Halma
by Benito Pérez Galdós

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Translated by

Robert S. Rudder
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INTRODUCTION

Benito Pérez Galdós, the author of more than thirty novels of the contemporary scene, also wrote forty-six historical novels and a considerable number of works for the theater. During his lifetime, sales of his books reached some 1,700,000 volumes. Today he is recognized as one of Spain's greatest writers, second only to Miguel de Cervantes in the genre of the novel. But in Galdós's own time, while critics abroad heaped high praises on his novels,[1] the Press in Spain oftentimes virtually ignored him.[2] At his death, in 1920, the government refused to give him a national burial. But his popularity among the masses was so great that while his body lay in state at the City Hall of Madrid, a crowd of 30,000 lined the streets to pay him homage. During the procession to the cemetery, while even more people joined the throng, government officials left early to attend to other "duties."

What could have caused this profoundly polarized reaction? The answer, as in so many cases, is politics. Spain had been a conservative land from early on, as the last Moslem stronghold was conquered and the Jews were forced to convert to Christianity or face exile in the same year that Christopher Columbus discovered the "New World": 1492. It was also late in the fifteenth century that the Spanish Inquisition was instituted to maintain Catholic orthodoxy; and its power would remain in force until 1834. This ultra-conservative ideology extended to books, as Spain's Counter-Reformation – an attempt to counteract the Protestantism that was sweeping over Europe – acted to prohibit books that were considered heretical. Among the writings banned were the works of Ovid, Dante, Rabelais, Erasmus and Thomas More. Even the Spanish poet, Fray Luis de León, was imprisoned for four years because he translated the "Song of Songs" of the Bible into Spanish.

This ultra-conservative stance was pervasive in Spain into the nineteenth century, until the Bourbon monarchy was overthrown in 1868, and the Catholic basis of society began to be questioned: talk arose of religious freedom and even of the possibility of divorce. At about this same time certain intellectuals at the University of Madrid fell under the influence of a German philosopher by the name of Karl Christian Friederich Krause.[3] This Spanish group founded a school, the Institución Libre de Enseñanza, which expounded enlightened ideas based on the

writings of Krause, including the promotion of women's education and the study of psychology.

While at the University of Madrid, Galdós studied under one of the members of this group of "Krausistas," and he later identified himself as a life-long liberal.[4] His novels soon began to reflect these same ideas. The theme of religious tolerance in confrontation with Spain's Neo-Catholic stance is to be found in his 1876 novel, *Doña Perfecta*, while the dilemma of two lovers separated by religions (Jewish and Catholic) appears in *Gloria* one year later. Galdós's subsequent writings were inspired by the French writer, Émile Zola,[5] as he put Spanish society under a microscope, examining the impact of heredity and environment on the human condition in such novels as *El doctor Centeno*, *Tormento*, and *Lo prohibido*. This interest turned to a type of spiritual naturalism under the influence of Russian writers, including Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Turgenev.[6]

It is here that we take up the case of our present novel – *Halma*, or we should say the two novels that form one body: *Nazarín* and *Halma*. Because in order to fully understand *Halma*, we must also know its predecessor.[7] In the novel, *Nazarín*, a Spanish priest of that name comes under the scrutiny of the law and the Church when his lodgings are set ablaze by a prostitute to whom he has charitably given shelter. As a result, he decides to roam the countryside, carrying out good works apart from the established Church, while adhering very closely to the words of the Gospel. He is soon joined by the aforementioned prostitute, *Andara*, and her friend Beatrice, who listen to his spiritual teachings and become his devoted followers. In attempting to carry out the words of Christ literally, Nazarín and his two devotees put themselves at considerable risk by entering towns where smallpox is raging, as they attend to the sick and dying populace. Neighboring towns hear of them, and soon the word is spread that they are insane – or worse. Finally, they are arrested by the local authorities and placed in a prison, where another convict going by the name *Sacrilege* also comes under Nazarín's influence. Finally, as the prisoners are led back to Madrid to face the courts there, and where Nazarín is to be tried and his sanity judged, he comes down with a severe case of typhus. And there this novel ends.

The character, Nazarín, has been viewed as a modern Don Quijote: a mad idealist who goes out to give succor to the downtrodden.[8] And while this reading does have merit, the influence of the writings of Tolstoy[9] and Dostoevsky[10] has also been noted.[11] Of course, the most obvious influence on this novel is Biblical scripture: the name "Nazarín" (Nazarene), the two women followers (one active like Martha, the other contemplative like

Mary), the "good thief" (*Sacrilege*), and the imprisonment, beating, and forthcoming trial of the protagonist.[12]

The publication of *Nazarín* was followed by its sequel, *Halma*, only six months later. And while readers might have been expecting this modern life-of-Christ story to be followed by something similar to the Acts of the Apostles, such was not to be the case. While the sequel is also spiritual in nature ("Halma", in Spanish, is pronounced like "Alma", or "soul") and deals with the theme of salvation,[13] Nazarín has only a minor role until the very end, in which he plays a decisive and rather astounding part.

Here we have an aristocratic lady who, after experiencing years of great hardship in foreign lands, returns to Spain, decided on a new mission in life: she will head a small society in her country home at Pedralba, north of Madrid, to shelter the needy and the sick.[14] It is to be an idyllic, Christian society that will receive its support from her inheritance and from working the land. Halma's family and the aristocratic group of friends with whom they associate, while expressing admiration for her high ideals, are nonetheless aghast at her intentions and derisive in their comments.[15] They think of her in much the same way that they view Nazarín: uncertain if she is a saint or if she is, in fact, mad.

Among those who are invited to Halma's home at Pedralba are Nazarín, his follower, Beatrice, and later Halma's ne'er-do-well cousin, Urrea. While the new community takes shape, outside forces, namely the village priest, the country doctor, and the former administrator of Pedralba's properties (in concert with Halma's conniving brother), begin to cause a stir, believing that Halma is incapable of governing her own small society, and that Urrea has nefarious intentions. It all comes to a climax when Nazarín suddenly offers the unexpected solution that reveals Galdós's true feelings, indicating that love and the family should replace the institution.

