

The role of Luisito in *Miau*

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Luisito

Modern critics of Benito Pérez Galdós' *Miau* have sought to ascribe a specific role to Luisito. For Ricardo Gullón, he represents «el candor descubriendo el mundo. La mirada infantil es la mirada de la inocencia pura e ilumina los objetos y los problemas según se posa en ellos».¹ Joaquín Casalduero considers him «el lazo de unión entre las miserias de la casa del cesante y la inmoralidad, arbitrariedad e injusticia de la vida del Estado, reflejadas en el ascenso del desfalcador de los bienes públicos, Víctor Cadalso».² Remarking on Luisito's anticipatory role, Gustavo Correa thinks that «dentro de la mente se ordenan los acontecimientos en una trabazón de carácter sobrenatural que explica luminosamente los acontecimientos habituales y el enigma del hombre sobre la tierra».³ Theodore A. Sackett tries to tone down Correa's supernatural interpretation by stating that the child has the role of «divine revealer», but «not divine in the supernatural sense but rather in virtue of his impartial revelation of truths known to other characters but which they cannot or will not admit to themselves».⁴ But for Sackett, Luis' role is essentially to merge «the external and internal realities of Villaamil's existence», and he manages to do this by virtue of being «the innocent observer of the novel's events, the uninhibited child as in the tale of *The Emperor's New Clothes* [who] candidly reveals the truth».⁵ Professor A. A. Parker sees Luis in a more transcendental light by associating him with a search for the principles of justice and righteousness in the universe.⁶ Geraldine M. Scanlon and R. O. Jones admit that Luis' role in the novel is complex but that «one of his chief functions ... is to act as what may be termed an emotional marker, guiding our attitudes towards Villaamil».⁷ More recently, Arnold M. Penuel has stated that Sackett's view is the most significant «in that it implies that the boy's approach to

¹ *Galdós, novelista moderno*, 3rd ed. (Madrid: Gredos, 1973), 343.

² *Vida y obra de Galdós (1843-1920)*, 3rd ed. (Madrid: Gredos, 1970), 94-95.

³ *El simbolismo religioso en las novelas de Pérez Galdós* (Madrid: Gredos, 1974), 133.

⁴ «The Meaning of *Miau*», *Anales Galdosianos*, 4 (1969), 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁶ «Villaamil: Tragic Victim or Comic Failure?», *Anales Galdosianos*, 4 (1969), 22.

⁷ «*Miau*: Prelude to a Reassessment», *Anales Galdosianos*, 6 (1971), 58.

life sets up a norm which the other characters might well have followed».⁸ And later, he explains what this norm may be: «Luisito ... in listening to his inner voice suggests a solution to the problems of injustice and inequality. Man must form early the habit of becoming aware of his deepest feelings. Only then will he be able to cultivate an inner self resistant to alien influences».⁹ Finally, Eamonn Rodgers believes that Luis' uncomplicated perception of the behavior of the members of his family ultimately leads us «to reflect on the whole complex of social, cultural and moral values on which people's self-images rest».¹⁰

In this essay, I hope to show that, far from exhibiting any discerning powers, or from being able to illuminate in any special way the problems that beset his relatives, Luisito manifests a total lack of understanding of the situation in which they find themselves. Further, a close reading of the text of the novel will reveal that Galdós had a specific if multivalent role in mind for Luis; a role which allows him to make an important contribution, not only to the theme and structure of the novel, but also to the development of the plot, which he influences decisively on several occasions. This role firmly establishes him as one of the most important characters of the novel and helps throw some light on the behaviour, motivation, and psychology of the other two main characters, Villaamil and Abelarda.

Luisito Cadalso emerges from Galdós' novel as a shy, diffident, and, at times, somewhat selfish child, who leads an intense interior life, and suffers from an unusual and unnamed sickness that results in occasional epileptic fits.¹¹ Two features stand out in his psychological

⁸ «Yet Another View of Galdós' *Miau*», *REH*, 12 (1978), 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁰ *Pérez Galdós: Miau*, Critical Guides to Spanish Texts (London: Grant and Cutler and Tamesis Books, 1978), 69. In his review of this excellent Critical Guide, E. A. Southworth regretted that Dr. Rodgers did not have the space to take his examination of the role of Luisito further still: *MLR*, 74 (1979), 969.

¹¹ According to A. H. Maslow and B. Mittelmann, in *Principles of Abnormal Psychology* (New York: Harper, 1941), 523-26, hallucinations in which a patient may hear God talking to him are characteristic of epileptics. In the character of Luisito, Galdós may be reflecting a prevailing mid-nineteenth century psychological bias in implicitly ascribing his illness to hereditary causes. His mother, aunt, and grandfather are all afflicted by some sort of mental ailment. According to M. Gordon, «The Medical Background to Galdós' *La desheredada*», *Anales Galdosianos*, 7 (1972), 67, the French aliéniste, B. A. Morel, held that «as the hereditary progression continued, it also tended to get worse, so that the grandson or great-grandson of a mildly neurotic person was quite likely, if the progression were not arrested by adequate mental treatment, to be born an epileptic or even an imbecile». Galdós' interest in abnormal psychology is well known: see Rafael Bosch, «La sombra y la psicopatología de Galdós», *Anales Galdosianos*, 6 (1971), 21-42; Fernando Bravo Moreno, *Síntomas de la patología mental que se hallan en las obras literarias de Benito Pérez Galdós* (Barcelona: Santa Cruz, 1923); S. H. Eoff, *The Novels of Pérez Galdós* (Saint Louis: Washington University Studies, 1954); and Carlos Clavería, «Sobre la veta fantástica en la obra de Galdós», *Atlante*, 1 (1953), 78-86 and 136-43.

make-up: his innocence, natural in a ten-year-old boy, and his associative powers. As the narrator points out, «Luis, como niño, asociaba las ideas imperfectamente, pero las asociaba, poniendo siempre entre ellas afinidades extrañas sugeridas por su inocencia» (445, 1032b).¹² This ability to detect strange affinities between seemingly unrelated ideas leads him at times to associate the trivial with the serious. Explaining his fondness for the stamp album, the narrator remarks that «estaba en la edad en que empieza a desarrollarse el sentido de la clasificación y en que relacionamos los juguetes con los conocimientos serios de la vida» (459, 1037b). Closely linked with his associative powers is his tendency to observe and rationalize. We are told that he had «instintos de observador» (325, 989b), and that he possessed «la volubilidad de un cerebro que se ensaya en la observación y en el raciocinio» (319-20, 987b). Throughout the novel, the narrator alludes, mostly ironically, to Luis' powers of deduction, and to his «golpes de lógica admirable», as when he concludes that he will not see God on the night that Ponce's uncle is dying because He must have been summoned to his bedside (446, 1040a).

