

HALMA: THE NOVEL'S NAME IS A GAME AND ALSO ITS FRAME

While Benito Pérez Galdós would have us believe that his novel *Halma* (October, 1895) is simply the sequel to *Nazarín* (May, 1895), or more artfully, that its basis is the writings of Saint Augustine,¹ an examination of the meaning of its title as well as the structure of the work reveals that the author not only succeeded in deceiving his readers, but that in another example of creating meta-fiction, Galdós actually used the name and system of a popular parlor game to inform and emblemize his work. By so doing he also provided another key to its relationship to *Nazarín*, while simultaneously taking a calculated risk that this *trompe l'oeil* trick would be discovered, perhaps to the detriment of *Halma* and possibly to *Nazarín*.²

In spite of the novel's religious theme, 'Halma' does not signify 'alma' nor is it an authentic German patronymic as indicated in the first part of the family name of count Carlos Federico Halma-Lautenberg,³ Catalina de Artal's first husband. 'Halma' is instead the name of a board game invented

¹ See G.G. Minter's excellent study on this topic, "Halma And The Writings of St. Augustine," *Anales Galdosianos*, 13 (1978), 73-97, which examines the works of the saint (*Confessions*; *The City of God*) inspiring one aspect of *Halma*. No such works appear in Galdós' library, although they could have been available to him.

² Although modern *galdosistas* dispute the relative merits and defects of *Nazarín* and *Halma*, neither they or contemporary critics of Galdós' novels (see note 13) perceived *Halma*'s relation to the game 'Halma.' Only Clarín, in his review of *Nazarín* perceived something unspecifically rare, involving possible game-play, perhaps unwittingly anticipating *Halma*: "...ciertas líneas demasiado atrevidas y algunos incidentes de la acción [de *Nazarín*], parece que nos quieren decir que se trata de un juego simbólico, de una *humorada seria*, de un geroglífico poético, idealista..." ("Revista literaria," *El Imparcial*, Año 29, Núm. 10,143, 5 de agosto de 1895, p. 3). In his review of *Halma* however ("*Halma*, novela de Pérez Galdós," *El Imparcial*, Año 29, Núm. 10,289, 30 de diciembre de 1895, p. 1) he did not explore this feature further. Only one critic of *Halma* found anything unusual in it, but waxed absurd by calling it "una novela de tipo Químico... un experimento de química espiritual" (José Verdes Montenegro, "Revista literaria. *Halma*," *La Justicia*, Año 9, Núm. 2,842, 10 de enero de 1896, p. 2).

³ In another trick in *Halma*, Galdós concealed his game clue in the pseudo-aristocratic hyphenated family name of count Carlos Federico Halma-Lautenberg. The name 'Halma' most probably never existed; it appears nowhere in the popular European registry of continental nobility, the *Almanach de Gotha*, (Gotha: Justus Perthes) during the nineteenth century. On the other hand, Galdós probably modified a real patronymic for the second part of the name: 'Leutenberg' appears in the *Almanach* for the years 1890-95, incl., having been the family name of the prince of Schwarzbourg-Rudolstadt; 'Leuchtenberg' and 'Lauterburg' also appear in it. 'Halma' resembles the Hungarian and Slovak terms 'halmoz' and 'hálña,' respectively (heap, pile, stack) and related compounds. 'Panonhalma' is also an Hungarian place-name.

in England in the late nineteenth century.⁴ Thus, although we might unquestionably accept the name as authentic, owing to Galdós' reputation for precise documentation, we determine that he has been accurate in unexpected other ways, that he has utilized a game and game-play as symbolic life process, implementing in *Halma* what Huizinga has demonstrated since: that the play element is an essential component of all great human creativity.⁵ Somewhat disconcerting, but less probable is that Galdós might have named the novel after another 'Halma,' which happened to be the winning horse in the Kentucky Derby of May, 1895⁶—the same month in which he finished *Nazarín*.

