

The Novel Republic: Inventing the Real in 1873-1874 Spain

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“Money, it’s a gas.”
Pink Floyd

I. The Difficulty of Imagining the Future

A few words that disappear, ephemeral coins and stamps, bloodless allegories are just a few manifestations of the difficult attempt to go from word to practice, from idea to realization, when the Republic became a possibility in Spain with the departure of Isabel II in 1868. The idea itself of a nation governed by the authority of her people and not the divine rights of a monarchy was well known, from its Roman origins to its then recent manifestations in the United States and France. A secular state, representative government, universal suffrage (or at least for most male voters), education for all, fair workers’ compensation, and other ideas usually associated with a republic were also textual realities, well-rehearsed projects, *ensayos*, awaiting their full implementation in Spain. The difficulties, as I will show here, were a lack of common purpose, a varied and powerful opposition, and a limited imagination to bridge the gap between words and the rest of the world. An examination of the intermediate and dynamic activity to which I refer here as the process of implementation illuminates the extremely complex relation between what has come to be called, by unfortunate shorthand, text and reality. A text, of course, such as laws or a constitution, a wedding certificate or a testament, does not stand apart from reality. Even a novel appears as a manifestation of the real. Once one leaves aside, therefore, the cumbersome and unenlightening term of “reality” and proposes instead to observe how ideas expressed in a verbal discourse are implemented in images, actions, processes, institutions, and so on—and how these elements in turn affect ideas—it becomes instantly clear that there is a significant and important difference between words, where every combination is possible, and the other elements considered here, where severe limitations apply. We need to be reminded of this roughness of experience.

One expects, of course, that novels will provide models of concrete and individual lives, thick descriptions, that will bring us tangentially to at least the illusion of a closeness to how people “live in things” or, better, to how people are constituted among things in an intense dialectic of mutual appellation. Yet, curiously, the novelist to whom we would tend to turn first, Galdós, wrote on the topic of the Republic an uncharacteristic novel, with the generic and unimaginative title of *La Primera República*, published in 1911. The main character, a historian, falls in love with an allegorical figure, a schoolteacher surrounded by other bland allegories such as Grammar, Geometry, and History. There is even a nightmarish underground trip from Madrid to Cartagena, where the regional independence movement is given just a brief notice, to add to the general atmosphere of unreality. Galdós observes that “saltó España del trono majestático al tablado de la República” (581), referring to 1873 as “año de sarampión agudísimo” (581). This personification of Spain jumping from monarchy to republic fits well with the allegorical novel, placing all events, in spite of the gossipy tone of the narration, in the region of the object-in-general, further displacing events with one image, *tablado de la*

República, to a happening of limited duration and perhaps even amusing for the bourgeoisie, and with another image, *sarampión*, to a childish malady soon to be cured and forgotten. In fact, as one reads about this period through one of the most respected newspapers of the period, *La Época*, one finds a concern that runs much deeper. Granted, the four daily pages that were delivered to subscribers and not sold in the streets, addressed a conservative readership, but one that was well informed and able to incorporate other points of view. On March 4, 1873, *La Época* diagnosed that “Es desgraciadamente innegable que ya en ninguno de los países de Europa hay un malestar tan grande, ni un estado de ruina como los que en España presentan todas las instituciones políticas, administrativas y financieras.” King Amadeo, imported from Italy to allow for a last try for a monarchic solution which lasted from January 1871 to February 1873, before resigning said Spain was “un país . . . hondamente perturbado” (Lafuente 179). How can one understand disquiet, such a deep disquiet, without attempting to rewind Galdós and other narrators who place themselves in the vantage point of the future, retrospectively recounting events whose outcome is already known, even if ensconced by the author until their proper moment of revelation? The state of ruins is precisely one in which the future seems to be sapped dry, a time, as Benjamin noted, propitious to the consolation of allegory, a time that can appear confusing and threatening.

1868 interrupted the continuity of historic imagination: tomorrow became more unpredictable than usual. Prim continued to use a cap with a royal insignia, to the irritation of many of his followers (Fernández-Rúa 74); coins were still minted with the image of Isabel II; stamps with traditional images were still accepted. But simultaneously red flags and Phrygian caps appeared, the names of streets changed, violence erupted randomly, and diverse and contradictory blueprints of new societies contested the privilege of implementation. Galdós describes the situation with ironic distance:

A su fin corría con paso incierto el año 68, atropellando sus días inquietos entre clamorosas disputas. Habíamos hecho una revolución con el instrumento naval y militar, trayendo después al pueblo a que la confirmara, y apenas cogieron los nuevos estadistas el manubrio de gobernar, saltó la cuestión batallona: si quitado el Trono debíamos poner otro, o constituirnos en República. Y los españoles se encendieron en porfías y altercados sin fin. La oratoria, que había sido achaque de algunos escogidos habladores, se hizo manía epidémica, y hombres, mujeres y aun chiquillos, salieron perorando a cántaros, cada cual según su tema o sus humores. Los más fríos argumentaban así: «Pero, hombre, no es poco trabajo carpintear ahora un trono con las astillas del que acabamos de romper». Y esta discusión primaria pronto había de ramificarse en variedad de peloterías. Los republicanos despotricarían sobre si la República debía llevar penacho unitario, federal o mixto, y los monárquicos andarían a la greña por si encasquetaban la corona en esta o en la otra cabeza. (9, cap I)

II. Keeping in Touch and Together through the Mail

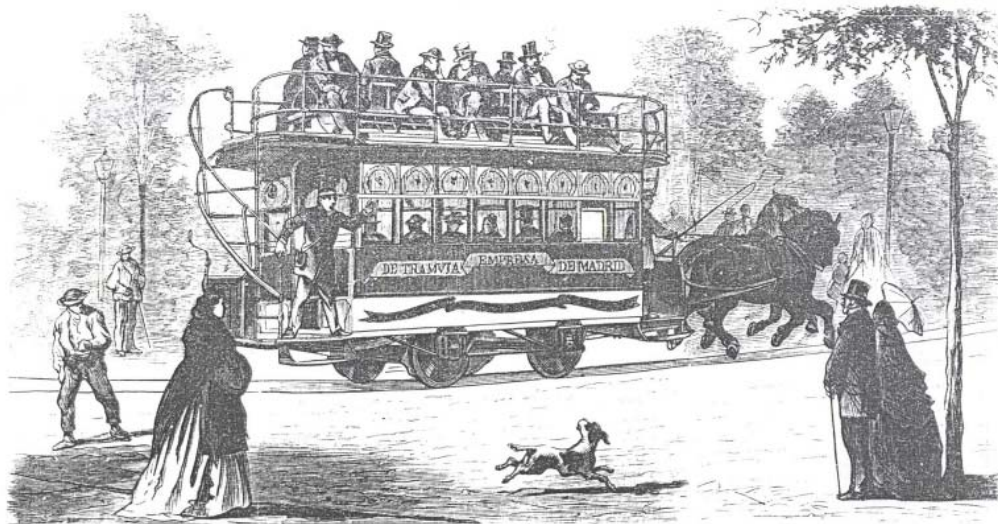
The Republic, then, when it becomes possible, splinters into so many possibilities or *astillas* that it becomes protean and unmanageable.¹ It is not surprising that the professional politicians turned first to an elected monarchy and imported Amadeo to a cool reception. “El estado del orden moral en España no es, por desgracia, al terminar el año 1872 más satisfactorio que el orden material. El descontento de lo actual y la incertidumbre del porvenir, juntamente con la necesidad de reposo, reinan en todos los ánimos; todo sigue siendo posible como en el período constituyente, y la alarma no cesa en las poblaciones más importantes de España,” writes *La Época*, January 20, 1873. While Madrid was a town of less than 300,000 inhabitants, it still knew it was an important player in deciding among the many possibilities and the journalist could convincingly make a claim to know “todos los ánimos.” After Amadeo’s departure, and as the Republic finally became institutionalized, *La Época* writes in March 28, 1873: “la situación que atravesamos . . . no se parece a ninguna otra de las de la vida política de España en el presente siglo,” adding that they are faced with “una situación totalmente diversa de las anteriores: no se controvierte ya la forma de gobierno, sino la organización social.” As a result, citizens lived “en medio de la extrema confusión que presentan hoy las ideas y los sucesos en España,” underlining astutely that speeches were as confusing as events. Perhaps the most dramatic expression of this profound unrest brought by an uncertain future is expressed in an overblown but effective section of the “Parte Política” of *La Época* of February 5, 1873:

La nación que civilizó un inmenso continente, la que paseó sus tercios por Europa, la que en armas y letras fue modelo de todos los pueblos, la que apenas hace 10 años sostuvo la gloriosa guerra de África, la que rodeó sus costas de faros, la que cruzó de vías férreas sus valles y montañas, está a punto de quedar, en cuanto a indisciplina, a desorganización, a absoluta falta de seguridad individual, muy por debajo de las tribus más turbulentas y salvajes del Riff.