However, one must not conclude from the above that Luis' logic is consistent and systematic. The narrator repeatedly emphasizes that the child's insights into problems, his deductions and conclusions, are often erroneous, and that they come to him intuitively, in flashes of understanding. Furthermore, as Rodgers has noted, Luis' explanations for very complex human problems are often too simple, and his frame of reference is only half-understood, for he is «shown in the process of absorbing from his elders the values and assumptions in terms of which he will seek to articulate his experience».¹³ In other words, Luis' conclusions are often the logical product of the illogicality of his elders.

In the course of the novel, Luisito faces the problems which beset him and his relatives during his fainting-fits, when he sees and speaks with a figure whom he believes to be God. The belief of some critics that Luis' God is the Christian God, a «Dios naturalista» according to Casaldueiro,¹⁴ although «teológicamente correcto» in the opinion of Gullón,¹⁵ has been convincingly refuted by Sackett. As he has shown, «Luisito's dreams reflect virtually nothing

¹² All references are to the text as edited by Ricardo Gullón, 3rd ed. (Puerto Rico: Editorial Universitaria, 1976). Henceforth all page-references will be inserted in the text. The second set of references is to vol. II of the Aguilar edition of Galdós' *Novelas*, 1st ed., 2nd printing (Madrid, 1975).

¹³ *Pérez Galdós: Miau*, 55.

¹⁴ *Vida y obra*, 96.

¹⁵ *Galdós, novelista moderno*, 344.

more than the concrete realities of actions experienced by him and *observed by the reader*».¹⁶ What function then does Luis' God fulfill in the novel? First of all, as Ramsden noted, his conversations with God «open up a means of self-expression for the child who otherwise, as a somewhat passive sufferer, has little opportunity to reveal his feelings towards the people and circumstances around him»;¹⁷ and, as Rodgers points out, «it is well known that Galdós often used characters' dreams to reveal certain things which their waking consciousness, for one reason or another, did not clearly articulate».¹⁸ Although a psychiatrist would probably have something to say about the accuracy of the mechanism of the dream-work in Luis' visions, considering them too logical to be dreams but not logical enough to be simple conscious mental acts, for the purpose of the present argument, it will be convenient to regard these visions (I hesitate to call them dreams) as an extension of Luis' powers of observation, rationalization, and association noted above.

What differentiates these visions from his normal thought processes is that in them the self-censorship of unacceptable truths which he imposes on his waking soliloquies all but disappears. This is why it is in a vision, and not during one of his conscious ruminations, that Luis finally accepts the unpalatable fact that his grandfather will never find employment (640, 1102b). But, as Rodgers has pointed out, Luis' God is also used as a means of verbalizing the child's latent anxieties, such as his performance in school, or his supposed responsibility for his grandfather's unemployment (446, 1032-33), as well as for expressing his wish-fulfillment.¹⁹ Further Luis' God acts as his conscience, at times praising him for his bravery in tackling Posturitas, at other times reproving him for not having learnt his lessons. In other words, Luis' God is none other than the child himself, or rather an extension of his personality, his *alter ego*, and the main function of his visions is simply to allow the reader a clearer insight into the workings of his ratiocinative mind, when unfettered by the self-censorship imposed on it by his consciousness.

¹⁶ «The Meaning of *Miau*», 30. See also Joseph Schraibman, *Dreams in the Novels of Galdós* (New York: Hispanic Institute, 1960), 68-70.

¹⁷ «The Question of Responsibility in Galdós' *Miau*», *Anales Galdosianos*, 6 (1971), 64.

¹⁸ *Pérez Galdós: Miau*, 51.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Villaamil

Recent criticism of *Miau* has tended to see Villaamil neither as the tragic victim of an inhuman and dehumanized state, nor as an ineffectual man with an excessive and ridiculous self-concern, who has only himself to blame for his failure. G. W. Ribbans, for example, thinks that there should be no incompatibility between seeing Villaamil's defects and feeling compassion towards him.²⁰ And as A. F. Lambert notes, «it is sometimes forgotten that Villaamil is himself a product as well as a victim of the bureaucracy».²¹ Furthermore, as Rodgers has rightly pointed out, «the organization of the novel encourages us to perceive Villaamil, not as the victim of arbitrariness and ingratitude, but as a person who sees himself as such a victim».²² This tendency to regard himself as a victim is a product of his obsessive concern, not for himself, as Robert J. Weber thinks, but for his situation. As Correa has noted, «la Administración es para él algo más que un medio de ganarse la vida. Constituye, en realidad, la razón misma de su existencia personal».²³ In a word, Villaamil suffers from an extreme case of *empleomanía*.²⁴ It may be argued, as Parker does, that a job is an important part of a man's life, especially when, after thirty-five years of service, he has only two months left to retire with a pension.²⁵ But the plight of the *cesante* must be viewed from a nineteenth-century perspective. As Lambert has shown, Villaamil's situation was not unique, either in literature or in life. In a short story by Mesonero Romanos, we hear about a character who, after thirty years of service, is made *cesante* within only a short time of retirement. Yet, he is not driven to either madness or suicide.²⁶ The point that Galdós wishes to

²⁰ «La figura de Villaamil en *Miau*», *Actas del Primer Congreso Internacional de Estudios Galdosianos* (Ediciones del Excmo. Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria, 1977), 3-19; and also his «Ricardo Gullón and the Novels of Galdós», *Anales Galdosianos*, 3 (1968), 166-68.

²¹ «Galdós and the Anti-bureaucratic Tradition», *BHS*, 53 (1976), 44.

²² *Pérez Galdós: Miau*, 25.

²³ *El simbolismo religioso*, 119.

²⁴ Villaamil's *empleomanía* is very close to manic-depressive psychosis, which is defined as «a type of mental disorder characterized by alternating periods of exaltation (with excessive activity) and depression with inhibition», *Dictionary of Psychology*, ed. Howard C. Warren (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 158. Manic-depressive psychosis may lead to suicide: see Norman L. Munn, *Psychology*, 5th ed. (London: Harrap, 1966), 285. «La empleomanía» is the title of a short story by Mesonero Romanos in his *Panorama Matritense*.

²⁵ «Villaamil: tragic victim», 17.

