GUSTAVO SAINZ AND THE RECENT MEXICAN NOVEL

by

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Dissertation Committee:

This study is dedicated
to my adviser, Professor
John S. Brushwood, and to
my parents.

PREFACE

This study has two principal objectives: to provide detailed analyses of the novels of Gustavo Sainz, and to relate these novels to contemporary fiction, with special emphasis on Mexico. All of the limitations inherent in studying the work of a living author apply to this dissertation. Definitive conclusions are obviously impossible, and it is probably dangerous to make generalizations about trends in the work of a writer who is still in his thirties. Ten years from now Gustavo Sainz may be writing novels which would never have been expected on the basis of his earlier work. Juan Goytisolo is a case in point. Still, novelists write for their contemporaries and not for some hypothetical critic of the future.

Critical work on the novels of Sainz is rather scanty. The only full-length study is an unpublished Master's thesis by Dorothy Farrington Caram, Gustavo Sainz: An Analysis of Obsesivos días circulares (Rice University, 1974). This is a useful and detailed study of Sainz's second novel. Two very helpful articles have appeared in the scholarly journals, both of them on Gazapo: James W. Brown's "Gazapo: Modelo para armar," Nueva Narrativa Hispanoamericana, 3, no. 2 (septiembre 1973), 237-244, and Lanin A. Gyurko's "Reality and fantasy in Gazapo,"

Revista de Estudios Hispánicos, 8, no. 1 (enero 1974), 117-146. The first is an excellent study of the narrative structure of the novel, and the second contains many insightful comments on the psychology of the characters. A number of reviews and short pieces, as well as interviews, have appeared in Mexican and North American newspapers and magazines. These are listed in the Bibliography.

Chapter I is a sketch of the state of Mexican fiction in the 1960's and early 1970's and a discussion of influences and trends in the work of the younger novelists in particular. Chapters II, III, and IV are detailed studies of the three novels that Sainz has published at the time of this writing. Biographical material and generalizations are limited to Chapter I, although some comparative remarks are made in the other chapters and in the Conclusion.

I wish to thank Professor John S. Brushwood for introducing me to Gustavo Sainz, for helping me to discover that Mexico is the surrealist country par excellence, and for his friendly nudging. The comments of Professors Jon S. Vincent and George W. Woodyard were very valuable in reducing the number of errors and weaknesses which this study contains. Those which remain are, of course, my own responsibility. Finally, I wish to thank Gustavo Sainz for his many personal kindnesses and for his considerable help in clarifying my ideas.

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CHAPTER ONE

SAINZ AND THE YOUNGER MEXICAN NOVELISTS

When Montesquieu was on his death bed he was approached by a priest who asked him to renounce the devil. Rationalist to the end, the Frenchman is said to have replied: "This is no time to be making new enemies." The contemporary novel, at least the kind of novel regarded as "serious" by literary critics, is not on its death bed, but it certainly is in no position to be making new enemies. Since the time of Joyce, novels have been getting more complicated and less accessible to the general public. How many educated Americans not directly involved in the study of literature have read Gravity's Rainbow or Giles Goat-Boy? It is hardly necessary to point out that this was not always so. The novels of Dickens and Galdós, to pick two random examples, were read by large numbers of people, and not only because they appeared in newspapers. Even at his most bitingly sarcastic, Dickens embodied a point of view and an attitude toward life which was acceptable, or at least comprehensible, to the educated public in general.

It is perhaps too easy for a literary critic to forget that despite the generally dismal economic fate of modern "serious" novels, people continue to read novels in large numbers. Many contemporary writers have made a great deal of money churning out volume after volume of melodrama,

mystery, or bedroom comedy. Scholars might comment that the popularity of a literary work is an economic or sociological fact rather than a fact related to artistic merit. This wholly defensible proposition is perhaps less appealing to novelists who write excellent, innovative, and intricate novels which nobody reads. Purists like Kafka, who ordered his manuscripts to be burned after his death, are few and far between. Most novelists write in the hope that someone will read their work.