Formando sangriento contraste con los Toisones, las grandes cruces, los títulos de Castilla, las grandezas, las botonaduras de brillantes, los cronómetros, las pulseras, los dijes que distribuyen los hombres de la situación, leemos en efecto en un solo número de *La Correspondencia*, que la línea del norte ha sido de nuevo cortada, que la línea del Mediodía está interrumpida en Alcázar, que la correspondencia pública de toda España con Europa ha sido dos veces secuestrada en Zumárraga, que anoche ha sido incendiada la estación de Villarreal, que la línea de Santander está amenazada, que el tren de Valencia ha sido robado en Záncara, que otra partida que le esperaba en Villacañas con el mismo piadoso fin, ha entretenido sus ocios rompiendo el telégrafo, cortando la vía y descarrilando una máquina.

This lamentation starts out with grand images of Empire, but immediately zeroes in on symbols of progressive modernity, first the lighthouses and then the railroad, both forms of orientation and movement, representing past and recent accomplishments.² The second paragraph counterpoints symbols that have become meaningless, starting again with the most revered, the Order of the Golden Fleece and large crosses, moving on to noble families, to deteriorate abruptly to buttons, watches, and bracelets, as the writer

moves into the description of a collapse in communication. The destroyed telegraph and the derailed train are superb and precise images of the writer's anxiety as the lighthouses go dark, so to say, and the navigation of the ship of state becomes more and more perilous. After all, communication had become the greatest pride and *need* of the enterprising *madrileños*. *La Ilustración de Madrid*, in a brief note probably written by Bécquer, had described glowingly in 1870 the "modelos de los coches del tranvía que ha de cruzar la población" (207). This was another project destined to bring together the different regions of town, "poniendo en contacto los extremos más opuestos, y facilitando la circulación cada día más difícil por no bastar los medios ordinarios a las necesidades de la vida actual." The illustration by Manchón shows a double decker pulled on its tracks by two hefty horses. A few people in the street seem surprised by the contraption and a dog runs happily alongside it, while the ticket collector invites an elegant couple to come aboard. Modern Madrid seems just around the corner. (We could compare the disruption in transportation and communication that so enervated people during the period that led to the Republic with the shock in the United States after four planes became weapons in 9/11 or the recent terrorist attack in Madrid.)



MADRID MODERNO.—MODELO DE LOS COCHES DEL TRANVÍA QUE HA DE CRUZAR LA POBLACION.

Transportation and communication had become the arteries and blood of the Nation, its pulse troubled by the Carlist wars in the north, the independentist movements in the south and eastern shores, and conflicting plans everywhere. Breakdown and isolation, paralysis and silence grew as a threat. As the monarchic experiment of Amadeo was evidently coming to a close, *La Época* complained bitterly on February 3:

El servicio de correos ha llegado a un tal grado de confusión, que hace indispensable la adopción de serias medidas. No era bastante que por causas de todos conocidas, aun antes que los carlistas se levantaran en armas, las cartas y los periódicos llegaran por casualidad a las personas a quienes iban dirigidas; no era bastante que los periódicos ministeriales dirigieran severas censuras a la Dirección, que no sabía corregir tantos abusos; hoy ha sucedido una cosa todavía peor. Los carteros se han

declarado en huelga, la correspondencia no se ha repartido a nadie, y las familias y las empresas y los periódicos se hallan privados de recibir lo que tanto les interesa, porque la Dirección ha obrado con manifiesta imprudencia, dando lugar a que los carteros incurran en tan grave falta.

The newspaper laments two day later: “¡Entretanto, qué inmensos perjuicios para todas las clases!” In the following issue it added, “el servicio de correos participa del desconcierto general.” On February 10, Asmodeo, who usually writes a gossip column for *La Época*, informs, “¡Hola! La huelga de los carteros ha terminado.” Yet, in that rewarding reading of the original news in their physical context, immediately below Asmodeo’s signature come the “Noticias Generales,” which start out with the following evocative description:

El tren-correo llegó el viernes con hora y media de retraso, a consecuencia de la gran cantidad de nieve que ha caído. En dicho día medía en algunos puntos de Areta 70 centímetros de espeso, y seguía nevando copiosamente. Calculen nuestros lectores la que habrá en Gorbea y en la Peña de Orduña.

No wonder that *La Época*, on the following day to the proclamation of the Republic on 11 February 1873 was concerned about mail delivery: “Suponemos que uno de los primeros cuidados de las nuevas autoridades republicanas será que la correspondencia y periódicos lleguen puntualmente a manos de las personas que los pagan. Tan escandaloso es lo que en la actualidad está sucediendo, por ignorancia o malicia, que si el abuso continuara, sería una grave responsabilidad para el nuevo orden de cosas.” “The new order of things” is an expression that reminds us of Foucault and that taken seriously permits a glimpse into the concern with which many citizens saw the implementation of an unpredictable Republic. At least deliver our mail and allow us to keep informed by reading our daily newspapers!