²⁶ «Galdós and the Anti-bureaucratic Tradition», 38. Galdós was probably acknowledging his indebtedness to Mesonero Romanos and other nineteenth-century Spanish *costumbristas* in the first chapter of *Miau*, where we read that Luisito thought that «las tres mujeres eran gatos en dos pies y vestidos de gente, como los que hay en la obra *Los animales pintados por sí mismos*» (319, 987b). Whether such a book existed in Galdós' time or not, the title is a clear allusion to the important collection of *costumbrista* articles published in 1843 under the title *Los españoles pintados por sí*

make through the character of Villaamil is that, although losing one's job within two months of retirement is a misfortune, it is not a tragedy of the proportions that the old *cesante* attributes to it. After all, as Abelarda says, «con destino y sin destino, siempre estamos igual. Poco más o menos, mi casa ha estado toda la vida como está ahora. Mamá no tiene gobierno; ni lo tiene mi tía, ni lo tengo yo. Si colocan a papá, me alegraré por él, para que tenga en qué ocuparse y se distraiga» (453, 1035b). Obviously, the precariousness of their financial situation has been aggravated by Villaamil's *cesantía*, but not by much. The more money the Miaus obtain, the more they seem to spend, as attested by the fact that they manage to squander Víctor's 300 pts. in a few days. Villaamil's job then is a distraction for him, not a vital necessity for the family.²⁷ After all, they know that after the death of his uncle, Ponce will provide for all of them. But for the old man his job is his life, and when his hopes of being reinstated evaporate, he can only contemplate self-destruction. Through the novel, he has been praying to God, «poniéndose en sus manos para que le diera lo que más le convenía, la muerte o la vida, la credencial o el eterno cese» (557, 1073a). Yet, there is more to life than a job, and the living proof of this is that other *cesante* in the novel, Federico Ruiz. Moreover, although *cesantía* was part of the common lot of a typical nineteenth-century civil servant, we do not know of any mass suicide of *cesantes*, either in literature or in real life. Villaamil therefore is exceptional, an extreme case of *empleomanía*, and Galdós emphasizes his uniqueness by means of the religious imagery associated with him and his situation.

The purpose of the parallel which Galdós draws in the novel between Villaamil and Christ is designed, not to allow us to detect the similarities that exist between the two, but to attract our attention to the enormous differences between them. When Villaamil fatuously responds to the cruel joke of Guillén's *Aleluyas* by saying «yo lo acepto. Esa M, esa I, esa A y esa U son, como el Inri, el letrero infamante que le pusieron a Cristo en la cruz» (604, 1090a), we are meant to react like Sevillano and Argüelles who, even though «al principio le habían oído con algo de respeto, en cuanto oyeron aquella salida titubearon entre la compasión y la risa» (605, 1090a). The exaggerated importance which Villaamil attaches to his job together with the highly dramatized

mismos (see Lambert's article, p. 39). The fact that practically every character in the novel is compared to an animal adds strongly to this impression.

²⁷ As Eamonn Rodgers has noted, «that economic considerations are secondary for Don Ramón is borne out when ... his wife, having borrowed money from Carolina Pez, presents him with an opulent lunch ... it does not occur to him to wonder, much less to ask, about this unusual affluence», *Pérez Galdós: Miau*, 34.

view of reality from which he, as well as other members of his family, suffers leads him to perceive a parallel between Christ's passion and his situation. But this parallel serves, not only, as Rodgers says of a different situation, «to remind us of how easily the expression of emotion, even genuine emotion, conforms to conventional stereotypes»,²⁸ but also to make us aware of the distance that separates Christ from this sad and pathetic cesante. Villaamil's identification with Christ is an extreme expression of his tendency to take things too seriously; a tendency of which the narrator warns us repeatedly, as when he observes that «a cualquier tontería daba Villaamil la importancia de suceso trascendente» (620, 1095b). Although to be unemployed is not a *tontería*, to see himself as a new Messiah who believes that his plan to save the country will only be accepted after he has suffered a passion and a crucifixion similar to Christ's most certainly is.²⁹

But Villaamil's highly melodramatic attitude to life and the excessive importance he attaches to his job manifest themselves in other important ways as well. One of these is particularly significant because of the effect it has on the impressionable mind of his grandson, Luisito. At the beginning of the novel, when he still has some hopes of being reinstated, Villaamil appeals repeatedly to God to have mercy on him and his family. For a time, it seems to him as if God had listened to his prayers. Returning home after an interview with the Minister, he tells his wife: «me recibió tan bien, que... no sé..., parece que Dios le ha tocado al corazón, que le ha dicho algo de mí» (371, 1006b). Of course, Villaamil's words are not meant to be understood literally. His is a conventional, pious way of speaking stemming from the belief that God is ultimately responsible for all the good and bad that befall us. What concerns us, however, is the effect that utterances of this type have on the innocent yet ratiocinative mind of Luisito.

On an earlier occasion, having had his request for financial help turned down by his friend Cucúrbitas, Villaamil exclaims in the presence of Luisito: «Esto ya es demasiado, Señor Todopoderoso. ¿Qué he hecho yo para que me trates así? ¿Por qué no me colocan?» (344, 996b). And shortly afterwards, while Luis is lying on a bed next to him, he says referring to the men who wield power in the Administration: «¡Dios mío!, inspírales, mete todas tus luces dentro de esas mulleras..., que vean claro... que se fijen en mí; que se enteren de mis antecedentes» (349, 998a). In the generally more explicit Alpha version of the novel, Villaamil actually asks: «¿Pero qué hace

²⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁹ See T. A. Sackett, «The Meaning of *Miau*», 26: «[Villaamil] begins to believe that like another Messiah, Christ, he must suffer a passion and martyrdom before his ideas will be accepted».

Dios que no me saca en esta combinación?»³⁰ Now, on both these occasions, Luisito is asleep. Yet, Galdós clearly indicates that, through some mysterious telepathic process,³¹ the old man's words have reached the sleeping child's mind. As the narrator explains, «cómo se encadenó esto con las imágenes que en el cerebro del niño determinaba el sueño no puede saberse» (349, 998b); but the result is that Luisito saw his God, surrounded by a mountain of letters and addressing one to

B.L.M.
Al Excmo. Sr. Ministro de Hacienda,
cualquiera que sea,
su seguro servidor,
Dios.

Why did Galdós choose to have Luisito asleep on both these important occasions? Evidently, his intention was to ensure that Villaamil's words would become deeply and indelibly imprinted on the child's subconscious, never to be forgotten, and ready to influence the course of his future visions of God. After this vision, there remains no doubt in the child's mind that, as his grandfather's words clearly implied, God can exert influence in the Ministry to bring about Villaamil's reinstatement. Consequently, God begins to assume for him the shape of a benign bureaucrat who can be prevailed upon to do something for his grandfather. This is why his visual representation of God is based on a beggar (332, 992a). The memory of that beggar reminds him of his grandfather, the bureaucrat turned beggar, and this helps form his conception of God. For him, God resembles a beggar visually, and a bureaucrat in his actions and speech. Luisito's God both writes and receives letters of *recomendación*, gives vague excuses to hide his inability to find Villaamil a job, and uses the language and even the calligraphy of the child's conception of a typical civil servant. To a large extent, his idea of God is a product of his family's trivialization of Religion. For the Miaus, God is somebody you ask things from: a job, a husband, money for the following day's shopping. Luis' first vision was in a sense his own appeal to the divinity to help

³⁰ See Robert J. Weber, *The Miau Manuscript of Benito Pérez Galdós*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), 132.