The problem of the restricted reading public for modern novels is particularly acute in Latin America, where economic underdevelopment combines with widespread illiteracy to make the reading of novels an activity available to a very small percentage of the population. It is therefore not surprising that Latin American novelists have become more and more interested in the cultivation of a reading public, or, to put it in its crudest terms, the expansion of the market for literary works. Gustavo Sainz is one of the most active Latin American novelists in this respect. Sainz sees a clear relationship between the extremely complicated nature of many recent Latin American novels and the lack of a clearly defined reading public:

> creo que el hecho de que carezca de audiencia en América Latina hace que las novelas latinoamericanas sean tan codificadas, o sea que libros como Paradiso o Gran Sertón Veredas, o inclusive El siglo de las luces, Rayuela, Cambio de piel, sean tan complicados de leer porque no se dirigen a ninguna audiencia. El escritor norteamericano,

> por el contrario y como ejemplo, tiene una audiencia de clase media segura. Él sabe que si su libro es comprado por el Book-of-the-Month Club o The Literary Digest, ya tiene éxito. ¿Y qué libros son comprados allí?, pues las sagas familiares, las historias melodramáticas, las novelas de acción, de suspenso. El escritor norteamericano ya sabe para quién escribe: para la clase media de toda la unión americana. El escritor de América Latina no sabe, porque por más que diga "yo escribo para los obreros o para los estudiantes," Conversación en la Catedral te cuesta 8 o 10 dólares. ¿Qué estudiante y qué obrero lo puede comprar? Además las obras te presentan tantos problemas de lectura, de estructura, que van dirigidas a un público sumamente especializado. Entonces se crea una literatura enajenada, enajenada de sí misma, por carecer de audiencia.[1]

These controversial remarks seem to be generally accurate, although they contain some doubtful comparisons. It is not really fair to compare North American melodramas with highly intelectualized Mexican novels and conclude that all novels sell well in the United States and all novels sell poorly in Mexico. The case of Luis Spota, who sells very large numbers of novels and has a clear idea of the public to whom he is writing, is enough to expose the weakness of the comparison. It would be difficult to imagine a novel like José Emilio Pacheco's Morirás lejos, to pick just one example, as a best seller in any country, while Spanish translations of novels like The Godfather or Topaz do quite well in Mexico.

Sainz's interest in expanding the relatively small reading public in Latin America is not purely theoretical.

He leads an extremely active life in editing and contributing to magazines and journals, both of a literary nature and of a more popular kind. For some years he edited a magazine called Siete, a cultural review directed at high school students. He views his teaching at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México at least partly as a means of stimulating interest in contemporary Mexican and Latin American fiction:

> no puedo dejar de dar clases, porque dando clases yo estoy procurando crear estímulos para el consumo de la literatura o simplemente para el cuestionamiento de las ideas, para el desarrollo de las ideas.[2]

Sainz has made considerable efforts to promote the sales of his own novels, particularly La princesa del Palacio de Hierro (1974), and these efforts have been quite successful. His first novel, Gazapo (1965) is now circulating in its eighth Mexican printing, and has been translated into English, French, and Italian. His second novel, Obsesivos días circulares (1969), has not been as popular as Gazapo: at the time of this writing it has seen only two Mexican printings. La princesa del Palacio de Hierro is likely to be even more popular than Gazapo; its first printing of fifteen thousand copies sold out within two months, and it is now circulating in a fourth printing. In addition, both Gazapo and La princesa del Palacio de Hierro are presently being adapted for the cinema.

Sainz has also been active in promoting the works of

other writers, particularly younger ones. His present position as Associate Director of Literature for the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes enables him to provide guidance and support for a large number of younger novelists, poets, and dramatists.