Halma, who represents the spiritual side of religion in contrast to certain clerics who embody the "ecclesiastical establishment", constantly appears reading Saint Augustine and mystical writings. She, however, has little in common with true Spanish mysticism. While in the nineteenth century religious enthusiasm – as Galdós notes in this novel – has become "fashionable," the great mystics of Spain's sixteenth century, Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz, in fact, experienced a powerful inner spiritual life. The main characteristic of mysticism is the *union* of the divine spirit and the human spirit. Santa Teresa speaks of approaching this mystical union, using such metaphors as a water-wheel or the many inner chambers of a castle. Halma has none of this: she is more concerned with the practical side of religion.[16] In neither the novel *Nazarín* nor its sequel,

Halma, does Galdós come close to true mysticism. As his contemporary, Leopoldo Alas, noted, he is not inspired by the lyrical and purely speculative aspect of religion: he is more concerned with its practical, realistic side.[17]

In addition to Galdós's liberal ideas and the themes developed in his novels, it is necessary here to discuss the language he uses in his writings. A translation must always come to terms with the problems of accuracy and "the ear." While the adage "traduttore, traditore" is certainly always true for literary translation, the problem becomes even more complex when a writer often reproduces the language he hears on the streets, but does not know himself precisely what that language means. Galdós's contemporary, the writer Emilia Pardo Bazán, makes this comment: "In Galdós's novels there is a lexical treasure of expressions, words and idioms – the language of the back alleys and of salons, the oratory of folklore, the jargon of politics and parliaments, transitory and traditional ways of talking."[18]

Galdós himself discusses the language he uses, as it relates to translation, in an introduction to one of his novels: "I ought to say a few words concerning the French translation of *Misericordia*. Maurice Vixio, a Parisian gentleman occupying a high position in business and banking, who was an adviser to the central committee of the Spanish Northern Railway and had lived in Madrid earlier in his life, acquiring an excellent knowledge of our language, did me the honor of rendering the pages of this book into French… Naturally, he wrote to me often in the course of his work to consult me about the problems of vocabulary he was constantly coming up against, since in this book, as any reader will confirm, I made unstinting use of popular language dotted as it is with idioms, turns of phrases and ungrammatical expressions which are as striking as they are picturesque. I answered him as best I could but was not always able to help, as *I myself cannot explain the meaning of some of the expressions the people in Madrid are constantly coining and putting into circulation…*"[19]

Facing many of the same difficulties as the French translator with regard to Galdós's use of popular expressions, it was wished many times, futilely, that the novelist could be present to comment on and provide explanations for the translation of the present volume.[20] However, by his own admission, it would appear that Galdós might not have been able to help in this instance either. Still, a great effort has been made to render this novel, *Halma*, into a language that may give the reader of English an appreciation of the inspired writing of this brilliant Spanish author.

Robert S. Rudder, Claremont, California 2014

Notes

[1] The French called him the Peninsula's only true novelist: "Il est aujourd'hui la vrai romancier de l'Espagne." Leopoldo Alas, *Galdós, novelista*, ed. Adolfo Sotelo Vázquez (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1991) 139.

[2] As one supporter said in 1888, "The Madrid press, with few exceptions, attaches more importance to a dog, almost, than to a novel by Galdós." H. Chanon Berkowitz, *Pérez Galdós: Spanish Liberal Crusader* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1948) 225-26.

[3]Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832) espoused a system of philosophy which he called "panentheism" (an attempt to reconcile pantheism and theism). Among his major works are Entwurf des Systems der Philosophie (1804; "Sketch of the System of Philosophy"), Vorlesungen über das System der Philosophie (1828; "Lectures on the System of Philosophy"), and Vorlesungen über die Grundwahrheiten der Wissenschaft (1829; "Lectures on the Fundamentals of Knowledge"). ("Krause," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Aug. 2014. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/323327/Karl-Christian-Friedrich-Krause>)

[4]Galdós was named a liberal member of parliament in 1886. In 1907 he ran for parliament as a Republican candidate for Madrid, and he accepted co-presidency of the Republican-Socialist alliance in 1910 (Labanyi 9). However, conservatives blocked his election to the Spanish Royal Academy until 1889, as well as his nomination for the Nobel Prize.

[5] In France, Zola wrote what he termed an experimental novel, attempting to examine human beings as though in laboratory conditions, analyzing the effects of alcohol, heredity, etc. While this was an objective approach, the Spanish writers of this school, including Pardo Bazán and Blasco Ibáñez, tended to be more spiritual. As for Galdós himself, to do his research, he visited slums with a police escort, disguised himself as a medical inspector to visit brothels, and while in England also visited London's East End.

[6] He referred to Turgenev as "my great teacher." Walter T. Pattison, *Benito Pérez Galdós* (Boston: Twayne, 1975) 90.

[7] The English translation of *Nazarin* was published by the Latin American Literary Review Press (Pittsburgh, 1997).

[8] Galdós's friend, the novelist and literary critic Leopoldo Alas saw him this way. (Alas 258)

[9] George Portnoff, *La literatura rusa en España* (New York: Instituto de las Españas en los Estados Unidos, 1932) 190-203.

[10] Julian Palley, "Nazarín y El Idiota." *El laberinto y la esfera* (Madrid: Insula, 1978).

[11] Even though Nazarín denies any influence of Russian literature on his actions, the fact remains that Galdós's library contains five works of Tolstoy in Spanish and French translations, while Galdós refers to Dostoevsky several times in his journalistic articles. See Jo Labanyi, ed., *Galdós* (London: Longman, 1993) 14.

Also see A. A. Parker, "'Nazarín', or the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ According to Galdós," *Anales Galdosianos* (Año II, 1967) 83-101.

[12] This was, of course, immediately apparent to the first readers of this novel. See, for example, the letter to the author written by Francisco Navarro y Ledesma on July 12, 1895, shortly after the book appeared in print: "I've received the Gospel, I mean Nazarín, and it has filled me with enthusiasm." Soledad Ortega, ed., *Cartas a Galdós* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, [1964?]) 327.

[13] See A. A. Parker 96.