A letter of 1873

A few days later, on February 20, *La Época* complains again: “Nada hace tanto daño en el extranjero al gobierno como la interrupción de las comunicaciones. Cada día que transcurre sin llegar el correo es un golpe mortal asestado al crédito moral y material del país.”³ A railroad track, a folded journal, an inscribed coin, a stamp, are not just,

then, inanimate objects, but means of communication, the guarantors of credit to the Nation and its projects. The problem, of course, was that engines were derailed, newspapers lost, money and stamps confusingly replaced and falsified, and credit consequently devalued. *La Época* does not give up; on March 17 it complains that “el servicio de correos es pésimo; los diarios y cartas se extravían; los encargados, o no entienden lo que traen entre manos, o su conducta es criminal.”

Was that the message, though? By its very absence mail confirmed the inefficiency of the Republic’s confused strategy that would lead it, in less than a year, to

have four presidents. That the first one, Estanislao Figueras, simply left for France suddenly, partly depressed by his wife's death, partly giving up on harmonizing radicals and liberals, leaving a significant emptiness at the head of the State, must have been astounding. No mail, no president, no clear path ahead.

Given the importance of mail during that period, one would expect that it would present an important way of providing a defining image for the new government.



In 1870 one sees simply a crowned figure of a young woman who represents the Nation.



She is followed in 1872 by the figure of the invited king, Amadeo I. It is not a heroic portrait, in spite of his upturned moustache and fiery hair. His eyes seem unfocused and his demeanor brooding and reserved.



In 1873 the Republic appears, holding an olive branch and next to her one sees the coat of arms of Spain. Perhaps what may strike us more in this context is the simple legend: *Comunicaciones*. Was the message getting across, and to whom? Isn't the Republic looking backwards, silent, and doesn't she look rather tired and hunched over?

Simultaneously, also in 1873, stamps circulated with the image of the throne pretender Carlos:



His brow slightly furrowed, his beard elegantly unkempt, he looks the part of the warrior, but the designer could have done better than presenting him as a decapitated head. Carlos is looking to his right, which is appropriate for a conservative figure. The denomination of this stamp is in the traditional reales, as opposed to Republican use of the new denomination, the pesetas, created by the revolutionary government on 19 October 1868 and first minted in 1869.

III. The Frail Legitimacy of Money

It was perhaps an unfortunate coincidence that the advent of a significantly new experiment in government coincided with the introduction of a new monetary unit and the centralization in Madrid of its production, since this could only add to the unrest and mistrust. The new coin aimed to bring Spain's monetary system into alignment with the rest of Europe as represented by the Latin Monetary Union, a goal it failed to attain.



The silver coin of the new peseta was inscribed with the truthful but most unfortunate "Gobierno Provisional," not a motto to raise the confidence of the market. This legend was soon replaced with the name of the nation, "España." A dubiously clad image of the crowned nation is offering with is right hand an olive branch, while leaning on a range of mountains that appears to represent the Pyrenees. Her left hand hangs limply and, were she a real person, she would probably be rather uncomfortable in her reclining but contorted position. The design was inspired in a coin of Hadrian and therefore represented a gesture of continuity with the Roman tradition. It was based on a silver denarius,



showing Hispania reclining over the Pyrenees and with her feet leaning against Gibraltar, accompanied by a rabbit.

The bronze peseta, which was minted from the winning design by Luis Plañol presented to an international contest, shows a seated matron who extends her left arm into the air, rather aimlessly, and holds an olive branch towards her back with her right hand, which is leaning on the rock where she sits.



The reverse had a rampant lion leaning on the Spanish coat of arms, not looking too fierce and thereby becoming identified as a dog. The larger denomination of ten cents became known as *perra gorda* and the five cents as *perra chica*. These coins were engraved by Luis Marchionni, who had been the principal engraver of the mint in Madrid since 1861 and had therefore seen many designs come and go. There had to be continuity, since change could only work if the general public saw a superficial difference but recognized a familiar continuation of the same function, that is, even if coins looked different, one could do the same with them as with previous ones. One could only tinker at the edges of a system that was already enormously complex, with several very different coins in circulation. In fact, the subscription and publicity rates for *La Época* during this period continued to be given in *reales*. The situation of a multiple system of accounting was described on 22 April:

La unidad monetaria [establecida por la reforma revolucionaria] no logra introducirse en nuestras costumbres. En realidad, tenemos hoy en España cuatro unidades monetarias oficiales; la peseta, empleada solo en las cuentas de las oficinas públicas; el duro, usado para los presupuestos y contabilidad de las provincias de Ultramar; el escudo, que sigue siendo la expresión y regla de los valores en los billetes del Banco de España, papeles de incuestionable carácter oficial; y en todas las cuentas de este establecimiento público; y el real, que continúa en uso para todo el mundo, sin exceptuar los mismos reformadores de octubre de 1868, pues . . . en las Memorias explicativas de los presupuestos generales del Estado presentadas a las Cortes desde aquella fecha . . . en reales se hacen los cálculos y las demostraciones.