Sainz was born in 1940 in Mexico City. He has described the literary atmosphere in Mexico during the years in which he began to write in the following terms:

> en México era muy complicado escribir cuando yo quise emerger al mundo de las letras. Era complicado porque la crítica, bastante ciega en ese momento, evaluaba la literatura mexicana como dividida en dos corrientes principales, arbitrarias: una realista, representada por Rulfo, que no es realista; y otra fantástica, representada por Arreola, que no es privativamente fantástico. Entonces tú tenías que escribir o en una o en otra, o por lo menos yo, adoloscente, me sentía presionado a escribir dentro de una o de otra. Por otra parte, yo nací en el año 40 y comencé a hacer vida cultural, a leer libros en serio, etc., en los años 56, 57, 58, en el momento en que está por nacer la novela urbana. . .Yo era un niño urbano que no conocía el campo, que a los 18 años nunca había visto una vaca, y a quien los problemas de la revolución no le tocaban.3

Sainz began his publishing career with short stories which were included in the Anuario del cuento mexicano for 1959, 1961, and 1962. These were years of an increasing feeling of freedom among Mexican novelists. The example of Carlos Fuentes as a writer who had broken with tradition and had nevertheless attracted a wide reading public and international acclaim helped to free the younger novelists from

restrictions which may have been partly imaginary but which were certainly partly real. The appearance of Rayuela in 1963 encouraged Latin American novelists to let their imagination run free and to challenge traditional concepts of novelistic structure and literary language. At the same time Latin American writers were increasingly conscious of being fully contemporary with their European and North American counterparts. Of course, it might be argued that Pedro Páramo or Al filo del agua are as sophisticated from a technical point of view as anything being written at that time in Europe or the United States; the difference between Rulfo and Yáñez on the one hand and the younger writers on the other is the consciousness of being fully contemporary. Consider the following remark of Sainz: "Yo, por ejemplo, que escribo muy despacio, hallo un equis recurso tipográfico y meses después leo a Grass y el recurso ya está allí. Naturalmente me pongo marcha atrás. Si Grass o Carpentier o David Viñas llegaron a lo mismo antes que yo, puedo investigar otro rumbo, pues siento una gran seguridad en mis propias esfuerzas."[4]

These comments indicate two things: first, that Sainz considers himself to be part of an international literary community which includes not only the rest of Latin America but also Europe and the United States; and second, that he is very concerned with finding an individual, distinctive voice. To be consciously cosmopolitan in Mexico can be a

dangerous attitude for a writer to adopt; the word "cosmopolitan" was, and sometimes still is, used as a pejorative term by the conservative literary "establishment" in Mexico. A nationalism which sometimes seems excessive does not take kindly to remarks like the following: "Creo que todos escribiremos un poco mejor cuando saquemos las narices de nuestras cortinas de nopal."[5]

This consciousness of being fully contemporary with other Western writers, which in Mexico probably began with Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, has made defiance of literary conventions and rejection of traditional social attitudes a major characteristic of the newer Mexican novelists. Tradition is not wholly abandoned, of course; El laberinto de la soledad and Cambio de piel are in many ways studies of the interaction of tradition and modernity. But the traditions investigated in these works are not the respectable customs of the Mexican middle class but rather the indigenous subsoil of Mexican culture.

The rebellious attitude of the younger writers is expressed in many ways. One of the most important is linguistic innovation, including the use of highly colloquial language and of many words seldom before seen in Mexican novels. The frank treatment of sexual themes and the highly critical view of Mexican society are offensive to many Mexicans. This is not especially surprising; sexual and moral taboos are stronger in Mexico than they are in

the United States. By way of comparison it should be remembered that the American publication of Ulysses was delayed by a lengthy obscenity suit in the 1930's, and that the novels of William Burroughs were still outlawed in many states in the early 1960's. That the situation is changing in Mexico is evidenced by the fact of Sainz's recent appointment to the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes in spite of the highly explicit sexual scenes and language in his latest novel, La princesa del Palacio de Hierro.