Its name derived from the Greek *αλμα* ("halma," neut.) meaning "spring" or "leap,"⁷ 'Halma' is the ancestor of the modern 'Chinese Checkers' and is played similarly: two players using nineteen pieces each (or four players with thirteen each) are positioned at the corners of a square board with 256 squares and have as the object of the game to move all their pieces diagonally across the board to the opposite corner. The first player to do so is the winner. No pieces are lost or captured, nor are there any penalties or scores tallied. The game's entire movement is a series of hops or jumps by each player's pieces, either over his own or his opponent's, as in ordinary checkers.⁸ The foregoing, combined with what follows will demonstrate how, beyond simply a title, Galdós directly applied the elements of the game 'Halma' to the dynamics of the novel, *Halma*, as well as the way in which its plot, characters and theme are transformed as a result. This provides more perception into *Halma*'s inherent dualism and its role as one of the dual set, *Nazarín/Halma*, a relationship which acquires more unity because of the latter's game origins.

Similar to the workings of the game 'Halma,' the characters in the novel number thirteen relatively significant ones with the addition of six lesser yet active ones, making a total of nineteen.⁹ Moving through exactly forty chapters—a possible Galdosian adaptation of the quadripartite layout of the game (*Nazarín* has thirty-five chapters)—the plot, characters and theme

⁴ [Charles] Goren's *Hoyle Encyclopedia of Games* (N.Y., 1961), pp. 407-08. The game was invented about 1880, according to R.C. Bell, *Board and Table Games* (London: Oxford, 1960), p. 98.

⁵ Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens: A Study of The Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1964), p. 3.

⁶ *Diamond Jubilee [Book], Kentucky Derby*, (Louisville: Churchill Downs, 1949), p. 57. 'Halma' was a 3-year-old colt when he won the Derby on May 6, 1895. He too was probably named after the game, given his occupation.

⁷ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), p. 71. Its verb is *αλλομαι* ("hallomai").

⁸ Goren, *loc. cit.* Galdós library contains three works devoted to games. In H. Chonon Berkowitz' *La biblioteca de Benito Pérez Galdós* (Las Palmas: Ediciones del Museo Canario-C.S.I.C., 1951), p. 203, item 3117 is: Anón., *Teoría del juego de pelota al alcance de todos por 'X' de la Academia de Ciencias* (Madrid: M.G. Hernández, 1893); item 3119: José Carlos Bruna, *El juego* (Madrid: Fernando Fé, 1895); item 3120: Manuel Cárceles Sabater, *Tratado del juego de damas* (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1905). Only item 3117 has its pages cut.

⁹ The thirteen primary characters in this regard are: Carlos Federico, Catalina, Feramor, Consuelo,

all exhibit marked changes from beginning to end of *Halma*, and in some instances reveal them occurring between the two novels themselves. In *Halma* a certain "rollover" effect takes place in characterization, attributes, symbols and roles. Each character initially appears alone, moving in individual trajectory, but soon comes into contact (or conflict) with others, as his life—like the grouped pieces in 'Halma'—converges or merges with theirs. Depending on the importance of their particular roles, all the characters eventually emerge from contact or conflict at some subsequent point in the novel (although not always at its end), altered, different and usually bettered by passage through a series of permutations and combinations of experience. Unlike the characters of other Galdós novels, e.g. *Marianela*, *Isidora Rufete*, or *Torquemada*, but more like players and pieces of the game 'Halma,' all the characters of the novel emerge unscathed; they suffer no solemn retributions or expiations. For this reason most of the main characters in *Halma* become "winners" in varying degrees, a status change which accounts for some of the "pluridimensionalidad" seen in them by one scholar.¹⁰

Moreover, in *Halma* there are two specific character groupings. The first, represented by the likes of Carlos Federico, Catalina, Nazarín, Flórez, Beatriz, et al., is dynamic and undergoes lengthy experiences which bring about individual transformations into different, improved individuals as well as effecting similar changes in others. Those of the second type, such as Feramor, Consuelo, Modesto Díaz, don Remigio, et al., are more static and are best described as 'catalysts;' they do not change at all but exist to create change in others by the reactions of movements incited in them.