³¹ The Society for Psychological Research was founded in London in 1882, six years before the publication of *Miau*. The members were concerned, not only with the actual investigation of cases of psychological phenomena reported to them, but also with the collection and diffusion of such cases: see H. J. Eysenck, *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 110. Galdós' interest in the paranormal may have been aroused, not only by the publications of this society, but also by his friendship with Dr. Tolosa Latour: see M. Gordon, «The Medical Background to *La desheredada*», and Joseph Schraibman, *Dreams in the Novels of Galdós*.

his grandfather. On that occasion, God promised that «por mi parte, haré también algo por tu abuelo...» (335, 993a), but the *algo* remained unspecified because the child could not imagine what God could actually do to help him. Now, after hearing the old man, he knows: He can write a letter of *recomendación*.

From this to seeing the Ministry as some sort of Paradise over which the benevolent God of his visions rules, there is but a short step. Words like «Sí, hijo mío, bienaventurados los brutos, porque de ellos es el reino... de la Administración» (346, 997a) only serve to reinforce this impression in the child's mind. For Luisito then the Ministry becomes Paradise; a Paradise from which his grandfather has been expelled and to which the old man longs to return. But the only way back to the «templo de la Administración», as Villaamil calls it (608, 1091a), is through the writing of letters; that is to say, through prayer, and, as the narrator observes, his grandfather's prayers are couched, like the letters which Luisito is continually taking to the prohombres, in a «mezcla absurda de piedad y burocracia» (558, 1073b).

Luis' idea of God as an influential bureaucrat is confirmed by Villaamil himself. Alone with his grandfather, he asks him the day after his vision: «Abuelito, ¿verdad que el Ministro te recibió muy bien?» and when Villaamil replies in the affirmative, he explains: «Y el Ministro te quiere mucho... porque le escribieron...» (373-74, 1007a-b). Vision and reality have now become indistinguishable for Luisito. The equations God=Bureaucrat and Paradise = Administration have become reality and not simple figures of speech.

But even more remarkable than Luis' conclusion is Villaamil's reaction. Through this short conversation, the narrator emphasizes the impact that Luis' words are having on the old man: he was «estupefacto de esta salida y del tono con que fue dicha», and «miraba Cadalsito a su abuelo con una expresión tan extraña, que el pobre señor no sabía qué pensar. Parecía expresión de Niño-Dios...» (374, 1007a-b). For a few moments Villaamil feels that there is something strange, inexplicable, supernatural about his grandson. But then he brusquely dismisses these thoughts: «En el mismo instante pensó Villaamil que todo aquello era una tontería...» (Ibid.). The next time the child speaks, however, his belief in Luisito's singularity will be considerably strengthened.

When in Chapter XXIII, Villaamil affirms in front of his family that «jamás habría piedad para él en las esferas ministeriales», the narrator, drawing our attention to Luis' otherwise undistinguished sally, inserts a passage which is in reality a broad hint that the child's words mean more than they say:

Entonces soltó Luisito aquella frase que fue célebre en la familia durante una semana y se comentó y repitió hasta la saciedad, celebrándola como gracia inapreciable, o como uno de esos rasgos de sabiduría que de la mente divina pueden descender a la de los seres cuyo estado de gracia les comunica directamente con aquélla. Lo dijo Cadalso con ingenuidad encantadora y cierto aplomo petulante, que aumentaba el hechizo de sus palabras:

-Pero, abuelito, parece que eres tonto. ¿Por qué estás pidiendo y pidiendo a esos tíos de los Ministerios, que son unos cualesquiera y no te hacen caso? Pídeselo a Dios, ve a la Iglesia, reza mucho, y verás como Dios te da el destino. (504, 1054a)

After the preparatory passage building up to it, Luisito's commonplace utterance is, to say the least, a disappointment. But the introductory passage fulfills two very important functions. First, it draws out attention to Luis' words, hinting that they may be more important than they seem to be at first sight. And indeed they are. Luisito is expressing his bafflement at his grandfather's blindness. Has he not heard from his only lips that only God will be able to give him the job he covets? Why then does he keep appealing to the «esferas ministeriales», instead of to the «esferas celestiales» as he should? In the second place, the passage serves to show the effect that his words have on the family. It is not the narrator but the Mias who think Luisito's utterance is a «rasgo de sabiduría» emanating from the divine mind. Villaamil in particular is extremely impressed: «Todos se echaron a reír; pero en el ánimo de Villaamil hizo un efecto muy distinto la salida del inspirado niño. Por poco se le saltan al buen viejo las lágrimas...» (Ibid.). Soon afterwards, a *prohombre* raises his hopes, and the old *cesante* sees this as confirmation of his grandson's words. The result is that «desde aquel día, Villaamil frecuentaba la iglesia de un modo vergonzante» because, as Luisito had reminded him “el cristianismo nos dice: pedid y se os dará...” (556-57, 1073a). The irony of the situation lies in the fact that the supposedly inspired words of his grandson's are nothing but his own words, which he is unable to recognize because they are presented to him through the pure and innocent mouth of a ten-year-old child.

Shortly after this incident, however, there occurs a change in Luisito's mind regarding his belief in God's ability to find his grandfather a job. As usual, his misgivings manifest themselves through the medium of his visions. When, in Chapter XXIX, he asks God about the letter of recomendación -«¿El caballero de la carta contestará que sí? ¿Colocarán a mi abuelo?»- God's reply reflects Luis' incipient doubts: «No te lo puedo asegurar. Yo le he mandado que lo haga. Se lo he mandado la friolera de tres veces» (551, 1071a). His doubts spring from a conversation he overheard, in which Víctor categorically announced that Villaamil had been left out of the latest *combinación* (434, 1028b). Luis' doubts have become certainty by Chapter XL, when God agrees

with him that «el pícaro Ministro tiene la culpa de todo. Si hubiera hecho lo que yo le dije, nada de esto pasaría. ¿Qué le costaba, en aquella casona tan llena de oficinas, hacer un hueco para este pobre señor? Pero nada, no hacen caso de mí, y así anda todo» (639, 1102a). It is at this point that Luisito reaches the conclusion that his grandfather will never find a job on this earth. As usual, he faces this unpleasant fact indirectly, through his God. As we saw above, Luis' God is simply an extension of his personality. The problem is, of course, that the child does not recognize him as such. God's utterances must therefore be considered from two different viewpoints. As far as the reader is concerned, they are simply verbalizations of Luisito's half-understood ideas about matters which trouble him; but for the child, God's words come directly from the divinity itself. The fact that this divinity always confirms what he intuitively knows to be true, only reaffirms him in his belief. Thus, when God finally tells him that his grandfather will not be reinstated, we must see in his words Luis' own reading of the situation. The question now facing us is, what made him change his mind concerning God's influence with the Administration? Once again, the answer is to be found in Villaamil's own utterances which, filtering into the mind of his attentive grandson, lead him to the most unexpected conclusions.