[14] Spain's great modern filmmaker, Luis Buñuel (1900-1983), had previously adapted Galdós's novel, *Nazarín*, to the screen (1959), and his film of 1961, *Viridiana*, seems to be a loose adaptation of *Halma*. In it a religious novice, Viridiana, visits her uncle's farm. The uncle attempts to seduce her, then commits suicide, leaving his property to her and to his illegitimate son, Jorge. Viridiana decides to establish a type of religious and charitable institution there, caring for a group of beggars. But in a drunken orgy, the beggars ransack the house. Disillusioned, Viridiana is left alone with Jorge and a female servant. The film's ending originally had Viridiana entering Jorge's room and closing the door behind her. Spain's board of censors objected, so Buñuel changed the ending to have Viridiana go into Jorge's room, where he is with the female servant, thus suggesting a *ménage à trois*. The government of Francisco Franco banned the film in Spain, and it was only released there in 1977, after Franco's death. See A. Horton and J. Magretta, *Modern European Filmmakers and the Art of Adaptation* (New York: Ungar, 1981) 187. See also Sally Faulkner, *Literary Adaptations in Spanish Cinema* (London: Tamesis, 2004) 162.

[15] Under the guidance of Galdós, in this novel the politicians and businessmen of Madrid's upper class reveal themselves as superficial beings with corrupt values. In his address to the Real Academia Española in 1897, Galdós also referred to "business" as "nothing more than enlightened greed." (Labanyi 37.)

[16] It is interesting to note that Santa Teresa balanced the spiritual and the practical sides of religion extremely well. See Robert S. Rudder, *The Paradox of Saint Teresa of Avila* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Pr., 2011).

[17] Alas 259.

[18] "El estudio de Galdós en Madrid," *Nuevo teatro crítico* (8, 1891) 57-59. Cited in Stephen Gilman, *Galdós and the Art of the European Novel: 1867-1887* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1981) 257-58.

[19] From the 1897 edition of *Misericordia*, published in 1913, Paris: Nelson. Cited in Labanyi 42.

[20] This is, perhaps, no more apparent than when Andara speaks to the reporters early on in the novel, or in the hilarious scene where the priest, the doctor and the former administrator argue as to who is best suited to take control of Halma's estate (while at the same time attempting to deny their own self-interest).

PART I

I

I give my readers the greatest proof of my regard for them by sacrificing my pride as an erudite investigator of genealogy... More accurately, I spare their lives as I omit the enormously long and irksome study of lineages here, by which I have been able to prove that Doña Catalina de Artal, Javierre, Iraeta y Merchán de Caracciolo, Countess de Halma-Lautenberg is related to the most cock-a-hoop nobility of Aragon and Castile, and that among her ancestors appear the Borgias, the Toledos, the Pignatellis, the Gurreas, and other illustrious names. Exploring the genealogical forest, rather more that than a tree, where such ancient and distinguished lineages are intertwined and mucked together, one discovers that by the marriage of Doña Urianda de Galcerán to an Italian prince in 1319, the Arcals become related to the Gonzagas and the Caracciolos. If, on the other hand, the Javierres of Aragon appear grafted onto the Guzmáns of Castile, in the branch of the Iraetas there runs the sap of the Loyolas, and in the family tree of the Moncadas of Cataluña there is sap of the Borromeos of Milan. Thus, the noble lady counts among her ancestors not only men renowned for their martial feats, but glorious saints who are venerated on the altars of all Christendom.

Having given the good reader my word not to bore him, I hold back for a better occasion the fifteen hundred records that I have gathered, while choking on the dust of the archives, to demonstrate the relationship of Doña Catalina to the antipope Don Pedro de Luna, Benedict XIII. Prying into every nook and cranny, I also discovered her distant link with legitimate popes, for, since there exists a branch of the Artales and Ferrench that became related to the Italian families of Aldobrandini and Odescalchi, it’s as plain as day that the pontiffs Clement VIII and Innocence XI are distantly related to the Countess. And as for monarchs, it goes without saying that the tree is bursting (as though loaded down with lush fruit) with regal names, and you see the Albrit and the Foix of Navarre, the Cerda and Trastamara from over here, and a thousand other names that reek of royalty from miles away, like the Ronans, Bouillóns, Lancasters, Montmorencys, etc.... Faithful to my word, I sheathe my erudition and embark on a biographical account, identifying Doña

Catalina-María del Refugio-Aloysa-Tecla-Consolación-Leovigilda, etcetera, de Artal y Javierre, as the third child of the honorable Marquises de Feramor. Her father and mother having passed away when she was seven years old, she was placed in the care of the eldest son who is, at present, Marquis de Feramor, and of her sister, Doña María Del Carmen Ignacia, Duchess de Monterones. In 1890 she married a young man who was an attaché to the German embassy, the Count de Halma-Lautenberg, a marriage that flew in the face of all reason, since her siblings and the entire family relentlessly thrust every obstacle in her way that their pride and mulishness could hatch up. They wanted her to marry an individual from the house of Muñoz Moreno-Isla, a person of mercantile nobility but up to the ears in sterling. Catalina, who had shown an incredible distaste for filthy lucre since early childhood, latched onto the German diplomat who, along with his seductive figure, held a most beautiful disdain for worldly goods. Great turbulence and convulsions arose within the family, due to the tyrannical inflexibility of her older siblings and the heroic resistance – almost to the point of martyrdom – of the love-sick maiden. When they were finally married – and not without juridical intervention – the husband was sent off to Bulgaria, and from there to Constantinople, with Doña Catalina following him, breaking all ties with her siblings. Endless disasters, privations and misfortunes awaited her in the East, and when the family here was informed of these things by Spanish and foreign diplomats, they could only see in all of it the hand of God, severely punishing Catalina de Artal for the amorous dementedness that induced her to become involved with an upstart from some unknown family, a man with no brains, with extremely confused ideas and wild nerves, a dull inhabitant of the realm of the imagination. And to top it off, Carlos Federico was poor, his title plucked bare, and with no income beyond his salary. And that was shaved to the bone too, since the family of Halma-Lautenberg (which descends, according to reports that I regard as reliable, from the Landgrave of Thuringia and Hesse**,** Hermann II) had come down in the world to a level as low as any family around here. The sort that, after all manner of ups and downs, sinks to the depths of the social abyss, never to rise again. In those faraway lands poor Doña Catalina suffered a thousand setbacks, reverses of fortune, privations and even genuine hunger, with no more consolation than the love of her husband who was always there for her. And she had not one word of complaint against him, for although God deprived her of so many material things, He granted her a bounty of conjugal harmony. Tenderly loved and loving, to her the intimate happiness of matrimony was compensation for all the misfortune from outside forces. Carlos Federico was good, sweet, although half-crazy

according to some, and completely insane according to others. The unfavorable opinion of his cerebral compass must have reached as far as the Chancellery of Berlin because he was discharged from his post. The young couple found themselves at the mercy of Divine Will which, no doubt, wanted to submit the strong soul of the Spanish lady to her harshest trial. Because two months after his dismissal, while they were living in lowly obscurity in a humble little house in Pera**,** awaiting means to enable them to depart for the West, the husband came down with such a serious case of tuberculosis that it was not difficult to foresee, in a very short space of time, a dismal end.