It is the first character classification which comprises the "winners." For example, and in keeping with the steps of the game, Nazario Zaharín initially appears in the novel *Nazarín* as an active, and sane, if unorthodox priest with full priestly powers. Throughout that novel and *Halma*, he suffers, changes, becomes ill and even supposedly "loco," but emerges once more toward the end of *Halma* as a 'sane' practicing cleric having his priestly faculties officially restored, even his physical appearance markedly different. In *Halma* itself, the protagonist, Catalina de Artal, is first the wife of the misfit Romantic nobleman Halma-Lautenberg whom she has converted from agnosticism to Catholicism. Then, following his death and her own misfortunes, she becomes rehabilitated in Madrid, reestablished in Pedralba and finally 'emerges' as the wife of a totally rehabilitated former misfit, José Antonio de Urrea, as their mutual convergence throughout the novel creates a mutually beneficent outcome. Urrea, whose disastrously

Flórez, Urrea, Nazarín, Andara, Beatriz, Modesto Díaz, don Remigio, Díez Amador and doctor Laínez. The six lesser ones who comprise the active total of nineteen are: Felix-Mauricio Halma-Lautenberg, Zárate, the journalist, the marqués de Cícero, Cecilio, Ladislao and Aquilina). Several more characters appear in *Halma* but have roles too insignificant for such consideration.

¹⁰ José Luis Mora, introd., *Benito Pérez Galdós, Halma* (Salamanca: Almar, 1979), p. 35.

inept lifestyle as the *parásito* cousin of the Feramors puts him on the lowest moral and material level (on a par with Carlos Federico's wastrel brother Felix Mauricio), by the end of the novel has reacquired all his original natural goodness and purity of character and achieved identity and position, 'emerging' as well with higher noble status (both in person and title) as the *señor* of Pedralba. As an example of the many combinations possible in this context, it is Urrea who replaces the aristocratic husband lost by Catalina when Halma-Lautenberg died, and ultimately restores to her the noble status she abandoned to become the head of a religious institution "de igualdad [para todos]."¹¹ Even the projected utopia at Pedralba becomes something less serious and structured. At the end of *Halma*, Catalina, on the advice of the now recuperated (and 'emerged') Nazarín, declares: "Esto no es ya un instituto religioso ni benéfico, ni aquí hay ordenanzas ni reglamentos, ni más ley que de una familia cristiana que vive en su propiedad. Nosotros nos gobernamos solos y gobernamos nuestra ínsula."¹² (Part V, chapter 9, p. 1874).

Other characters in *Halma* display similar transformations according to the dynamics of the game, but like the players who fail to reach the opposite corner of the board in 'Halma,' may not experience the full cycle enjoyed by the major figures mentioned above. Manuel Flórez for example, a sophisticated, privileged cleric, the stereotype of the established Church, dies before the actual foundation of Pedralba but not without departing from established ecclesiastical postures by giving it his personal support and recognition. Beatriz, one of the poorest of the poor when we encounter her in *Nazarín*, gradually achieves a certain higher status and significance by the end of *Halma* as Catalina's aide and confidant, her anxieties and periodic seizures having vanished. Even Andara, whose presence in *Halma* is markedly diminished in comparison to that in *Nazarín*, nonetheless stands as confirmation of the positive effects of Nazarín's ministry by her redemption and faith. Her salvation as a partial 'winner' is assured in spite of her imprisonment; that punishment—as *el Sacrílego's*—is for strictly civil (not religious) offenses committed in *Nazarín*, yet is pertinent to the present context. Both of them have the consolation of faith in some better future, as implied by Nazarín's departure at the end of *Halma* for the site of their incarceration in Alcalá de Henares, "donde pensaba que sería de grande utilidad su presencia" (V, 9, p. 1874).

The remaining characters in *Halma* are the catalyst type and like the

¹¹ Benito Pérez Galdós, *Halma, Obras completas*, V (Madrid: Aguilar, 3a. ed., 1961) pp. 1843, 1853. All subsequent references to the text of *Halma* appear in parentheses in our text.

