



"T Alone"

Bernardo de Gálvez's
American Revolution

EDUARDO GARRIGUES

Praise for the work of Eduardo Garrigues

“At its intermittent best the writing competes with Robert Louis Stevenson (that at least would have pleased Borges) and there can be no higher praise for the writer of an adventure story.”

—*The New York Times Book Review on West of Babylon*

“Without hiding his affection for Gálvez, nor his desire to recover and praise him as an attractive and valiant character, Garrigues avoids writing an uncritical beatification by presenting both the positive and negative aspects of a conflicted personality. His reconstruction of Gálvez reveals psychological authenticity of this historical figure while also depicting Spain’s foreign relations during the period of colonial crisis.”

—*Letras on El que tenga valor que me siga*

“Garrigues reveals a flesh-and-bone Gálvez. Ambitious, irascible, proud but also audacious and mindful of the safety of the civilian population during battle; he is also passionate in love, as demonstrated in his relationship with the beautiful Creole Felicitas de St. Maxent.”

—*Culturas La Vanguardia on El que tenga valor que me siga*

“A detailed, pleasurable and well written novel on the period and the central character: adventures, loyalties, penury, treachery and love.”

—*El País on El que tenga valor que me siga*

“Reminiscent of the best of Hemingway.”

—Miguel Delibes on *Lecciones de Tinieblas*

His novel, *Lecciones de Tinieblas*, was a finalist in the Novela Sésamo Prize, and he was awarded the prestigious Pío Baroja Prize for his story “Artículo sexto.”

“I Alone”

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Translated from Spanish by Nancy J. Membrez



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Recovering the past, creating the future

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*For my daughter Maria, who helped me edit the English
version of this novel.*

The Congress of the United States has recognized Bernardo de Gálvez' contribution to the War of Independence, awarding him "US Honorary Citizenship." We should also acknowledge the decisive role played by the Creole militia from Louisiana, the troops from Cuba, Mexico and other places in Latin America who fought with Gálvez in the same war.

Following the Spanish General this multicolored and motley army crossed the Mississippi swamps and braved the storms in the Gulf of Mexico to conquer the strategic British garrison of Pensacola, anticipating the final victory of the Continental Army in Yorktown.

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Prelude

At dusk on Sunday, December 28, 1776, a dense fog rolled in from the shores of the River Seine enveloping Notre Dame Cathedral on the Île de la Cité, blurring the buildings' contours. The Cathedral bells had already rung for the Angelus prayers when a horse-drawn coach crossed the Pont Saint-Louis and ascended the cobblestone-paved street towards the elegant neighborhood of aristocratic mansions.

In the carriage rode three English-speaking gentlemen. The tallest and stoutest man among them, whose knees touched the opposite seat, was Arthur Lee. Sitting next to him was Silas Deane, a gentleman of medium build with sideburns. Opposite them sat a round-faced, chubby-cheeked and well-shaven older gentleman with a twinkle in his brown eyes, Benjamín Franklin, who had recently arrived in Paris and was the group's leader. Having declared independence from England, the United States Congress had commissioned the trio to negotiate the aid of European governments in their confrontation with the powerful British armed forces.

The American Revolution's leaders, especially Commander-in-Chief George Washington of the impressively titled Continental Army, knew that the Americans could not be victorious against the British without the support of other nations—even with the enthusiasm and bravery of their militias that had fought the British to a draw.

After the French authorities, especially the Foreign Minister, Count of Vergennes, had welcomed the congressional commission, they suggested the commission seek an audience with the 10th Count of Aranda, his Catholic Majesty's Spanish ambassador to France. In interna-

tional politics, the two Bourbon monarchies of Louis XVI (France) and Charles III (Spain) maintained familial ties, so the Spanish ambassador did not want to slight the French Foreign Minister and therefore granted an audience to the congressional commission. But Aranda was not prepared to deal with this unprecedented situation and did not have time to ask Madrid for instructions; He, therefore, decided to receive them on a Sunday at an off hour to avoid having anyone notice the men entering the embassy, especially anyone who could report this to the English ambassador to France.