It was then that the heart of Catalina de Artal revealed its wondrous mettle: mustering courage in the face of that new blow, she ventured to ask her siblings in Madrid for assistance. And if at first they dragged their feet, they gave in at last, acting more out of family decorum than from Christian charity. With the little help that they sent her, the heroine managed to transport the poor sick man to the Isle of Corfu**,** renowned for its mild climate. There they lived, if it can be called living, on a level of miraculous economy, substituting tenderness for material resources, and wonders of intelligence for comforts. He in resignation, she courageous and sublime as a nurse, most loving as a wife, diligent in the management of their humble home. Until, at last, God called the poor Count de Halma to Himself on the morning of the 8th of September, the day of the Nativity of Our Lady.

II

Let those who possess mystical inspiration and are experienced in recounting the lives and deaths of glorious martyrs tell, with my blessings, the sufferings of Catalina de Artal during those sad days and the days that followed the death of her beloved husband. I wouldn't know how. And leaving this work to the hands of experts who will surely write that edifying history, I will do no more than point out the principal facts, as the background or introduction to what I propose to relate. What can I say of this lady's terrible, deep pain when she saw the one who meant everything to her, the love of her life, her greatest happiness, the only earthly thing that mattered to her, dying in her arms? Worldly opinion, which is rarely correct in its hasty, vain assessments, had distorted the moral character of the honorable Count – depicted in the circles of Madrid with shades of malice. But the conscientious historian, well informed about the subject, is duty bound to erase all the falsehoods that gossips and the envious have made use of to tarnish such a noble personage. This is what I shall do now,

assuring one and all that Carlos Federico de Halma was a saint, and that the most thoroughly researched and pessimistic investigation will find, after his marriage, no blemish of any sort in his conduct. I flatly deny the aspersions that overly loose tongues in Madrid have unleashed on his character, and it is my wish to reconstruct his true nature as an upright, loyal, honest man, adding, along with these qualities, the virtues that he acquired while living with his most excellent wife.

Before his marriage the volubility of this German's ideas played no small part in his questionable reputation, along with the fickleness of his judgment and his reveries that reached the point of forming a truly anecdotal patchwork quilt; his gloomy indifference, alternating with bursts of mad enthusiasm for any cause – art or love affairs, his tiresome long-windedness in discussions, and his innumerable manias, some of which he clung to until his death. He racked his brain, pondering all the stars in the sky, both large and small, that might be habitable; and anyone who wanted to drive him out of his wits had only to raise doubts about the infinite diffusion of human families spread throughout the immense planetary system. Not long before his marriage, and under the influence of the angelic Catalina, he had gone from holding an absolute disdain of all positive religion to embracing an ardent Christian fervor, more imaginative than it was pious. A yearning of the heart that longed in vain, not for external observance and liturgical practices, but for a fanciful intoxication, more awake to seductive legends than to rigid dogma. In the East his wife managed to instill some order into those wild flights of enthusiasm of Carlos Federico until, when he was wracked with cruel suffering, it was as difficult to combat his burning fever as it was his spiritual delirium. Both of these fires consumed him equally, and one might think that the two of them, uniting their flames, would together reduce him to fine ash.

On the same night that he died, between two attacks that left him gasping for breath, he told his wife of a dream that he had had that afternoon. And since Catalina saw in that tale a strange logic and a certain classical lucidity, she became terribly upset, thinking that the poor sick man was glimpsing the horizon of the kingdom of eternal truth. So much sense, such sound judgment in the composition of a fantastic little poem (for the nicely told dream was nothing other than that), what else could it mean but that the poet was dying? And that, in fact, was the case. In the final minutes of his life, he flung himself, with his unbridled imagination, into planning a trip through Asia Minor and Palestine, with the dual aim of visiting the ruins of Troy first, and afterward the country of Galilee. (Reconcile those two!) Two names became entwined in his thoughts:

Homer and Christ. And as he tried to explain that historical and poematic union, he moaned, cried out...: "Ah!", and expired...

One might think that the Count's death was poor Catalina Artal's final grief and that after that blow Heaven granted her many days of rest if not of good fortune. But such was not to be. On top of the sorrow of becoming a widow and having the memory of the poor dead man ever present, she found herself overwhelmed by misfortunes of another kind. Until then she had known degrading humiliation and privations that wounded her aristocratic dignity. But shortly after losing her husband and while still living in Corfu, since she lacked the means to go anywhere else, she learned the true meaning of destitution – that is, genuinely horrifying poverty – and she suffered humiliations that would have crushed souls of a spirit weaker than her own. Lodged first, almost from charity, in an English house, then, later, in a Greek hostelry, Catalina de Artal found herself some days going without meals, forced to wash the few garments she owned, repair her shoes and give herself over to chores that repelled her delicate nature. But she bore it all with patience, she accepted it all through the love of Christ, with a desire to purify herself through suffering. When an opportunity arose to free herself from that situation, she decided to take advantage of it, not so much to improve her own life as to be with relatives on whom she could bestow all the affection that her beautiful heart possessed. One day a brother of Carlos Federico arrived unexpectedly at the Ionian island. He was a great enthusiast of sea voyages, and was sailing around the archipelago on a yacht owned by certain merchants from Piraeus. He offered to take her to Rhodes where Count Ernst de Lautenberg was consul. This man, who was his uncle and the uncle of Catalina's late husband, was a very kind, ordinary sort of gentleman that the poor lady had met in Constantinople.