The 100 pesetas gold coin had a more dignified design:



More important than the images, though, which echoed traditional allegories and symbols, is what was missing already in the coins with the image of Amadeo I:



As early as with the gold maravedí coined under Ferdinand II (1157–1188) the user is greeted with the important message that FERNANDVS DEI GRACIA REX (Castán 48), a claim of divine right to the monarchy that was frequently repeated across the centuries. From 1822 to 1823 the text was changed to “Por la Gracia de Dios y la Constitución,” a tradition which continued during the reign of Isabel II:

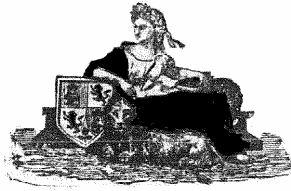


God and the Constitution, then, were expunged when it came to Amadeo, providing his reign with no justification. This erasure had to be clearly noticed, since the previous coins were still in circulation...

The allegorical figure chosen for the Republic had, then, a long tradition to represent the nation, but it did not serve to introduce a guiding thought nor did it become a revered symbol. In fact, *La Época* had a field day on 3 March 1873 when such a representation appeared in the official newspaper instead of the traditional coat of arms. The paragraph is worth copying in full:

El escudo de las armas de España que aparecía al frente de la *Gaceta de Madrid*, ha sido reemplazado hoy por una alegoría que representa sin duda la república en figura de matrona de feas facciones, sentada muellemente en un sillón, y como descansando de haberse hallado en postura menos cómoda; con la espada de la justicia al hombro, que parece va a echársela a la espalda; el nivel y la ley por los suelos, y teniendo, por último, a sus pies al león de España en una actitud que no podemos comprender si es que se encuentra dormido, mustio, aburrido o resignado.

¿No sería más sencillo, económico y conveniente suprimir toda aleluya, y encabezar buenamente el primer pliego del diario oficial con su título de *Gaceta de Madrid*, en letra de mayor tamaño que el actual?



Gaceta, 2 de marzo



Gaceta, 3 de marzo

Apparently this unconvincing image was too disturbing to become resigned to it, and on 19 March the newspaper returned to the topic:

Dícese que varios artistas han elevado una sentida solicitud al señor ministro de la Gobernación para que se cambie la viñeta puesta al frente de la *Gaceta de Madrid*.

Dicen que les produce un ataque diario de nervios el aspecto de la figura de la república con el garrote al hombro, la tristísimo cara que tiene el león de España y el ver por el suelo, sin que haya quien las levante, las tablas de la ley. No entran en pormenores artísticos, porque ya saben que de eso no hay nada en la viñeta; pero piden que, si ha de haberla, no haga reír, o que se suprima por completo.

This image described by *La Época* of a less than energetic Republic is similar to the one that appeared in several stamps of 1874:



1874

While we may not be today as irritated as those artists who complained about the allegory in *La Gaceta*, one would hardly find this pensive image of justice, so relaxed and looking away from us, one leg over the other, not ready to spring into action, inspiring.

There were, of course, passionate visionaries, such as Castelar, who expressed movingly the importance of the Republic, as well as numerous activists, such as the *cantonalistas* in Cartagena (where they minted their own coins), or the Carlistas, masters of inflammatory rhetoric.⁴



But these powerful emotions never coalesced into one single image with which all parties could identify. In fact, in this frantic circulation of images and affirmations of value, each group believed the others were sustained by false beliefs, waved illegitimate flags, and usurped symbols that did not rightfully belong to them.⁵ On 14 February 1873, *La Época* lamented its national destiny: “¡Qué suerte la nuestra, que siempre nos toca caer en manos de embaucadores políticos o de estafadores financieros!”