As the Spanish embassy staff had been instructed to do, when the commissioners' carriage pulled up to the entrance leading to the count's magnificent residence, the porter opened the gate but told the coachman to circle around to the back of the building for their clandestine meeting. At the back entrance, a servant carrying a candle was anticipating their arrival. The servant led the visitors down dark corridors in utter silence to the study where the ambassador awaited them.

The Americans had heard a lot about the Spanish ambassador, who came from a venerable, aristocratic Aragonese family and had held important government posts after a brilliant military career. However, their host's physical appearance rather disappointed them. Having amassed multiple titles, Don Pedro Abarca y Bolea was a Spanish grandee three times over, but neither the count's figure nor his countenance reflected that grandeur: one shoulder was lower than the other, constant horseback riding had deformed his calves and his excessive use of snuff had disfigured the tip of his nose.

On the other hand, the ambassador, who perhaps expected to meet a bunch of shady, unwashed revolutionaries, found himself in the presence of three gentlemen wearing brand-new, dark waistcoats in the English style. This made him think the American Revolution had yet to abandon the mother country's fashions. The first to greet him—and the man who made the best impression—was the famous writer and inventor Benjamín Franklin, who was dressed simply and did not even wear a wig. Wanting to avoid any fussiness in his attire and communicate an easiness in his manner, Franklin had in fact thrown his wig into the ocean as their ship had approached the French

coast. Although his facial features were rather plain, Franklin's expression was direct and affable, his eyes twinkling with wisdom and good humor.

The host and his three guests quickly realized they were going to have problems understanding each other because, as the ambassador later wrote in his dispatch to Madrid, "Franklin spoke very little French; Deane even less, and Lee not at all." Aranda himself only knew a few words in English. After introducing the delegation in broken French so that the Spanish ambassador would understand the motive for their visit, Benjamin Franklin took a crumpled piece of paper from his waistcoat pocket to recall the details of the proposed reciprocal trade agreement between the former English colonies and the French court. This was the treaty the commissioners had already favorably presented to French Foreign Minister Vergennes. Franklin added in halting French that they intended to offer it to the Spanish Crown as well. Although the Count of Aranda prided himself on his enlightened attitude, he almost fainted. These were representatives of a country that had yet to be recognized internationally, yet they were offering him the possibility of a treaty as if they were on an equal footing with His Catholic Majesty, King Charles III.

A seasoned diplomat, the Spanish ambassador tried to conceal his shock, which bordered on indignation. He replied to Franklin in his excellent French sprinkled with a few English words that he thought it was precipitous for the American congress to attempt to sign a reciprocal treaty, when firstly, the country had not yet become independent and, secondly, could not assure control over its own territory. He added his belief that, for the moment, it would be more logical to ask for European aid in exchange for some advantageous arrangement, at least until the conflict had been resolved. Given the radical differences in the men's mentalities and expectations, the meeting could have deteriorated into speaking at cross purposes, but both parties decided to chalk up the initial lack of understanding to language issues. They agreed they should postpone the next meeting for a few days until they could have an interpreter present. At that juncture, the ambassador courteously wished them good night and asked his assistant to accompany his visitors to the back door.

Aware of King Charles III's character, Aranda knew that the Spanish monarch would never officially recognize representatives of a country that had rebelled against their legitimate sovereign. He additionally surmised that Secretary of State Grimaldi would probably react in the same way to the Americans' aspirations. But since the count was paying several spies to inform him of happenings in Madrid and in other European capitals, he also knew there were supporters of the colonial rebels in Spain, even at the government level, if for no other reason than the fact that these American revolutionaries were eroding the power of England, Spain's traditional arch-enemy.