The widow allowed herself to be taken on board by Felix Mauricio (that was the name of her brother in law), attracted mainly by the thought of living in the company of Countess Ernst de Lautenberg, a very nice Hungarian woman who had treated the Spanish lady very cordially during the few days they had spent together. So then, they left Corfu on the Greek boat, erroneously called a yacht, since with its small size and meager tonnage it was really nothing but a pretty sailboat, better suited for regattas and short excursions. It was manned by young men who were *dilettanti* of the sea. Due to the bad piloting and inexperience of the man who acted as captain, they were unable to ride out a furious storm that caught them between Zante and Cephalonia, and tossed by the wind and waves toward the gulf of Patras, the ship arrived at Misolonghi badly damaged. There they remained, day after day, waiting for good weather, and when they

were at sea again they were constantly putting in at unintended ports. Félix Mauricio and his Athenian chum who was piloting the fragile boat held to the theory that, with wine, storms are *less severe*, and they were continually getting downright sozzled. In this way, with all these anxieties and vicissitudes, sailing at the mercy of Neptune and without the skill to control him, they went lurching all over the place, south of the Peloponnese. Like someone zigzagging around the labyrinth of back alleys of a winding city, no sooner had they run into Crete than they were in Cerigo (ancient Cythera); they went willy-nilly among the Cyclades, running into Milos and Paros; then they crossed the Sporades, visiting Samos, Cos and other places, and finally, after two long months of hellish sailing, they ended up at Rhodes.

As everything was going against the wishes of the poor widow, it turned out that Count Ernst had been transferred to Germany, and his wife, that pleasant and most kind Hungarian lady, had died three months previously. The Countess de Halma accepted this new disappointment with resignation. But when she told her brother-in-law that she needed to go to Corinth or Athens in order to send word to her family in Madrid and make preparations to return to Spain, the young man answered her in such a blunt, rude manner that the lady, as much as she tried, could not keep pride from overruling humility in her reply. They were staying at a cheap boardinghouse near the dock. The lady refused the hospitality that the captain of the yacht offered her on board the vessel, and learning that there was a convent of the Third Order in Rhodes, she went there, turning her back forever on Count Felix Mauricio and the asinine companions of his seagoing adventures.

Thanks to the good Franciscans the noble lady was given decent lodgings, and negotiations were set in motion for her to return to her motherland. Let it be said in passing, so that the information may be complete, that this Felix Mauricio was the very worst of the Halma-Lautenberg family. He had been part of the Diplomatic Corps, serving in Alicante and in Smyrna. There he married a wealthy Greek woman, and abandoning his career, dedicated himself with uneven success to a commercial venture in sponges. When we met him on the yacht, he had just recovered from his first bankruptcy. His violent and irascible personality, his disagreeable manners and, more than anything else, his irresistible fondness for alcoholic libations, made him thoroughly disagreeable, and he was loathed by those who knew him, as well as by strangers. One afternoon as Doña Catalina was having a conversation with the Guardian of the convent, she saw the yacht set sail, and she made the sign of the cross. She pardoned the ship and the crew, and gave thanks to

God that she had survived such a dangerous adventure on the seas of Greece.

The kindly friars were able to oversee the hapless Countess's return to the West. Booking passage on the *Austrian Lloyd*, they arranged for her to go to Malta where other religious of their order would look after her voyage to Marseilles, and from there to Barcelona. But since the *Austrian Lloyd* did not put in at Rhodes, the traveler had to make the crossing on a Turkish schooner carrying fruit and wheat between this island and its destination, Smyrna. New difficulties were in store for the poor Countess, because those Turkish devils had taken it into their heads to carry an enormous amount of contraband, and off the waters of Chios the schooner was visited by a felucca of war. There it was seized and detained along with all its passengers and crew until the pasha of Smyrna could decide how many lashings should be administered to the skipper. In the meanwhile, as no Franciscan friars were there to watch over her, Doña Catalina endured all manner of privations and grief. Finally, thank goodness, she found herself aboard the Austrian steamer which, in order to put the finishing touches on the fate of the poor lady, was an absolute wreck. She was fearful of everything: of the sea, the sky, of being abused by the rabble of various Oriental races that continually board and debark those ships. But it was not the sky, not the sea, not the passengers that brought the lady bad luck. It was the steamship's fiendish engine that woefully took it upon itself to interrupt the voyage, breaking down as it headed for Crete. The ship was left like a buoy, the shaft of its screw split in half, its helm unable to steer because the hawsers were broken. Finally an English steamship towed it to Damietta. There they changed lines and were taken to Alexandria where, for the sake of variety, they endured another painful transshipment that resulted in the loss of luggage and a thorough soaking of all the clothes they had on. On the way to Malta there was the pleasure of a mighty sirocco – huge waves – and as icing on the cake, while heading into Valletta one of the propeller blades broke: delay, danger... In Malta the wayfaring lady was attacked by intermittent fevers. Two weeks in the hospital, the shadow of death, despair, abandonment. Finally in this sad affair, fulfilling that business about *God tempering the wind to the shorn lamb*, Catalina de Halma set foot in Marseille horribly undernourished, her clothing and shoes in deplorable condition. Five days later the honorable Marquises de Feramor saw a woman enter their house who looked more like a ghost, her face gaunt, as if gone to waste, eyes garish and feverish, her clothing ravaged by the weather, the wind and sea..., shoes falling apart..., a pitiful figure, truth be told. And when the Marquis scowled at her in astonishment and said:

"Who are you?"
Catalina could only answer:
"But really, don't you recognize me? I'm your sister."

III

In her explanations and the discussions she had with her brother and sister, the Marquis de Feramor and the Duchess de Monterones, the Countess de Halma did not eat humble pie. That is to say, she expressed no regrets about her marriage, nor did she complain of the countless trials and misfortunes that she had suffered after marrying the German. The memory of her husband was more important to her than anything else, and she would not allow her brother and sister to defile it with heartless accusations or jokes. She had come to them for assistance, to ask them for the remainder of her inheritance, if anything was still left after the accounts were settled with the head of the family. But she would not be humiliated, not in the asking nor in the taking, in case they did give it to her, by surrendering her dignity, by lowering herself morally before her brother and sister and agreeing with them about the matter of her marriage. No, a thousand times no. If they refused to help her, even as an act of charity, there would still be a convent of nuns where she could find shelter. Nor would it bother her to go into any of the ultramodern orders devoted to caring for the aged, or to a place that assisted invalids. Among all these Congregations, there had to be one that would admit penniless widows. Her brother cautioned her solemnly not to rush headlong into anything, and said that for the moment what she should do was concentrate on recuperating from her weakened condition and from all the hardships she had endured.