Round the middle of the novel, the nature of Villaamil's allusions to the Administration begins to change dramatically. As his disillusionment increases and his hopes of being reinstated decrease, he begins to use more and more infernal imagery to describe the Ministry and the people who dwell in it. The narrator dutifully echoes Villaamil's mood. Soon it becomes increasingly apparent that the Administration, far from being Paradise, is in reality the opposite of Paradise, that is to say, Hell. To begin with, there the sinners are rewarded and the virtuous punished. One still needs intermediaries to gain entrance into the Kingdom of the Administration, but instead of the intercession of the saints and the Virgin Mary, one requires the influence of a *fantoche* (477, 1044b), or of *faldas corruptoras* (525, 1061b). Further, in the world of the Administration, Víctor and people like him thrive, whereas Villaamil, the *probo empleado*, remains *cesante*. And Víctor is, as we know, a personification of the Devil: Abelarda compares him to Mefistófeles (394, 1014b), and he himself confesses that «no tiene el diablo por donde desecharme» (438, 1030a).³² Together with Víctor, the deceiver, the handsome Lucifer (see 506,

³² See Sackett, «The Meaning of *Miau*», 32, and Alfredo Rodríguez, *Estudios sobre la novela de Galdós* (Madrid: José Porrúa Turanzas, 1978), 62-63. Rodríguez notes some similarities between Víctor and Don Juan. Here we may add that, like the original Don Juan in Tirso's *El burlador de Sevilla*, Víctor is a *burlador* who seems more interested in deceiving than in sensual pleasure; also, like Tirso's character,

1054b), is Guillén, the «cojitranco de los infiernos» (595, 1086b), probably a reference to Luis Vélez de Guevara's *El diablo cojuelo*. On the other hand, Guillén's fellow-employees are described as «infelices condenados a la esclavitud perpetua de las oficinas» (491, 1049b). And indeed, the Ministry is described as a world more hellish than those invented by Dante and Quevedo. There «a lo largo del pasadizo accidentado y misterioso, las figuras de Villaamil y de Argüelles habrían podido trocarse, por obra y gracia de hábil caricatura, en las de Dante y Virgilio buscando por senos recónditos la entrada o salida de los recintos infernales que visitaban» (601, 1088b).

This is the picture of the Ministry and the Administration which Villaamil paints in his moments of despair and disillusionment. Once again, he is using a figure of speech, a set of images designed to give vent to his anger and frustration. But how is Luisito to know that his words are not to be taken literally? On one occasion, when Villaamil is comparing Víctor to the Devil, the narrator observes that «detúvose Villaamil al reparar que estaba presente Luisito, quien no debía oír semejante apología. Al fin era su padre. Y por cierto que el pobre niño clavaba en el abuelo sus ojos con expresión de terror» (506, 1054b). On another occasion, Luis is the silent witness of a conversation between his grandfather and Abelarda in the church of Montserrat. Having been informed of the fact that Víctor had been, not only promoted, but given a position in Madrid, Villaamil bursts out: «Dios no protege más que a los pillos... ¿Crees que espero algo ni del Ministro ni de Dios? Todos son lo mismo... ¡Arriba y abajo, farsa, favoritismo, polaquería!» (563, 1075b). Luis must have been understandably baffled by these words, especially since they were spoken near the chapel of the «Cristo de las melenas negras». His ratiocinative mind must have wondered what sort of God was this that, according to his grandfather, only protected the wicked. Certainly, he must have concluded, not the kind God he saw in his visions, but the God that ruled over the Ministry, the one responsible for his grandfather's unemployment. By the middle of Chapter XXXII, Luis has found an answer to this riddle: there are two Gods. One is the «Cristo de las melenas negras», a God of suffering, created and manufactured by man, as Silvestre Murillo made clear to him (500, 1052b), who both suffers and inflicts suffering. The other is his perfect antithesis, «el Señor de la barba blanca», a God of light, happiness and laughter, surrounded by pink clouds and angels. Luisito clearly differentiates between the two Gods when he tells Abelarda, referring to the Montserrat Christ,

he is essentially theatrical: see Daniel Rogers, *Tirso de Molina: El burlador de Sevilla*, Critical Guides to Spanish Texts (London: Grant and Cutler and Tamesis Books, 1977), 31-40. Tirso was the first to see Don Juan as the personification of the Devil: Catalinón calls him Lucifer in line 1774, Act II.

Tiíta, ahora le veo el faldellín todo lleno de sangre, mucha sangre... Ven, enciende luz, o me muero de susto; quítamele, dile que se vaya, El otro Dios es el que a mí me gusta, el abuelo guapo, el que no tiene sangre, sino un manto muy fino y unas barbas blanquísimas... (581, 1082a)

The product of popular superstition, the two Gods correspond to the two most important men in his life, his father and his grandfather: «Era Cadalso el papá malo, como Villaamil era el papá bueno» (393, 1014b). But the distinction is made by the child in an attempt to reconcile his grandfather's contradictory imagery. This contradiction, however, ceases to exist as soon as he discovers the two Gods: the one who rules over the earthly paradise, that travesty of the divine paradise where instead of happiness, there reign wretchedness, misery and sorrow, and the one who rules over the celestial spheres.³³ It is now obvious to him that his grandfather will never find employment in the first God's Administration. Could he perhaps find a position with the other God? The answer comes to him in his last vision, when the good God tells him «dile [a tu abuelo] que has hablado conmigo, que no se apure por la credencial, que mande al Ministro a freir espárragos, y que no tendrá tranquilidad sino cuando esté conmigo» (640, 1102b). Having reached this conclusion, Luis discloses to Villaamil that he sees God and adds: «Y anoche me dijo que no te colocarán, y que este mundo es muy malo, y que tú no tienes nada que hacer con él, y que cuanto más pronto te vayas al cielo, mejor» (653-54, 1107b). The misunderstanding has now come full circle. Unable to recognize his own conventional words and attitudes in his grandson's utterances, Villaamil thinks him divinely inspired (675, 1107b), and follows his advice.³⁴

³³ In the Alpha version, the good God tells Luisito that the Devil often comes to Congress, thereby further identifying the God that rules over the Administration with him: see Weber, *The Miau Manuscript*, 151. In Act III, scene IV of *Cassandra*, Ismael states his belief in the two Gods: the first is «un Dios político, gubernamental, militar, judicial, administrativo y un poquito burocrático... El otro Dios, el de los Pobres, es el que recoge a todos los desengañados del Dios de los Ricos, a los que no tienen influencia ni poder alguno en los mangoneos de la política ni de la Iglesia... Su nombre encabeza las cesantías...» Benito Pérez Galdós, *Novelas y Miscelánea* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1977), 960a. Pipá, the eponymous child observer of Clarín's short story (published two years before *Miau* in 1886), also expresses his belief in two gods: *Obras selectas*, second ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1966), 824-26.