In 1965 Sainz published his first novel, Gazapo. At about the same time another young writer, Jose Agustín, published two novels: La tumba (1964) and De perfil (1966). These three novels signalled the beginning of a trend in Mexican fiction which was called "la onda." The word "onda" implies modernity, youth, and vigor. It also has an element of colloquialism: in the slang of Mexican youth, "¿que onda?" is the equivalent of "what's happening?" The "onda" is not a literary movement or a school; it is a loose set of attitudes shared by younger writers. Generally speaking, these attitudes include a skeptical (not cynical) view of society and its norms, a focusing on the problems of adolescence, a sense of humor seldom found in earlier Mexican novels, and an openness to structural and technical innovation. Of these shared attitudes perhaps the most important is the insistence on linguistic freedom. The use of the language of youth is not only a result of the

desire to be accurate and convincing in the depiction of adolescents. Both Sainz and Agustín were in their early twenties when they began to publish, and the language of Gazapo and De perfil rings true because it is the kind of language they both spoke. A comparison might be made here with Salinger's Catcher in the Rye. The language of Holden Caulfield is natural and convincing, but it is perceived from outside. Sainz and Agustín, on the other hand, are writing from within the environment which they portray.

At the same time, the language of Gazapo and De perfil suggests the restless and rebellious attitude characteristic of "la onda" and of similar trends in Latin America as a whole. Writing in 1969, Carlos Fuentes commented:

> Cabrera, Sainz, Agustín y Puig nos indican dos cosas. Primero, que si en América Latina las obras literarias se contentasen con reflejar o justificar el orden establecido, serían anacrónicas, inútiles. Nuestras obras deben ser de desorden: es decir, de un orden posible, contrario al actual. Y segundo, que las burguesías de América Latina quisieran una literatura sublimante, que las salvase de la vulgaridad y les otorgase un aura "esencial," "permanente," inmóvil. Nuestra literatura es verdaderamente revolucionaria en cuanto le niega al orden establecido el léxico que éste quisiera y le opone el lenguaje de la alarma, la renovación, el desorden y el humor. El lenguaje, en suma, de la ambigüedad: de la pluralidad de significados, de la constelación de alusiones: de la apertura.[6]

In a general sense, the use of youthful language and the focusing on adolescent characters who are radically separated from traditional cultural values is a protest against the established social order. At the same time,

the characters in Gazapo and De perfil are not blind to their own hypocrisies and foolishness. Their honesty forces them to construct their sense of personal identity around a rejection of the "establishment," never an easy task. The frequent use of English and the many references to rock music and to "pop" culture in general, particularly in the case of Agustín, reflect Mexican youth's sense of participation in the latest international trends and in the general unrest which prevailed in Europe and the United States in the sixties.

Many young writers followed the lead of Sainz and Agustín in dealing honestly with the problems of youth, among them Orlando Ortiz (En caso de duda, 1968) and Parménides García Saldaña (Pasto verde, 1968). But the 'onda" was not a movement; it was a moment. In 1969 Sainz received a grant from the Ford Foundation to participate in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. There he wrote his second novel, Obsesivos días circulares, which apart from the technical innovation and the emphasis on language has very little in common with Gazapo. It is an introspective, rather cynical novel which presents a sarcastic and highly critical view of Mexican society in general and of the effects of violence on individuals in particular. It is clear that the skeptical but basically optimistic attitude of the middle sixties had changed. In some ways Obsesivos días circulares is as funny as

Gazapo, but the humor is totally lacking in innocence. The criticism of Mexican social and moral standards is intensified by the lack of pontificating and by the fact that the narrator is an active participant in the very activities which repulse him. Other novels written at approximately the same time have a similarly sarcastic and despairing tone. Consider the following remark from Héctor Manjarrez's Lapsus (1971): "Todos sabemos que las soberbias rubias nórdicas sueñan con viriles y morenos hombres mexicanos que les enseñarán todo lo que sus pasivos y poco imaginativos escandinavos ni siquiera sospechan."[7] Sainz's sarcasm is less open but no less biting. The social criticism which is largely implicit in Gazapo is a a principal feature of Obsesivos días circulares. At the same time, the theme of the conflict between narrator and language, introduced in Gazapo by the use of tape recordings, acquires a more pessimistic tone.