For about a month Doña Catalina remained in her brother's home, not seeing anyone or receiving any visitors, letting herself be seen only by the family and by the servant who attended her. Of all the clothing they offered, she accepted only two black dresses, very simple ones, avowing that for the rest of her life she would wear no colorful clothing, and no silk or finery of any sort. Modesty and neatness would be her only adornments, and in truth, nothing was more suited to her pallid face and austere, melancholic figure. Since all the facts must be given, this is a good place to state that Doña Catalina was not beautiful, at least not in the worldly sense of beauty. But so many misfortunes had left a shade of tranquility on her face and an expression of bliss in her eyes that was a delight to all those who looked at her. Her hair was blond, tending toward red; her nose somewhat large, a protruding lower lip, her complexion quiet and clear,

her gaze sweet and serene, her expression completely somber; she was tall in stature, her posture straight, her bearing formal. Some who managed to see her in those days swore that they found a certain resemblance to Doña Juana la *Loca*,[1] the way legend and the artist's brush have rendered that lady's image to us. Other similarities of a spiritual nature that have been related are pure fancy, except for the fact that Countess de Halma spoke German as perfectly and fluently as she did Spanish.

The monastic isolation in which his sister lived did not go down very well with the Marquis, nor did he care for her ideas about completely turning her back on social life. According to him, she might still hope for a second marriage that would make up for the disasters of the first. But to do that she would have to give up her rigid hieratic posture, her solemn tone of voice, stop dressing like a lieutenant's widow, and join in with their circle of friends. The Marchioness was of the same opinion, and they both lectured her on this matter. But Catalina's staunch defense of her convictions, manias, or whatever they were, made them realize that they could do nothing for the moment, and that they would have to trust to time and a gradual shift in human nature to work out this family problem.

Although he is well known in Madrid, I would like to say something now about the character of the honorable Marquis de Feramor, whose English manners are so exemplary. And if his intelligence, which is more solid than it is brilliant, arouses the admiration of many, of very few, or of nobody at all, to put it plainly, he does win the affection of people. The fact is that exotic personalities formed in the Anglo-Saxon mold don't blend well, or don't fuse with our native dough that is kneaded with a different sort of flour and milk. Don Francisco de Paula-Rodrigo-José de Calasanz-Carlos Alberto-María de la Regla-Facundo de Artal y Javierre exhibited, from his tenderest years, a serious nature so contrary to the way children normally behave that his little friends took to calling him the *Old Man*. He collected stamps, he fattened his piggy bank, and kept his clothes neat and clean. He picked up needles, pins and even bottle corks that he found on the ground still in good condition. It's been said that he swapped so many dozen buttons for a Nicaragua stamp, and sold his duplicates at outrageous prices. In boarding school at Los Escalapios, the monks took a liking to him and gave him highest marks in all his examinations. Because the boy learned. And where his intelligence, which was not lacking, did not come through, his conceitedness – which was exorbitant – did. Extremely proud of his son, and wishing to make a truly eminent person of him – someone useful to the State, who would also be a stout guardian of the *moral and material interests* of the country, his father sent him to England for his education. The honorable Marquis was Anglo-Saxon by

inclination, or by hearsay, because he had never traveled farther than the canal of La Mancha, and knew only from vague remarks he had overheard at soirees that the best machinery and the best Statesmen come from Albion.

So then, there went Frankie, with excellent references, and they enrolled him in one of the most famous schools in Cambridge. But he remained there only two years because his father, not being in the best of pecuniary conditions, had to find less costly schooling for the boy. The first-born completed his education at a modest Catholic school in Peterborough, where he became a true Englishman: in ideas and manners, in his way of thinking and in his social bearing. At Peterborough they had none of the refined classical studies of Oxford, or the scientific studies of Cambridge. The boys were brought up in an atmosphere of cultured bourgeoisie, knowing many practical things and even some that were elegant, cultivating *horse-racing* and *boat-racing* in moderation, and gaining enough expertise at *lawn-tennis* to pass in any town on the continent as perfect creations of Albion.

The heir-apparent of Feramor spoke the English language to perfection, and he knew the literature of the country that had been his intellectual mother very well. He preferred political and historical studies to literary ones, favoring Macaulay over Carlyle in the first instance, and being more a devotee of Milton than of Shakespeare in the second. He was always attracted to Latin stock. When he finished his schooling his father secured a position for him in the Embassy so that he might remain there a few years more, soaking up the Britannic juices. During that time his political interests awoke and grew until they became a full-blown passion with him. He studied Parliament in great detail, along with its prerogatives, its archaic practices buttressed by time. And he never missed a speech delivered by those masters of oratory who spoke on every matter of importance – those men who are as different from our own as the fruit is from the flower, or the straight, solid trunk from the robust bush.

Don Francisco de Paula was nearing thirty years of age when, with the death of his noble father, he inherited the marquisate. He returned to Spain, and within ten months he had married Doña María de Consolación Ossorio de Moscoso y Sherman, of Malagueñan nobility, of English and Spanish stock, a most virtuous young woman. She was less beautiful than she was wealthy, and her manners, being so proper and having been shaped in foreign customs, were in no way inferior to those of her husband. Shortly afterward, the elder sister of the Marquis married the Duke de Monterones. Catalina, who was the youngest, did not become Countess de Halma until six years later.