³⁴ For other factors contributing to Villaamil's suicide, see Stephen Miller, «Villaamil's Suicide: Action, Character and Motivation», *Anales Galdosianos*, 14 (1979), 83-96.

Abelarda

The Abelarda subplot parallels the main plot of *Miau* in many respects. As Scanlon and Jones have noted, Abelarda finds herself in the same emotional situation as Villaamil.³⁵ Furthermore, as Penuel has pointed out, «both father and daughter misplace their trust: Villaamil in the bureaucracy, and Abelarda, in Víctor».³⁶ More importantly, both suffer from an excessive and obsessive concern for their situation, and tend to see their plight in highly melodramatic terms. Abelarda loves Víctor with the same singlemindedness of purpose with which Villaamil loves the Administration. While rehearsing for the play, she behaves like an automaton, «como si su casa, su familia, su tertulia, Ponce, fuesen la verdadera comedia, de fáciles y rutinarios papeles ... y permaneciese libre el espíritu, empapado en su vida interior, verdadera y real, en el drama exclusivamente suyo, palpitante de interés, que no tenía más que un actor: ella, y un solo espectador: Dios» (452-53, 1035a). Her melodramatic attitude surfaces on the night Víctor fails to return. She begins to imagine that the rejected lady must have poisoned him with «el veneno de los Borgias», mixing, as the narrator remarks, «mil lances que había visto en las óperas» (568-69, 1077a). Like Villaamil, she considers herself a tragic victim, and undergoes a passion and a crucifixion with a figurative, if not physical, suicide at the end. As the narrator says, she was «plenamente decidida a tirarse por el Viaducto, es decir, a casarse con Ponce», and she marries him very fittingly on the third of May, the «día de la Cruz» (634, 1100b). But just as in the case of Villaamil we had to beware of taking his passion and crucifixion seriously, so must we now beware of falling into the same trap with Abelarda. As Ricardo Gullón notes, «Abelarda -lo risible del nombre es quizás paródico; acaso escogido con propósito de evocar el recuerdo de Abelardo, Pedro Abelardo, el héroe medieval del amor, para acentuar irónicamente el contraste».³⁷ The same ironic contrast which existed between Villaamil and Christ, applies now between Abelarda and her medieval name sake.

As with Villaamil, Luisito also acts as the observer of the melodrama involving his father and aunt: «[Víctor] con Abelarda echaba largos parlamentos, si por acaso se encontraban solos, o en el acto interesante de acostar a Luis» (432, 1027b).³⁸ And there is no doubt that Luis listens to

³⁵ «*Miau: Prelude to a Reassessment*», 59.

³⁶ «*Yet Another Interpretation*», 8.

³⁷ *Galdós, novelista moderno*, 339. Galdós may have intended Abelarda to see herself as a Mater Dolorosa, just as Villaamil sees himself as a Christ-figure: see p. 577, 1080b.

³⁸ See also p. 501, 1052b. As Gullón noted, the child seems to pick up more information than he means to or is aware of: *Galdós, novelista moderno*, 345.

these conversations, as his God makes clear when he asks him, «¿Pero a ti quién te mete a escuchar lo que dicen las personas mayores?» (639, 1102a). What does Luisito overhear in these conversations? In Chapter XIX, for example, he hears Víctor tell Abelarda and Ponce: «Yo daría sangre de las venas por echar mi anzuelo en el mar de la vida, con el cebo de una declaración amorosa, y pescar una Abelarda» (461-62, 1038b); and then, turning to Ponce, «ésta es segura, amigo; le quiere a usted con el alma y con la vida» (462, 1038b). At the end of this chapter, after Ponce's departure, Luis hears Víctor explain his behavior to Abelarda, and then witnesses her reaction:

-Víctor -exclamó descompuesta y temblando-, o eres el hombre más malo que hay en el mundo, o no sé lo que eres.

Corrió a su habitación y rompió a llorar, desplomándose de cara sobre las almohadas de su lecho. Víctor se quedó en el comedor, y Luis, que en su inocencia comprendía que pasaba algo extraño, no se atrevió durante un rato a molestar a papá con aquel teje-maneje de los sellos. (465, 1040a)

What is Luis' reading of the scene he has just witnessed? The answer is supplied in Chapter XL, when he confides to God: «[Abelarda] me tiene mucha tirria desde un día que le dije que se casara con mi papá. ¿Usted no sabe? Mi papá la quiere; pero ella no le puede ver» (639, 1102a). On the basis of the literal meaning of the words he heard that night, Luisito could not but conclude that Abelarda hated his father and that he both loved and needed her. Of course, we the readers know that his reading of the situation is totally wrong. But how can the innocent child see through his father's irony and malice and through his aunt's bashfulness, especially when the latter is particularly careful to hide her real feelings from him?³⁹ The fact that we can easily penetrate the artificial and deceitful language of the characters of this novel should not lead us to the assumption that a ten-year-old child will be able to see through it too.

But how are we then to explain Luis' words to Abelarda on the following day?: «Tía, ¿por qué no te casas tú con mi papá?»⁴⁰ If Luis is convinced that Abelarda hates his father, why does he make this suggestion? First of all, the idea of a union between Víctor and Abelarda was implanted in his mind by Paca Mendizábal. As the narrator remarks, this idea «le pareció al principio algo rara, pero ... luego [la] tuvo por la más natural del mundo» (467, 1040b). The selfish child can

³⁹ See, for example, p, 394, 1014b.