Technically, Obsesivos días circulares is a highly fragmented novel. Of course, fragmentation of narrative structure is a characteristic of the contemporary novel as a whole, but the complexity of Sainz's novel sets it apart from most other Mexican novels of the same period. In its hermeticism it seems to bear some relation to José Emilio Pacheco's Morirás lejos (1968) and to Héctor Manjarrez's Acto propiciatorio (1971). In tone and in the manipulation of narrative voice it is similar to some

novels of Günter Grass, perhaps particularly Dog Years (1963, Spanish translation 1968).[8] It is, however, a highly individualistic novel, and these comparisons indicate only a general similarity of mood among a number of different writers.

After the publication of Obsesivos días circulares Sainz spent three years editing magazines and teaching at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. He began his third novel in 1972 with the working title Paseo en trapecio.[9] This novel was eventually published at the end of 1974 under the title La princesa del Palacio de Hierro. It is as different from Obsesivos días circulares as the latter is from Gazapo. It would appear that the commercial fate of his second novel (two printings in five years) inspired Sainz to try to reach a larger audience. The narrative techniques are less intricate than before, and the use of fairly conventional chapter divisions makes the novel easier to read than Obsesivos días circulares. The social criticism is no less pronounced, however. The excessive consumerism of the Mexican middle class is lampooned by detailing its enervating effects on the central character. Sainz chooses a particular social class and presents its customs and language with an objectivity which reveals its essential shallowness. The fury of Obsesivos días circulares is gone, but so is the buoyant innocence of Gazapo.

One of the characteristics Sainz shares with Agustín, Cabrera Infante, Vicente Leñero, and many other modern writers is his interest in films. He has worked in the Cineteca Nacional in Mexico City, which is the official film agency of the Mexican government, and has written many reviews and critical articles about films. He is also interested in the incorporation of film techniques into his novels. These include all of the now fairly common devices like flashback, close-up, and fade-out. However, Sainz also employs less obviously cinematic techniques, or at least seems to have a strong "film sense" which insinuates itself into his novels. One rather subtle device is the manipulation of a phenomenon called "persistence of vision." A character is reading a novel or indulging in a fantasy and is interrupted by some stimulus from his external environment. Before he is fully in tune with his surroundings, he passes through a period in which the imaginary or fantastic images merge with the real ones. The imaginary images persist for a time, just as a film frame persists in the vision for a time before it merges with the following frame to give the illusion of movement. A film which lasts an hour contains about twenty-seven minutes of totally blank space. These minutes are filled with the optical illusions supplied by the preceding frames. Specific examples of this phenomenon in its novelistic application are given in the chapter on

Obsesivos días circulares.

Many readers comment that the characters in Sainz's novels, especially the secondary characters, are rather vague. Some critics might see this as a defect, but it is certainly an integral part of the depiction of the narrator's perception of the world. In addition, it seems to have some connection with the cinema. Consider the following description of the difference between acting for the stage and acting for the screen:

> The film actor's performance, then, is true to the medium only if it does not assume the airs of a self-sufficient achievement but impresses us as an incident--one of many possible incidents--of his character's unstaged mental existence. Only then is the life he renders truly cinematic. When movie critics sometimes blame an actor for overacting his part, they do not necessarily mean that he acts theatrically; rather, they wish to express the feeling that his acting is, somehow, too purposeful, that it lacks that fringe of indeterminacy or indefiniteness which is characteristic of photography.[10]

Many of the characters in Sainz's novels seem to have a certain "fringe of indeterminacy," as indeed do many of the episodes. Ambiguity is a principal characteristic of all three of his novels, and seems to imply not only a skeptical attitude toward social norms but also a refusal to be dogmatic. The interest in films and in the adaptation of cinematic techniques to novels is evident in other writers as well. Leñero's Estudio Q (1965) and Agustín's Inventando que sueño (1968) stand out in this respect.