Well, sir, on sure footing and playing an even better hand, the seventeenth Marquis de Feramor entered the social and aristocratic life of the town, to which he brought English Enlightenment and the parliamentary orthodoxy of the country of John Bull. Being very fortunate in his marriage, as he and Consuelo seemed to be cut from the same cloth, he was no less so in politics. Because from the moment he entered the Senate as representative of a Levant province, he began to distinguish himself as a serious person in every way, shape and form: someone who had come to revitalize our antiquated parliamentarianism with the blood and vitality of a country that was the parliamentary nation par excellence. His oratory was dry, *pithy*, boring and ineffective. He spoke about economic matters with a precision and knowledge that emptied the seats. But what did that matter? One goes to Parliament to sway people, not to win applause. Parliament is a body that is more serious than a cockfight. In point of fact, in the loneliness of those red benches Feramor had sincere, even enthusiastic, admirers – two, three and up to five judicious senators who listened to him in a sort of rapture, and then went out, praising him to the skies:

"That's the way we have to deal with these matters. Here, here: everyone should see themselves in this mirror. This is the real essence of the good, *true-blue* English spirit, the authentic, genuine mark of *London*."

IV

Outside of the Senate, the Marquis also had a small group of admirers who constantly pointed him out as a model worthy of imitation. For him and a small number of other worthies, the stock saying was: "Ah, if all our nobility were only like that, this country would be singing a different tune!" This specious argument, blaming our political misfortunes on the fact that we have no aristocracy of the English sort, with parliamentary traditions and true political power, was becoming insufferable cant.

It is noteworthy that Feramor ran counter to the popular belief that all upper-class Englishmen were horsemen and were obsessed with every sport played in Albion. To his honor, from that sober country he had imported only sobriety, leaving the whims of horsemanship on the other side of the channel. Although he knew something – even several somethings – about *turf*, he treated it only with courteous indifference, always taking note of the intellectual gulf that existed between a *handicap* and a political speech, even if it's of the cabinet level. And although he was a hunter, and a good one at that, he showed no steady, all-consuming preference for that sort of sport. So pleasures, like obligations, had their

proper and natural place for him, with intelligence always acting as master and guide over everything. In the disposition of his talents, one (which God had given him to hold sway over the others) took precedence: that of money-management. And while he was waiting until he could become keeper of the nation's accounts, he managed his own with a skill and meticulousness that was another cause for adulation among his admirers. "An aristocrat who understands how to manage money! Oh, if only we had many more Feramors among our grandees, the country wouldn't be so down and out!"

The Marquis' inheritance was not great, because his father had instituted practices that went against the norms of good management. But the wealth that the Marchioness brought to the marriage bolstered the homestead considerably, and in it there reigned perfect order, with their expenditures consuming only half their income. So then, they lived with decorum and modesty, submitting happily to a regimen of discretion between two benchmarks: the far one, fixing the limits for luxury, not to be exceeded in order to avoid wastefulness; the near one, marking the limits of economizing, to safeguard them from descending into squalor. In addition, the Marchioness, who seemed made in the image and likeness of her husband, and by living with him took on his own ideas splendidly, turned out to be as budget-minded and every bit as much a manager as he; and she helped him maintain that happy balance. They both excelled in governing the house, with perfect economic intonation, if we may put it that way. The opinions of outsiders regarding their way of life varied, because if some criticized them for not having a horse stable of great importance, befitting the English tastes of the Marquis, others praised him to the skies for his excellent library dedicated, oh!... to the moral and political sciences. His table was inferior to the library and superior to the stable. There were only five guests, one day a week.

Since people offered their opinions, we should make note of the gossip, even though this might slightly tarnish the noble figure of the Feramors. Tongues, evidently wicked ones, said that the Marquis used his excess income for making loans at exorbitant interest, allowing his fellow nobles – who were involved in gambling, in sports and in other vices – to extricate themselves from financial straits. In this case the backbiting was false, as is almost always the case, because the loans that the Marquis made were not at extraordinarily high rates. He protected himself, of course, by asking for good collateral, and when the guarantee was weak and the return of his money uncertain, his economic principles warned him to raise the interest judiciously. The fact is that if, in the full light of truth, he could not be called a skinflint, it would be equally unjust to call him

generous. Not even flattery, which can accomplish all things, could say that about him. Even his kindest friends were unable to find a drop of generosity in him, or any example of when he had done anyone a favor without expecting something in return. He was absolutely rigorous in his thought, mathematically precise in his actions, like a machine in social life, with the movement of the wheel of emotion suppressed. He was always attentive to his duties, and he never neglected his obligations; but at the same time the sentimental twaddle of doing good for goodness' sake never laid a finger on him. Always on his guard, protecting himself with secure keys that he alone handled, he never allowed spontaneity to find an opening into that iron interior of his, much less let a heathen hand penetrate it.

You see here why people didn't take a liking to him, and even those who looked up to him as the highest form of the English type were not terribly fond of him. Everyone found him wanting in the qualities of a Spaniard – he had none of the virtues or defects of the complex race of the peninsula. They would have liked him to be less rigid morally, less exacting, and just a bit of a rascal. Physically, he was handsome, but colorless: not a blemish could be found in his features, which were topped off with a negative crown. I mean with a precocious baldness, shiny and clear, which he regarded as the most elegant topper of Britannic sobriety. Outside the house his manners were refined and polite within the bounds of an elegant coolness, and in the privacy of his home they were dry and authoritarian, without stridency, but without a trace of softness either, more like a tutor or an administrator than a father and husband. Of the honorable Marchioness, who was nothing more than the feminine counterpart of her husband, there is little to be said. The assimilation had grown so perfect that they thought and spoke in one voice, and even used the same familiar expressions. They both spoke English with remarkable fluency. And the assimilation did not stop there, because in that young marriage there took place what happens in some old ones where the couple, through long years of living together, is reduced to a single person with two separate forms. The Marquis and the Marchioness resembled each other physically. What am I saying – they resembled each other? They were one and the same – in spite of the fact that she was not very pretty and he was quite handsome: the same in their gaze, in the way they breathed, in the movements of their facial muscles, the serious air of their brow, the imperceptible tremble of the nostrils; in the way they wore their glasses, for they were both myopic; their mouths, their smiles – more polite than kindly. A certain wag, a friend of the household, quipped that if one of the two should die, the survivor would be his own widower.