⁴⁰ In Alpha, Luis' advice to Abelarda parallels his advice to Villaamil in Chapter XXIII: «Pepín seguía exaltado. Viendo que su tía Abelarda estaba muy triste y dando suspiros, le dijo: tonta por qué suspiras tanto? porque tu novio no te quiere? Ya, ya comprendo yo. Pues pídeselo a Dios, necia» (Weber, *The Miau Manuscript*, 152).

only see advantages in a marriage between Abelarda and Víctor: he will keep a wealthy father who gives him presents, and in the bargain retain a doting aunt. Furthermore, as the narrator points out, «habían extinguido la prevención medrosa que su padre le inspiraba, no sólo los regalos recibidos de él, sino la observación de que Víctor se llevaba muy bien con toda la familia» (468, 1041). But the importance of Luis' advice to Abelarda may be missed if we fail to take into account her reaction. According to the narrator, «quedose la chica como lela, fluctuando entre la risa y el enojo» (467, 1040b). Why? Because Luis seems to have been able to divine her innermost feelings, and desires. Like Villaamil's on a previous occasion, her response is out of all proportion to the import of the child's words. However, on hearing that the suggestion had come from Paca Mendizábal, Abelarda, like Villaamil before her, dismisses any notion that the child might possess any unusual powers of perception. But the feeling that he might somehow have been able to read her mind remains lodged within her, ready to be rekindled the next time the child should offer further proof of his powers. This occurs in Chapter XXIII, and then again in Chapter XXV.

Feeling the compulsion to confess to someone her guilty passion for Víctor, Abelarda, to the surprise of the reader, thinks first of confiding in Luisito. However, realizing that the child is far too young to act as her confessor, she eventually opts for a priest: «le contó al cura lo que le pasaba, añadiendo pormenores que al sacerdote no le importaba saber» (497, 1051b). The nature of these *pormenores* will be indicated below. Now, we should turn our attention to Luisito who, as a consequence of accompanying his aunt to church, is beginning to toy with the idea of becoming a priest: «Luisito aseguraba que o no sería nada o cantaríamisa, pues le entusiasmaban todas las funciones sacerdotales, incluso el predicar, incluso el meterse en el confesionario para oír *los pecados de las mujeres*» (500, 1052b). In italicizing, and thus placing special emphasis on, the last phrase, Galdós' intention was to refer the reader to the beginning of the chapter, where we were informed of Abelarda's impulse to confess to Luisito. Could the child have read her mind? Further proof of his apparent ability to do just that is offered in Chapter XXV. In bed at night, both Luis and Abelarda are having a restless sleep. His is disturbed by thoughts of revenge against Posturitas' mother, the person who, according to his reasoning, invented the nickname Miau; hers is troubled by the image of her unknown rival. At one point, the child exclaims aloud: «Tu mamá no es señora, sino mujer...»; echoes Abelarda: «Esa elegantona que te escribe cartas no es dama, sino una tía feróstica...» The strange dialogue ends when Luisito, using some startling

sexual imagery, cries out: «Es un ratón lo que Posturas echa por la boca, un ratón negro y con el rabo mu largo». Abelarda wakes up, and Luisito explains to her: «Es que... un ratón. Pero mi papá lo ha cogido»; and then he insists that he saw his father lying in bed with Abelarda: «y mi papá estaba acostado contigo...» (516-17, 1058). Apart from its explicit sexual symbolism, one other feature of this scene is worth noting. Clearly, it was Galdós' belief that, in the mysterious state of sleep, telepathic communication was a strong possibility, especially when two highly-strung minds were involved.⁴¹ Proof of this is found in the strange parallel dialogue between the two sleepers and, more startlingly, in Luisito's vision of his father lying with Abelarda. The latter is simply a visualization of Abelarda's dream, of the *pormenores* she confided to the priest; a dream which, through some mysterious conduit, was transmitted to the sleeping child's mind.

On a previous occasion, we saw how Villaamil's words affected and directed the course of Luis' dream; on this occasion, the telepathic phenomenon will mainly affect the agitated Abelarda. Its more immediate effect is that she «no pegó los ojos en el resto de la noche...» (517, 1058b); eventually, however, the evidence she has gathered of Luisito's ability to read her mind and predict the future will lead her to the conclusion that there is something strange, incomprehensible, perhaps even supernatural about her nephew. Where Abelarda is seen to differ from Villaamil is, as we shall see next, in her belief in the nature of Luis' singularity, for whereas the old cesante thought that the child was divinely inspired, Abelarda will conclude that he is possessed by the Devil.

At the end of Chapter XXX, Víctor, in a travesty of Christ's words, asks Abelarda: «¿Abandonarías casa, padres, todo, por seguirme?» (Cf. Matthew, XIX, 21). The narrator quite rightly terms these words a «rpto de infernal inspiración» (566, 1076b), but for Abelarda, they represent the culmination of all her hopes and desires in a strange, but in Galdós' novels rather common, mixture of piety, mysticism and sex. Abelarda is now ready to make the ultimate sacrifice; an epic, heroic sacrifice, just as in the most melodramatic opera, in which she will immolate her honor, her virtue, her virginity for the salvation of the immortal soul of her beloved. As the narrator puts it, «Abelarda se entregaría sin ningún trámite al hombre que le había absorbido el alma; renunciaba a toda libertad, era suya, de él, en la forma y condiciones que él quisiese, con escándalo o sin escándalo, con honra o sin honra» (567, 1077a).

⁴¹ A very similar type of dialogue is that which takes place between Ángel Guerra and Doña Sales in Chapter III, X-XI, Part One of *Ángel Guerra (Novelas y Miscelánea, 60-63)*.

Abelarda, however, is not able to carry out her resolution, for that night Víctor fails to return home. She cannot believe in a betrayal; instead, she thinks that in «aquella ausencia inexplicable había un enigma, algo misterioso, quizás una desgracia o una monstruosidad que la pobre muchacha, en la ofuscación de su inteligencia, no acertaba a comprender» (569, 1077b). The following day, in the church of Montserrat, her worst fears are confirmed. With some trite excuse, Víctor leaves her, disappearing «como alma que lleva Satanás» (577, 1080a). Abelarda can now easily believe that the Devil himself has intervened to prevent her magnificent sacrifice: «si hubiera visto que al púlpito de la iglesia subía el Diablo en persona y echaba un sermón acusando a los fieles de que no pecaban bastante, y diciéndoles que si seguían así no ganarían el Infierno; si Abelarda hubiera visto esto, no se habría pasmado como se pasmó» (577, 1080a-b).

In this state of mind, she returns home. That night in bed, she begins suddenly to feel an «odio sañudo» towards Luisito: «El tal mocoso era un necio, un farsante que embaucaba a la familia con aquellas simplezas de ver a Dios y de querer hacerse curita»; the child was «un cómico, fingido y trapalón, bajado al mundo para martirizarla a ella y a toda su casa...» (580-81, 1082a). Further, she thinks that the child is possessed. To her fevered and deranged mind, he is possessed by the same devil who destroyed her sister's life and happiness: «Y Abelarda repetía las mismas palabras de la muerta, diciendo que el pobre niño era un monstruo, un aborto del infierno, venido a la tierra para castigo y condenación de la familia» (582, 1082a).⁴² It is interesting to note, first, that the word monstruo harks back to Abelarda's own explanation for Víctor's mysterious absence; and, second, that the phrase «un aborto del infierno» was inserted by Galdós during the proof-reading stage of composition, with all the deliberation that this act implies, and that it replaced the more obvious, but less effective, «o diablito».⁴³

As the words she uses clearly indicate, Abelarda is suffering from a psychological process of displacement. The «cómico fingido y trapalón» is not Luis but his father who, throughout the novel, has been described as a consummate actor.⁴⁴ It is Víctor too who proves to be the scourge of the family, the cause of Luisa's madness, of Abelarda's unhappiness, and of Villaamil's despair.