Gustavo Sainz published his first novel in 1965. It is obviously too early to make definitive statements about trends in his work, or about trends in the Mexican novel of the sixties and seventies in general. The first step in coming to an understanding of the period and of Sainz is to analyze the particular works. The following three chapters focus on the novels of Sainz and are followed by some very tentative conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

GAZAPO: MIRROR WITH A MEMORY

Gazapo, first published in 1965,[1] examines the problems of growing up in Mexico City by detailing the activities of a group of middle-class teenagers during one week. Unlike some other novels which focus on the psychological turbulence of adolescence, Gazapo does not present a retrospective evaluation of the process of maturation. Instead, the psychological growth and increasing self-awareness of the principal characters are presented as they occur, and there is no attempt to interpret the process as part of a larger pattern of individual development. As Vicente Leñero has commented, novels like Gazapo describe the world of adolescence "no en términos rememorativos, no desde la tradicional actitud de quien vuelve los ojos al pasado para recobrar la edad perdida, sino desde la adolescencia misma."[2] For this reason, and also because adolescence is an unstable and turbulent period, the whole novel has a frantic quality which is evoked in a number of ways. Physical movement is an obvious way of suggesting instability, and much of the action takes place in cars driving around Mexico City. The city itself, with its noise and crowded streets, reinforces the peripatetic atmosphere of the novel.

The definitions of the word "gazapo" with which Sainz introduces the novel provide several clues about the

personalities of the teenagers:

> GAZAPO. (d. despec. del celt. gaz, liebre, conejo). M. 1. conejo nuevo. 2. fig. y fam. Hombre disimulado y astuto. 3. fig y fam. Embuste o mentira grande. (Diccionario Enciclopédico de la Lengua Castellana, París, 1895)

> GAZAPO. Cría del conejo, h. 1200. El sufijo es indudablemente prerromano, y lo será también el radical, si no es deriv. de caza, por ser los gazapos fáciles de cazar. /Mentira, disparate, h. 1822. Alteración del griego kakémphaton, cosa malsonante, indecente, o vulgar; cpt. de kakós, malo, y de emphaino, yo muestro, declaro. (Breve Diccionario Etimológico de la Lengua Castellana, Madrid, 1961) (p. 8)

The protagonist of the novel, Menelao, is a "conejo nuevo," newly emerged from the family environment. He hopes to become an "hombre disimulado y astuto" in the eyes of Gisela, the ingenuous teenage girl whom he courts. He will attempt to achieve this state of maturity partially through the "embustes o mentiras grandes" which he is constantly spinning. These gazapos or fanciful exaggerations and inventions reveal the creative power of the imagination as a means of self-discovery, and also create the tension between reality and fantasy which is a principal feature of the novel. The etymology given in the second set of definitions is also suggestive. The girls pursued by Menelao and his friends are "fáciles de cazar," at least in the boys' fantasies. The "cosas malsonantes, indecentes, o vulgares" may refer to the language in which the novel is written, a highly colloquial Mexican Spanish.[3] The reference to emphaino ("yo muestro, declaro") suggests the self-

assertiveness of all the teenagers, and brings to mind their repeated affirmations of their newly discovered sexual identities. Finally, the well known reproductive fertility of rabbits seems related to the proliferation of different versions of the same event which is characteristic of the novel.

The narrator-protagonist, Menelao, is depicted at a crucial point in his personal development. He has just abandoned his father's home in an effort to make a clean break with a turbulent and often unhappy family life. He is trying to adjust to living alone and depending on his teenage friends for psychological support. At the same time, he is attempting urgently but inexpertly to seduce Gisela, whom he frequently calls "conejita." Because Menelao is leaving behind the familiar environment of his home and undergoing all the stress and excitement of his first sexual encounters, he must develop a sense of personal identity based on new and untried criteria.