The topic of counterfeit money is obsessive in *La Época* since, as communication and the mail, it is related to trust in the government, stability, and investment in the future. On 7 January 1870, the newspaper published on its first page a long and detailed letter to the editor signed by J. Salazar entitled “La cuestión de la moneda.” Salazar tried to explain the need to rationalize the monetary system, complaining especially that the reliance on coins made falsification easier than with other instruments of credit. He starts by stating a disturbing fact: “No negaremos la abundancia de centenes falsos y la gran perfección con que se imitan los legítimos, ni tampoco que la falta de una buena policía ha contribuido sobremanera a la perpetración y propagación del fraude.” While Salazar does not doubt “la posibilidad de reprimir las falsificaciones que hoy pululan por todas partes,” the editor of the newspaper, who footnotes aggressively the letter addressed to him, contradicting it, does not believe a shift away from coins will solve the problem: “Los billetes de Banco no están menos sujetos a falsificaciones que la moneda metálica; con la diferencia de que el público reconoce más difícilmente los primeros que la segunda.” Ten days later, the newspaper reminds its readers that it had previously informed of the circulation in the Canary Islands of counterfeit gold coins, but believing they were few and easy to recognize. But now *La Época* reports that the governor of Canarias has issued an edict on 27 December 1869 asking the population to be especially alert against “una industria tan criminal.” The newspaper echoes this need, affirming that “bueno es que se vigile para impedir el desenvolvimiento de un tráfico criminal que causa a todas las clases irreparables perjuicios.” Production, *industria*, and circulation, *tráfico*, are, as in politics, part of a process of implementation in which authority, trust, and effectiveness are essential, yet based on a principle that is troubling, since what person, bank, or government has the capacity to respond for a fiduciary note is subject to the whims of business and politics: a company may declare bankruptcy, a bank may default on its obligations, and a state may mismanage so badly the economy that it can have an

anti-Midas effect, transforming all gold into just paper. On 15 January 1872, *La Época* addressed precisely this question of the authority behind Spanish money:

La frecuencia con que se repiten de cuatro a seis años a esta parte las falsificaciones de los billetes del Banco de España acusa un vicio capital inherente a su administración, puesto que no sucede lo mismo con otros mucho más importantes, que tienen en circulación no solo 300 millones de reales, sino 800 como el de la Habana y aun 8.000 como el de París, autorizado últimamente para emitir hasta 11.200. ¿Cuál es este vicio? ¿Sobre quién recae la responsabilidad?

Ouch, the colony is doing a better job in asserting its authority than the metropolis? The Spanish *reales* are not that real? (In this context, does it not seem logical that the great novelists of the period are concerned about reproducing or faking the feeling of the real?) The challenge was picked up nonetheless by Domingo Martínez, head of the engraving section of the Bank of Spain, in a letter published two days later. Martínez provides astonishing information as he defends his bank from the accusation that bills designed and printed in Spain are inferior to and easier to falsify than those printed abroad:

Los billetes que el Banco ha emitido hasta el año de 1868 se han fabricado en la casa de más nombradía que hay en Londres para esta clase de trabajos. La colección de billetes falsos que el Banco posee demuestra palpablemente que todas las emisiones de aquella procedencia se han contrahecho, algunas de ellas admirablemente.

All have been reproduced illegally and many have merited inclusion in the collection the Bank devotes to its nemesis, to its unauthorized supplement; some are even admirable. One has to salute Martínez for recognizing the talent of his shadowy enemies who undermine his work. He repeats that “no ha habido emisión que no se haya falsificado;” as he descends from theory to the “terreno práctico de la verdad,” nevertheless, Martínez begins to lose his footing, first making a spurious yet most interesting distinction and then simply going astray:

¿Qué se entiende por falsificación? Imitar alguna cosa dándole apariencia de verdadera no siéndolo. ¿Y se ha hecho esto al falsificar los billetes? De ninguna manera; y aquí es donde yo ruego al autor del artículo que en parte refuto, fije su atención.

Los billetes no han sido *verdaderamente* falsificados: 1º Porque los falsificadores no han imitado nunca ni la clase ni los transparentes del papel, 2º Porque jamás han podido ni modelar siquiera el dibujo de figura, que han ejecutado por medio de *arañazos* solamente, y cuya estampación grosera y varia causa admiración que no haya saltado a la vista del más refractario al arte. Y 3º Porque todos los adornos accesorios que forman parte del billete, tampoco han sido ejecutados con acierto. ¿Hay razón para censurar el trabajo de un artista por el mero hecho de que se le antoje a un hombre criminal pretender imitarle de una manera confusa, detestable y grosera con el fin de lucrarse, causando perturbación y alarma a los tenedores de billetes? Yo creo que no. Además, la experiencia me ha demostrado que las falsificaciones están siempre en relación con el trabajo que quiera imitarse. Más claro: todo es susceptible de falsificarse en este

mundo, y de la manera con que en este país se viene ejerciendo esta industria, y dadas las condiciones en que el público se encuentra para ser tan fácilmente engañado, estoy por asegurar que nos falsificarán hasta nuestros hijos.