⁴² For Galdós' interest in demonology, see Carlos Clavería, «Galdós y los demonios», in *Homenaje a J. A. van Praag* (Amsterdam, 1956), 32-37.

⁴³ Weber, *The Miau Manuscript*, 110.

⁴⁴ See Rodgers, *Pérez Galdós: Miau*, 45; Ramsdem, «The Question of Responsibility», 64; and Correa, *El simbolismo religioso*, 120; and also pp. 392, 1013b; 439, 1030a; and 472, 1042b of the text.

Finally, it is Víctor, and not Luis, who is a monster and the personification of the Devil.⁴⁵ But, just as her sister before her, Abelarda redirects her hatred for Víctor against his son. Luis himself is intuitively aware of this process, even though, as usual, he attributes it to the wrong motivation. As he tells God in his last vision, Abelarda attacked him because «no puede ver a mi papá, porque mi papá le dijo al Ministro que no colocara a mi abuelo. Y como no se atreve con mi papá, porque puede más que ella, la emprendió conmigo» (638-39, 1102a). This attack, in Chapter XXXVIII, signals her definitive break with Víctor, who will use it as an excuse for taking his son to Quintina's house and for severing his connection with the Miaus, and also places her on the final road to her figurative suicide; that is, to her marriage to Ponce.

Conclusion

Many positive and negative analogies may be drawn between Villaamil and Abelarda. She parallels her father in the excessive importance she attaches to her situation, in her melodramatic attitude to life, in her imagined passion and crucifixion, and in the fact that she also becomes a victim of Victor's infernal machinations. The two characters are also analogous in their readiness to believe in the intervention of a supernatural force in their trivial affairs. This supernatural force manifests itself in both cases through Luisito, who is believed by Villaamil to be speaking with the voice of God, and by Abelarda to be possessed by the Devil. Neither of course is right, but the fact that they can arrive at such opposite conclusions about the same child, tells us more about their values and attitudes than about the child himself. Because of their obsessive concern with their situations, Villaamil and Abelarda become self-deluded, and their self-delusion is made manifestly obvious through their reactions to the child's intervention in their lives.

Further, the Abelarda subplot parallels the main plot in that Luisito, the observer of both narrative lines, totally misunderstands the situation in which the main characters find themselves. This misunderstanding is due to his propensity to believe in the literal value of the words he hears. As I hope to have shown, Galdós did not intend to endow Luisito with any special insight, nor did he think him able to shed any special light over the family's problems, except in

⁴⁵ See Sackett, «The Meaning of *Miau*», 32; Rodríguez, *Estudios*, 62-63; and Weber, *The Miau Manuscript*, 110-11. The series of changes on the word *monstruo* which Galdós introduced during the proof-reading stage emphasizes the identification between father and son.

an indirect and ironic way. There is nothing supernatural about the child, and, consequently, he does not reveal any transcendental truths to the other characters. If his utterances are considered revelatory by some members of his family, it is because they fail to recognize in them their own thoughts and attitudes when divested of their rhetorical trappings.

What then is Luisito's role in the novel? First, by decisively intervening, and affecting, the narrative development of each of the plots of the novel, he formally links the stories of Villaamil and Abelarda. Thus, he lends unity to the work and allows the reader to draw affective analogies between the two characters and their situations. In the second place, he fulfills the role of the innocent observer of the world around him. Unable to penetrate the shallow religiosity, the false values, the resorting to stereotypes, the melodramatic posturing, and the misleading, insincere, and artificial language of his elders, he takes the words they speak at their face value. Because he does not realize that people do not always mean what they say, he consistently misunderstands the motivation of the persons he loves. The artificiality and insincerity of the world of the Miaus is thus sharply and effectively exposed through the observant eyes of a child. Finally, by reflecting in a pure and unaltered form the values, thoughts, and attitudes of the members of his family, he becomes directly or indirectly responsible for the ultimate fate of the Miaus as a family. Convinced by his grandson's words of the futility of seeking a job on this earth, Villaamil decides to commit suicide; thinking that her nephew is bent on destroying her love and happiness, Abelarda becomes resigned to a marriage to Ponce, and commits suicide in a figurative sense. Thus, Luis emerges at the end of the novel, not only as the victim, but also as the executioner of the Miaus, for he is in a sense responsible for their dissolution as a family.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ After completing this article, and following Professor R. Cardona's suggestion, I read Henry James' novel *What Maisie Knew*, published nine years after *Miau* in 1897. Like Professor Cardona, I was immediately struck by the many points of similarity between the two works, specially as concerns the two child characters. For example, by using Maisie and Luisito as the innocent observers of the two parallel plots that unfold before their eyes, the authors are able to present the chaotic world in which the adult characters live; thus, the two children emerge, not only as the only stable figures, but also as the unifying force in each of the novels. In both works, the narrator operates sometimes in close association with the child's viewpoint, and at other times at some distance from it. The words uttered by the two children possess occasionally the quality of revelation, because they are the product of thought processes to which we have been denied access. Both children see a great deal of things which they fail to understand or which they totally misunderstand; often this leads to their reaching conclusions simpler than those arrived at by the reader or by other characters. What James says in his Preface about Maisie may equally well be applied to Luisito: «She is not only the extraordinary 'ironic centre' ... she has the wonderful importance of shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension». The resemblance between the two children extends to other areas as well: Maisie's French doll, Lisette, is used, like Luisito's God, as a means of verbalizing the child's perplexities: «Little

by little, however, she understood more, for it befell that she was enlightened by Lisette's questions, which reproduced the effect of her own upon those for whom she sat in the very darkness of Lisette» (Ch. V). Not unlike Luisito, Maisie tends to understand the literal meaning of the words she hears: «'He leans on me -he leans on me!' she only announced from time to time; and she was more surprised than amused when, later on, she accidentally found she had given her pupil [Maisie] the impression of a support literally supplied by her person» (Ch. XI). There exist, however, some important differences between the two novels: unlike Galdós, James decided to keep Maisie's limited perspective the very field of his picture. Nevertheless, a systematic comparison between these two great novels should prove extremely rewarding, and I am very grateful to Professor Cardona for drawing my attention to James' work.