¹² To which don Remigio responds, thus placing his blessing and approval on their new status and immediate plans as well as providing concluding criticisms and solutions to the problems encountered with institutional authority: "Y así debe ser... y así no tienen ustedes quebraderos de cabeza, ni que sufrir impertinencias de vecinos intrusos, ni el mangoneo de la dirección de Beneficencia o de la autoridad eclesiástica. Reyes de su casa, hacen el bien con libérrima voluntad, sin dar cuenta más que a Dios" (p. 1874).

individual pieces of the game, themselves are never altered or transformed, but by their relative immobility serve to determine the extent to which others may change or the plot become diverted. Catalina's brother, the marqués de Feramor in particular, never modifies his opposition to his sister's new lifestyle, to her project at Pedralba, or to Urrea and their associates and in effect insures their successes by inducing progressive movements in avoidance of himself, by side-stepping or moving away from him. He never leaves Madrid physically (except for education abroad), while the others characters such as Catalina, Nazarín, or Urrea are in constant movement everywhere. Feramor's only 'change' is specious; under pressure from Flórez, Feramor is 'played' into releasing Catalina's rightful inheritance to her without subtracting expenses she incurred abroad after Carlos Federico's death. Feramor's wife Consuelo is a mirror image of her husband, and with her friends of high society effects reactions from the others similar to those caused by Feramor. Other static types include the priests Modesto Díaz and don Remigio, the doctor Alberto Laínez, and Feramor's administrators, Pascual Díez Amador, all of whose roles oscillate between momentary opposition and accommodation to the forward-moving progress of the novel-game; as pieces in 'Halma,' they provide the useful means by which the major figures might achieve their ends. None of the latter three ever attains his own goal as the director of Pedralba, and don Remigio is skillfully 'played' by Urrea. Through subtle maneuvering, Urrea manages to secure a parish post in Madrid for don Remigio—in a jump backwards—which assures the latter's approval for official ecclesiastical restoration of Nazarín's priestly powers (V, 9, pp. 1872-73).

Given the obvious Cervantine stamp of both *Nazarín* and *Halma*, particularly in the former (the character of the protagonist, his adventures, and Galdós' imitative author-distancing, etc.), it would appear that the novelist may have had reservations about the extent to which it should be carried in its sequel, especially in view of the fact that he was compelled to respond indirectly to some contemporary insinuations that *Nazarín* was a work of Russian mysticism¹³ by having the priest deny it explicitly in *Halma* (III, 2, pp. 1811-12). The galley-proofs of *Nazarín* attest to the fact that Galdós suppressed some of its more obvious *cervantismo*. The protagonist's *apellido*, "Zaharín" is a new one which the author inserted by hand in place of the original printed one, "Nazario Quijada" which in one place

¹³ No explicit attribution of Russian mysticism to *Nazarín* actually appeared in contemporary reviews of it. But in his own review, Clarín (*artic. cit.*, note 2) responded to probable popular debate, defending Galdós by denying any imitation whatsoever on his part. With Nazarín's own denial in *Halma*, Galdós not only reacted to Clarín's support and to evident hearsay in this respect, but actually forestalled any real criticism on this question. The only two critics of *Halma* to mention it avoided direct judgments. 'Zeda' (Francisco Fernández Villegas) insisted that Galdós' mysticism was "de cepa española," but not without some foreign influence from "la racha que sopla del Norte" ("Autores y libros; *Halma*," *La Epoca*, Año 48, Núm. 16,401, 27 de enero de 1896, p. 1); 'Andrenio' (Eduardo Gómez de Baquero) saw a connection with Russian mysticism but declared that *Halma*'s was indeed "nacional" ("*Halma*," *La España Moderna*, Año 8, Núm. 85, enero de 1896, pp. 147-153).

also carried the qualifier, "...apellido que revela parentesco con D. Quijote."¹⁴ All the words from "Quijada... [to] ...Quijote" were eliminated by Galdós as all published editions of *Nazarín* demonstrate.