They lived in the hereditary house of the Feramors, in one of those anomalous little squares near San Justo, with a view of Segovia Street and the viaduct on the west. A very old house, but with the repairs and renovations made by the Marquis, it wasn't too bad. The lower section, considerably enlarged and improved, was divided into two parts that were rented out: one for lithography, and the other for the offices of a holy Brotherhood. The third floor, at first divided into three flats for rent, was later made part of the house as rooms suitable for the older children, the governess, and some of the servants. Catalina chose her quarters on that floor, and would not allow them to be furnished in any ostentatious way; instead she wanted them to be like a convent cell. The Marquises, avowed enemies of extremism in any form, objected. Exaggeration sent them into a frenzy, so they decorated the quarters modestly, but avoided the affectation of monastic poverty.

A month after returning to Madrid, the poor widow began to emerge from the painful, benumbed state in which she had arrived. She now began to take pleasure in the life of the family. She broke the melancholy solemnity of her silence, and amused herself at times with the innocent companionship of her little nieces and nephews, serving their meals, helping the governess, and even entertaining them with quiet little stories and games. She never went down to the main dining room at the usual mealtimes. She was either served in her own room or with the little family in the upstairs dining room. She led a very simple life, with all the regularity of a convent. She awoke at daybreak, heard mass at El Sacramento or at San Justo, returned at about eight o'clock, prayed or read, and did some crocheting. Then she spent the rest of the day with the children, reviewing their lessons, and occasionally returning to her usual routine of reading, crocheting and prayers. Her sister-in-law frequently went up to engage her in conversation and take her mind off of things. Her brother rarely raised his solemnity to the third floor, and when there was something he wanted to tell her, he summoned her to his office. One morning, after he had finished preparing a speech that he was to deliver that afternoon in the Senate, drawing out a thousand and one facts from magazines and newspapers that dealt with dry economic theses, he spoke at length with his sister about what will be seen in the following section.

V

"Now I ask you, dear sister: Are you going to spend the rest of your life acting like this? Haven't you had enough of this mourning? Aren't you tired by now of this darkness, this silence, those nuns' prayers and all that

quietism that will only end up ruining your health and be the death of you?... Won't you answer me? All right, then. I know how stubborn you are, and your silence tells me that we're going to have these spells of melancholy and grieving for some time to come. Oh, Catalina! Why can't you be like me? Why can't you be just a tiny bit practical, and put a stop to all these excesses? Come on! Let's get it all out in the open. Is it your intention to dedicate your entire life to devotions – in a word: to religion?"

"Yes," answered Halma with curt determination.

"All right, then. So we do have a decision. That's something anyway, even if it's all a bunch of nonsense. A religious life: very good. And have you thought it all out? Aren't you afraid you might live to regret it, that somehow... when it's too late… you could have a change of heart?"

"No."

"Fine. A flat out denial like that is something, anyway. Let's get on with it then... So your mind is made up. You think you have the strength to hold up under a life like that – and I would be the first to praise and commend it... Ah, that life! – what beautiful examples there were in by-gone days! But in these times... Oh, dear!... Anyway, to go on: you've decided to join one of our orders and live out your life in a cloister. Excellent. But here's where I come in, here is where your older brother, the head of this family right now, steps in, the one who's responsible for seeing things very clearly, and for putting everything on a practical footing. Now let me ask you: do you intend to join one of those cloistered, solitary orders or a modern one, the French kind, one whose objectives are basically practical and social? I ask you this, dear sister, not because I want to put an obstacle in your path – no matter which you choose – but to set things down clearly. To settle the sort of relationship you're going to have with the family from a social and economic point of view. We need to look at the matter of the dowry or of your religiosity from a material perspective... Because if we don't take special care... If we don't set down the terms carefully..."

With nervous impatience Doña Catalina interrupted her brother at the very moment when, to reinforce his arguments, he began thumping his two index fingers against the edge of the very elegant desk in his office.

"Don't wear yourself out treating this matter as though it's some debate in the Senate. It's very simple. So simple that I can take care of it myself, without anyone else's help or advice. Keep all that wisdom of yours for more important things. I have my own ideas..."

Here he quickly interrupted her, jumping at her words to comment rather sharply:

"That's what I'm afraid of, dear sister. And when I hear you say, 'I

have my own ideas,' I start getting nervous because I've seen proof that your ideas don't hold up very well in the real world."

"The point is that those ideas are mine, dear brother," said the Countess de Halma humbly, "and you have your own. More than likely, they won't agree. We think differently, and life affects us very differently. So you go your way, and let me go mine. Maybe we'll meet, maybe we won't. Who knows? What I do know for certain is that I want a religious life. I can't tell you yet if it's going to be in one of the old orders or in a more modern one. I always take time to make up my mind, and my ideas have to be worked out thoroughly before I act on them. And I may surprise you with some little project that goes just beyond the ordinary. I don't know. Everyone has dreams. I have them in my world the same way you do in yours."

"All right, all right," said the Marquis, finding an easy opening for taking a humorous tone. "My dear sister has high hopes. The strength of her humility presents ideas to her that are as close to pride as Tweedledee is to Tweedledum. The established orders aren't worthy of her religious fervor. Her desire is to eclipse the glory of the Teresas and the Claras, and found a new monastic order for her own personal pleasure... So I ask: are my dear sister's intellectual faculties a match for the very noble aspirations of her generous heart? I seriously doubt that... You can't deny that you've considered it, Catalina, and that you've dreamed about the fame that would come your way as the founder of a project like that. I've seen it in the way you hold back when you talk to me, more than in what you say. I've seen it in your sudden reticence, the way you sometimes dodge certain questions when we talk about what you intend to do with what's left of your inheritance. And now, my dear sister, I want to bring up the matter of money again because I'm beginning to wonder about something. Let me ask you, dear sister, in that deeply personal state of mind, which is the inevitable result of mysticism: are you completely aware of exactly how much you do have left in your inheritance, after all the terrible things you've been through in the East – which is something we shouldn't really bring up right now? I seriously doubt it."

"I think I can understand that," said the Countess de Halma firmly, "even though, according to you, I have no sense about the real world."

"My opinion isn't unwarranted: it's based on sad experience. You were never able to tame that imagination of yours, and it's distorted things for you. It's made everything that could possibly be good seem much better than it really is, and it's played down things that..."

"Oh, no!" answered the widow with feeling. "You think my imagination underestimates bad things?... It's quite the opposite. I always