Logic is not Domingo Martínez' forte: if all can be falsified, then his cherished bills, his sons as it were, can be falsified also. Would not the perfect counterfeit be undetectable, and therefore isn't it impossible to affirm that none exist? Yet, when someone at the very heart of the production of instruments of exchange that should resist falsification declares that all can be falsified, one detects not just a declaration of fact, but a confession of insecurity, one more important manifestation of the lack of faith that the Republic needed to address. A few months later, 29 September, the Acting Secretary of the Bank of Spain, Teodoro Rubio, published a notice that even if long is so dramatic that merits to be copied in its entirety:

Se han presentado en la plaza tres billetes de este Banco de la serie de 400 escudos, emisión de 1º de diciembre de 1871, los que, reconocidos por estas oficinas, han resultado ser falsos. Aunque por lo imperfecto del trabajo se advierte a primera vista la falsificación, este establecimiento, siguiendo la práctica establecida, se apresura a ponerlo en conocimiento del público y dar las señas más principales que distinguen a dichos billetes de los legítimos que son las siguientes.

El papel se compone de dos hojas pegadas, en una de las cuales se han estampado los adornos que forman el transparente con albayalde y barniz resultando imperfecto y poco perceptible al trasluz. La hebra que va colocada a la derecha del billete, no es de estambre como la de los legítimos, sino de pita, y por consiguiente más lisa o suave que aquella, y se halla intercalada entre los dos papeles pegados, marcándose apenas el dibujo transparente, en cuyo centro está colocada dicha hebra.

Las dos hojas se desunen fácilmente abriéndose por cualquiera de sus ángulos el papel, que a primera vista se advierte ser más grueso y blando que el de los legítimos. Las cinco cabezas que se hallan distribuidas en la orla del billete tienen torcida la boca; la ejecución del grabado es bastante tosca, así como la de las figuras desnudas de los lados, y la estampación pálida y borrosa.

Deseoso el Consejo de gobierno de que los intereses del público no se vean defraudados en vista de las repetidas falsificaciones de billetes que se vienen cometiendo, se ha servido disponer que desde el día de mañana, 30 del corriente, quede establecida en el patio del edificio que ocupa el Banco, una sección de reconocimiento de billetes, la cual se hallará abierta al público de diez de la mañana a dos de la tarde en los días de trabajo y de diez a doce de la mañana en los festivos para que los interesados que gusten puedan presentarlos al referido reconocimiento.⁶



It may be evident by now that the critical word here is “legitimate,” one that was being applied or denied to the government and those who pretended to have a stronger claim to it. Unfortunately, there was no easy test that could be applied in the bank’s patio to don Carlos, Amadeo, the Republic, the cantons, or don Alfonso. As there were different coins in circulation, and they all had some sort of value, so each one of these political options—all of them with many denominations—coexisted and interfered with each other. *La Época* reported on 1 October 1872 that “a pesar de todas las precauciones imaginables, inclusa la *hebrita de estambre*, exclusiva y peculiar a los billetes del Banco de España, una nueva falsificación de los de 4,000 rs. ha venido a probar la ineficacia de aquellas.” On the following day, appeared “una noticia gravísima para el Banco de España [al] estarse reuniendo los gremios para ponerse de acuerdo y no admitir los billetes de dicho establecimiento en vista de sus repetidas falsificaciones.” It is not a stretch to bring together Galdós’ unconvincing allegorical novel, the rather uninspiring images of Spain in coins and stamps, the failures of the postal system, the proliferation of counterfeit money, and the many political projects, among them the Republic, that ultimately did not convince of their legitimacy and authority bringing about the Restoration. A few months earlier, 5 February 1872, *La Época* published an essay titled “Las falsificaciones de la democracia,” where it stated: “No hay mayor mal que la falsificación de un buen principio. La democracia es la salud de la sociedad moderna. Pero falsificada es la muerte.” The difference between a legitimate democracy or Republic and a falsified one, is that the first one has mustered enough people who believe in it. Recruiting believers and keeping their faith is a complex and necessary task if an idea is going to be implemented. When Emilio Castelar proclaims on 2 January 1874, that every one believes in the ideas of the Republic, he has rallied phantom troops that have no real bodies; he is surrounded by illusion and captivated by his own dazzling rhetorical power:

Afortunadamente es universal la convicción de que la República abraza toda la vida: de que es autoridad y libertad, derecho y deber, orden y democracia, reposo y movimiento, estabilidad y progreso, la más compleja y la más flexible de todas las formas políticas; inspirada en la razón, y capaz de amoldarse a todas las circunstancias históricas término seguro de las revoluciones, y puerto de las más generosas esperanzas.