The development of this sense of self in Menelao is the principal concern of the novel. A fairly rounded portrait of the protagonist gradually emerges through the construction of three networks of personal relationships. Although these three groups of relationships may be isolated for purposes of analysis, in the novel itself they intertwine and influence one another as the narrator unwittingly reveals the factors which determine his development.

The first network is composed of the family ties which Menelao tries half-heartedly to cut. Next is the emotional and sexual give-and-take between Menelao and Gisela, which incidentally produces much of the humor of the novel and leads to situations which one reviewer has accurately described as "preposterously credible."[4] Finally, the relationships between Menelao and his male friends play an important role in the elucidation of the protagonist's personality.

Menelao's parents are divorced, and his father lives with his second wife in a large apartment building. Menelao's grandmother, an elderly invalid, lives with them. Menelao's mother has an apartment in another part of the city, but during the period covered by the novel she is in Cuernavaca and her apartment is occupied by Menelao and a friend of his, Mauricio. We learn that Menelao has just left his father's home, apparently because his father disapproves of Menelao's relationship with Gisela and because of certain malicious stories invented by his stepmother in order to cause trouble. Still, Menelao hopes for a reconciliation with his father, as we see early in the novel in a dream in which Menelao, his father, and Gisela stroll down the street making friendly conversation: "los tres andábamos juntos y conversábamos sin estar enojados como sucede en la realidad, donde mi papá odia a Gisela y yo me salí de la casa por eso" (p. 16). The relationship

between Menelao and his father is developed at some length in a tape recording which Menelao listens to repeatedly. On this tape he describes his last meeting with his father (pp. 25-30). Menelao feels that his father is unduly influenced by the stepmother, whom Menelao calls "Madhastra" [sic]:

> --Lo peor es, de verdad no lo entiendo, cómo puedes ser tan amable conmigo, fuera de la casa, y tan grosero dentro. Cuando voy pones mala cara. Actúas para Madhastra, reconócelo. Has prometido hablarme por teléfono y siempre se te olvida, nunca te acuerdas. Una sola llamada en cuatro meses. ¿Te parece bien? No sé si un padre deba portarse así/ (p. 29)

Menelao and his father go for a drive, and afterwards Menelao traces the route they took on a street map of Mexico City. The sketch acquires the form of a dove, which may be a symbol of Menelao's hopes for a reconciliation.

If Menelao seems to have a sincere regard for his father, his relationships with the other members of the family are more ambivalent. The stepmother is at first presented in a very negative way: she reads Menelao's diary, eavesdrops on his telephone conversations, and tries to discredit him in the eyes of Gisela's family. Nevertheless, when his real mother performs a bizarre and malicious ritual with a picture of his stepmother, Menelao experiences an unexpected surge of affection for his stepmother:

> Mi madre me contaba cosas terribles de Madhastra. Hizo que ella y papa se divorciaran. Una tarde me enseñó un retrato de Madhastra dividido en tres partes, lleno de inscripciones y

> alfileres. Lo cortó alrededor con un corta-uñas y dijo un exorcismo. Descubrí que en lo íntimo quiero a Madhastra y derramé algunas lágrimas por ella. (p. 28)

Menelao's mother is presented less ambiguously and more negatively than his stepmother. Her main motivation in leaving for Cuernavaca was to escape the bill collectors who threaten to take away her furniture and turn her out into the street. Menelao hardly knows her, and his earliest memory of her is of a strange woman who approached him one day after school: "me dijo: '¿No me reconoces?' Un niño me dijo que esperara, que una señora quería hablar conmigo. 'No', respondí. Estaba tan maquillada que parecía gamba con gabardina. "Soy tu madre', me dijo" (p. 174). The mother is nevertheless presented with some sensitivity as Menelao expresses his feelings of guilt at having driven her away in order to use her apartment for his own amatory purposes.