Aranda had already been informed that some cabinet ministers were using covert intermediaries to convey financial aid, arms and war supplies to the militias fighting against England. He also knew that in Madrid as well as in Paris not all wounds had healed from the humiliating defeat England had inflicted on them in the French and Indian War, which had taken place over a large expanse of North America. France lost all its possessions in the territory, and Spain lost the two Floridas and the island of Menorca in the Mediterranean.

Aranda knew that the cowardly Italian Marquis of Grimaldi, Spain's minister of state, would be against supporting the American commissioners. But with characteristic vehemence, Aranda communicated his conviction to the Spanish Court: Spain should recognize the colonial representatives unreservedly and declare war on England immediately. He argued, "There will not be another opportunity to vanquish England like this one for centuries."

Part One

CHAPTER I

The Road to Almadén

(Bernardo de Gálvez speaks)

After a long ride on that dusty trail filled with potholes we called a highway, south from Madrid to Andalusia, we arrived at Puerto Lápice. Accompanying me were Sergeant Melecio Rodríguez, a local shepherd who was our guide and a military escort of four halberdier guards. We turned off onto a narrower road, which, according to our guide, was a short cut to Almadén.

I was familiar with the principal route, having ridden once to Cádiz and back in the past. So I thought it better to travel to Ciudad Real using the same road southward as the carts carrying quicksilver in containers from Almadén. The ore would later be loaded onto ships bound for the Spanish colonies. It seemed as if Sergeant Rodríguez, charged by my Uncle José de Gálvez with protecting me, was deliberately bypassing towns where our armed halberdier escort might arouse local curiosity. Instead of the usual, well-traveled route other wayfarers frequented, he always chose the solitary, winding trails preferred by highwaymen and smugglers.

Since we had left Madrid, Melecio never took his eyes off me—or rather, he never took his one eye off me because the sergeant had lost his other eye to an arquebus bullet. This made me think my uncle had ordered him to keep me in his custody rather than to act as my personal security. But since I was still convalescing from the wounds I had sustained in the siege of Algiers, I would not have been able to give the halberdier guards the slip. The only thing that was certain was this unpleasant mission to the Almadén mines Don José had given me.

After I was released from San Carlos Hospital, I hardly had time to occupy my post in the new military academy in Ávila, when my Uncle José called me back to Madrid urgently.

There was no question of making my uncle wait. Apart from the respect I owed him as my father's brother, His Majesty the King had just appointed him Secretary of the Council of the Indies, so I arranged for a seat on the first stagecoach leaving for the capital.

Convinced that I had been promoted to lieutenant colonel after the battle of Algiers thanks to Uncle José's influence, I wanted to show up at his office dressed in my new uniform. I didn't have enough to pay a military tailor, so I hired a seamstress on Hileras Street to mend a uniform belonging to a colonel who had died—in the siege of Algiers, actually. I was grateful the seamstress skillfully patched the gasholes in the dead man's waistcoat.

Don José did not make me wait long in the antechamber of his Buen Retiro Palace office and, true to his character that I knew well, he came directly to the point.

“Doubtless you'll recall that during my time as an inspector general in the New Spain viceroyalty, thanks to the intense Sonoran campaign and the harshness of that climate, I fell ill with ague.”

Don José didn't wait for me to answer before continuing. “Do you remember too that my sickness, besides from attacking my body, wore down my spirit to the point of clouding my judgment?”

My uncle stared at me with his piercing black pupils and, as he continued, his voice shook with indignation. “I'm sure you'll remember as well that three memorialists were tasked with keeping a journal of the Sonoran expedition. Two of them behaved with the common sense and loyalty the circumstances demanded and with respect for the lofty mission His Majesty entrusted to me. The third, however, was disloyal and sent a memorandum to the viceroy about what I did and said while I was delirious from ague.”