That same day General Pavía would declare the end of the republican government. If there is a lesson here, it is that discourses must be put to the test and, to survive, they must succeed in their implementation.⁷ Many of the ideas associated with

the Republic eventually became the law of the land and common practice. On the other hand, the last peseta was minted on 19 June 2001, as Spain adopted the euro. After 28 February 2002, the peseta became a museum piece. Where does republicanism now belong? Can it convince enough people in Spain that it is the legitimate form of government? Could it now project a more unified front than in 1873, would it find more seductive and inclusive images, would it possess more of the genius of implementation in the real world, that place where we live as anchored bodies among things? Only time will tell.⁸

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¹ The revolutionary government at first did not side with a Republic, as can be seen from this text quoted by Valera in his most enjoyable continuation to Lafuente's *Historia General de España*:

Verdad es que se han levantado voces elocuentes y autorizadas en defensa del régimen republicano, apoyándose en la diversidad de orígenes y caracteres de la nacionalidad española, y más que nada en el maravilloso ejemplo que nos ofrece, allende los mares, una potencia nacida ayer, y hoy envidia y admiración del mundo. Pero por mucha importancia que relativamente se conceda a estas opiniones, no tienen tanta como la general reserva con que sobre asunto tan espinoso han procedido las juntas, en las cuales, hasta la formación del gobierno provisional, ha residido por completo la iniciativa revolucionaria. Además, compréndese bien que un pueblo joven, perdido en medio de selvas vírgenes, y limitado solamente por vastas soledades inexploradas y tribus errantes, se constituya con entera independencia, libre de todo compromiso interior y de todo vínculo internacional. Mas no es probable que acontezca lo mismo con pueblos que cuentan larga vida, que tienen antecedentes orgánicos indestructibles, que forman parte de una

comunidad de naciones y que no pueden de repente, por medio de una transición brusca y violenta, torcer el impulso secular al cual obedecen en su marcha...” (4).

² On Saturday 8 February 1873, *La Época* quotes the following words from a rival newspaper, *El Imparcial*: “La democracia progresa; ¿qué importa si la locomotora en su carrera atropella a alguno y le tritura? Lamentaremos la víctima, pero el vapor no detendrá por eso su empuje.”

³ On 8 January 1973, *La Época* printed this memorable protest against the insecurity of travel:

A pesar de que los progresistas democráticos, radicales o como sea de su agrado apellidarse, pretenden hacernos creer que, gracias a la revolución de setiembre, y sobre todo a ellos, nuestra patria ha recobrado la honra perdida y entrado en un período de felicidad y bienandanza que las naciones más civilizadas nos envidian, es lo cierto, sin embargo, que hemos vuelto a aquellos tiempos nefandos del oscurantismo, en los que era necesario, antes de emprender un viaje, ponerse bien con Dios, como suele decirse, pues no cabe duda que, por desgracia, en la actualidad, la persona que tome un asiento en cualquier línea de ferro-carril [sic] para dirigirse al punto que fuere, no sabe: primero, si llegará; y, segundo, si lo efectuará sano y salvo: gracias a las repetidas huelgas de los maquinistas, a las partidas federales o carlistas, a las de ladrones que pululan por doquier, y por último a los desocupados que se entretienen en tirar tiros o piedras a los trenes, bajo la garantía inapreciable de los derechos individuales, que han venido a ser en España un salvo-conduto para los malhechores.

⁴ José Antonio Piqueras Arenas reminds us in his book, *La revolución democrática (1868–1874)*, that this was a bourgeois revolution under which a proletarian movement was simmering but without yet having a say in the course of events.

⁵ Valera expresses a common opinion when he writes: “Aquellas cámaras se confirieron a sí mismas un poder que no les daba la Constitución; eran además ordinarias, y proclamando la república cometieron una ilegalidad, así como no dejaron bien sentada su moralidad política, siendo como eran monárquicos” (Lafuente 190).

⁶ Today there is a Brigada de Investigación del Banco de España, domiciled in Alcalá, 522, Madrid. Their e-mail is bibe@correo.bde.es and they are part of the Oficina Central Nacional Contra la Falsificación de Moneda. One can find the current legislation addressing “la lucha contra la falsificación” at <http://www.bde.es/billemone/falsificacion/normativa.htm>

⁷ José Luis Comellas concludes in his essay “Revolución y Restauración (1868–1931)” that “el conjunto de los hechos nos sugiere un gran fracaso de edificación” (xxii).

⁸ I would like to thank my research assistant Michael Sisskin-Fernández, who diligently and insightfully read with me several years of *La Época*.