As in *La desheredada*, where Galdós resolved the problem of its naturalistic characteristics by the device of the Manchegan-quijotesque origins of its protagonists, in *Halma* he seems to have taken more pains to conceal his *cervantismo* within the plan of the game 'Halma.' Although the frequent discussion in *Halma* about the recent work published about *Nazarín*, and on the question of its accuracies (II, 4, p. 1797; III, 2, pp. 1812-14; IV, 2, p. 1836) is one of its more blatant Galdosian imitations of Cervantine matter, Galdós does not go much further. The protagonist of *Nazarín* fairly dominates that work, but like the invisible Dulcinea in *Don Quijote*, he is absent for the major part of *Halma* and does not physically appear for the first time until Chapter 2 of Part IV, and then is limited to being observed secretly through a hole in a wall. *Nazarín* finally emerges into full view at the meal described in the next chapter, and, most importantly, in no way appears or acts quixotically then or thereafter. Galdós simply diverts any vestigial *quijotismo* elsewhere and to people who are typically un-quixotic. In marked contrast with the mental state of Don Quijote on his deathbed, the typically sane Manuel Flórez dies most quixotically in a kind of 'locura,' somewhat deliriously lamenting having been a mere routine practitioner in the institutional clergy and by implication, abjuring this form of the priesthood in favor of *Nazarín*'s (III, 8, pp. 1830-31). He expires however, but not without making bequests to his *ama* and *sobrina* (III, 5, p. 1822; 7, p. 1826), and in the presence of his friends, a priest and a doctor. Even Urrea briefly acts quixotically chivalrous before Catalina by threatening anyone who would not confess her purity and virtue, or would doubt her sanctity and honesty, etc. (II, 8, p. 1807). The only possible imitation of Sancho Panza is seen in Díez Amador whose blend of sagacity and vulgarity is only a superficial hint of such a parallel.

Prior to his physical reappearance in *Halma*, *Nazarín* experiences progressive stages in his approach to it, akin to those of the opening and successive moves of the game. He is first simply mentioned, then displayed in Urrea's photographs (which Urrea plans to publish), subsequently described and finally quoted from bedside interviews and visits. Absent though he might be during all this time, *Nazarín* is the inspiring force which imperceptibly directs the actions of everyone else in different directions; it is he who is the very plan of the game, the embodiment of the spiritual ideal which Catalina would infuse into Pedralba. Yet he even changes her mind on that point, convincing her to de-institutionalize the

¹⁴ This correction initially appears on p. 12 of the galleys where *Nazarín* is identified by name for the first time (I, 3, p. 1863). It recurs wherever "Nazario Quijada" was originally printed from the text of Galdós' autograph MS. The galley-proofs are in the possession of the Casa-Museo Pérez Galdós, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

original concept into one of the Christian family. Thus, as with the game, while Nazarín himself is moving closer toward contact with the principals, he is also effecting a convergence of them all, from which eventuate all the final and appropriately beneficial solutions to the game. In fact, upon such successful emergence at the end of the novel nothing and no one comes to any terminus with the finality of Don Quijote's. Instead they are regenerated and disposed to resume the drift of the game in newer directions and beyond the limits of the novel. Rather indicative of this different movement is the direction of Nazarín's only *salida* in *Halma*: it is rectilinear, and not circular as in *Nazarín* or like Don Quijote's three excursions. Nazarín departs outward and elsewhere, purportedly to continue his ministry but essentially to disappear. Yet his original dream and the fundamentals of Pedralba were destined to outlive *Halma*, to emerge ultimately in practical application in *Misericordia*.

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¹ This and all other quotations from the original Spanish are taken from the *Manuscrito de Don Quijote*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Editorial Juventud, 1946), II, 713.

² "Tradition: Tradition: Don Quijote in English," *Critica Hispanica*, I, No. 1 (1970), 8-9.

³ This is especially so with Cohen and Starkie, but also true of the new Norton critical edition of