Don José was so angry, he could not even utter the memorialist's name without his lips burning: Juan Manuel de Viniegra. I am convinced that, with his elephant's memory, my uncle remembered that I had befriended the man, with whom I had long conversations while I was accompanying my sick uncle in Sonora. Once my uncle felt

better, I was to join him and his entourage on the road to the viceroyalty's capital, Mexico City. During the long journey, neither Viniegra nor I could imagine what trouble was brewing, once Uncle José found out the viceroy had received the memorandum in which Viniegra duly reported Don José's delirium. What my uncle had called "ague" was an attack of madness, plain and simple.

We had not yet reached Mexico City, when Viniegra and the two other memorialists were arrested and kept incommunicado, and all their papers and belongings were confiscated. My uncle ordered categorically that none of those men who had traveled with him to Sonora—and had therefore witnessed his malady—were to mention it to anyone. When Uncle José tried to force Viniegra to retract the memorandum now in the viceroy's hands, Viniegra refused. My uncle had ordered him to be thrown into the ship's brig as a common criminal and deported to Spain; officials of the Inquisition had previously seized copies of the Sonoran campaign memorandum. But, apparently before Viniegra was arrested, he had managed to hide the original copy. That was what was worrying my uncle.

"I have tried by all means possible to force the disloyal scoundrel to turn over the memorandum, but he is obstinate. When I was appointed the General Superintendent of Quicksilver, it occurred to me to send him to the Almadén mines, where we have him well-guarded, like all the prisoners who labor there. Even though for a time I forgot about it, it came to my attention that if after my appointment to as secretary the memorandum were to get out, it could do irreparable harm to my political career."

I did not need a divining rod to guess what my uncle was going to ask me to do next, although he hadn't mentioned it earlier. Don José knew perfectly well I had been friends with Viniegra before he was arrested, after which I'd had no news of him. What my uncle expected was that I would go to Almadén and persuade the memorialist to hand over the document he had meticulously guarded up until then, despite having been threatened with torture and maybe even death.

"These pages contain the blueprints for opening the Almadén mine's new galleries. Please give them personally to the mine's superintendent. You know quicksilver is essential for the profitabili-

ty of the gold and silver mines in Mexico and New Granada. Therefore, I recommend you visit the mine and learn how the ore is extracted.” My uncle paused, his eyes once again boring into mine, before adding, “And since you’ll be there, I don’t think it’s too much to ask for you to request the prison warden escort you to Viniegra’s cell and, by whatever means you think necessary, persuade him to give you the journal he still has in his possession.”

It was outrageous for my uncle to tell me to secure the memorandum “by whatever means you think necessary.” It was obvious he had not recovered it by underhanded means, and now he was asking me to persuade Viniegra to hand it over to me by hook or by crook.

“I ask you to leave for Almadén as soon as possible because time is wasting,” Uncle José added. “I’ve already ordered a man I trust to travel with you as well as a military escort to avoid any mishaps on the road to the port. I’m told the Ciudad Real wilderness is infested with highwaymen, who raid the carts, lured by the rich ore. But that should not concern you because the halberdier guards will accompany you. My only hope is for you to return with the memorandum in a few days. In any case, don’t forget to visit me when you come back, because I’ve prepared a surprise for you that I think will be to your liking.”

Past the village of Puerto Lápice, the trail we were traveling crossed an immense wasteland where the wind whipped up tumbleweeds. That distant landscape reminded me of those great desert expanses in the Viceroyalty of New Spain’s internal provinces, including the uninhabited lands I had traversed at full gallop as I rode to see my sick uncle at the Cerro Prieto encampment in Sonora. As the sun flashed its final rays from behind the western hillcrest, the evening breeze spun the windmills on the hilltops in Ciudad Real.

I remembered that under similar circumstances the Ingenious Gentleman of La Mancha had mistaken those colossal stone and adobe windmills for giants. I mused that the ravings of that grotesque character who had tried to impose the laws of chivalry everywhere were not that different from my uncle’s bout of madness. He had attempted to inflict his religion and customs on a handful of savage Indians using the same means of persuasion as Don Quixote had: the lance and the sword.