The last member of Menelao's family is the elderly grandmother, chronically ill and constantly complaining. Menelao describes her without the pity and partial understanding with which he presents his father, mother, and stepmother. When he visits his father's house the grandmother always insists that he stay and keep her company, and Menelao shows little compassion for her advanced age and many ailments. This attitude is perhaps understandable; she is a grasping, possessive woman, and the narrator's

descriptions of her invariably focus on her repulsive physical qualities: "Ella me detenía, lloriqueaba. Gritaba muy cerca de mi cara, arrojándome su aliento fétido, oloroso a comidas mal trituradas durante años y años" (p. 86). The episode in which this passage occurs is interesting in many respects. Menelao has returned to his father's house to collect some things he left behind, and as he converses with his grandmother he imagines a scene in which he is sensuously caressed by a well-endowed chorus girl. The descriptions of this sexual fantasy begin to merge with the descriptions of the grandmother; the aged, grasping hands of the grandmother are imaginatively transformed by Menelao into the loving, stimulating hands of the chorus girl. The real grandmother, representing Menelao's past life and his family ties, becomes confused with and finally yields to the imaginary chorus girl, symbolic of Menelao's nascent virility and his increasing sexual self-awareness.

Menelao's departure from his father's house is rather hurried, and most of his belongings still remain there. This circumstance requires him to return in order to steal the tape recorder with which he records his descriptions of the week's activities. His friends also make an abortive attempt to recover his things surreptitiously. Significantly, the novel begins with a description of this attempt. Menelao's possessions are physical links connecting him with his family and his past life. The fact

that his friends try to steal them--i.e., to cut his physical links with his family--is an example of the interaction of relationships by which Menelao is characterized. Just as the sexual fantasy conflicted with the reality of the grandmother in the episode just discussed, so Menelao's new relationships with his friends symbolically seek to supersede the older family connections.

This effort by Menelao's friends to recover his things is significant in other respects as well. The teenagers plan the assault on Menelao's house with great care, obtain a car, and arrive early on Sunday morning to carry out the plan. But things go wrong from the very beginning. The caretaker of an adjacent building is already outside sweeping the sidewalk, and his curiosity is aroused by the car full of nervous teenagers. Menelao's parents, who are supposed to be out of town for the weekend, are still at home. Finally a policeman appears. The teenagers bluff their way out of the situation and are invited to breakfast at Gisela's house, which is next door to Menelao's. This episode establishes a pattern for many others in the novel: the well-planned projects of the teenagers are frustrated by circumstances. In addition, the fact that Menelao's friends fail in their effort to recover his belongings may suggest that the family ties which Menelao hopes to cut are stronger than he suspected. This idea is elaborated later in the novel when Menelao returns to his

house to talk to his father. He begins to remember fragmentary episodes from his childhood:

> Encontré voces de fantasmas, no había nadie. Arriba, mi abuelita lloraba. En el baño persistía el sonido triste de mis masturbaciones. Mi padre discutía con Madhastra. En mis manos de catorce años crujía el periódico de muñequitos. A los quince estaba sentado en una silla de la cocina, y, al mismo tiempo, soplaba con mi aliento inconfundible para apagar una y otra vez las velas de mi pastel de cumpleaños. A los trece, me bañaba los sábados en el agua sucia que había dejado Oscar en la tina. (pp. 149-50)

From the foregoing discussion of Menelao's relationship with his family a number of inferences about his character may be drawn. Menelao hopes to preserve and improve his relationship with his father, yet he also longs to be independent. He wants to live alone, yet he seems strongly attached to the memories of his family life. His ambiguous attitudes toward his family are appropriate to the transitional psychological state in which he is depicted. In his family relationships Menelao seems to be a rather shy and troubled adolescent. This impression contrasts sharply with his personality as it is revealed in his relationship with Gisela.

Menelao's courtship of Gisela is a recurring motif throughout the novel, but there are two principal seduction scenes which take place in the apartment of Menelao's mother. These scenes occur on Sunday and Monday, and there is an accelerating rhythm which adds to the sense

of frenzy conveyed by Menelao's somewhat disjointed narration. His mother is expected back from Cuernavaca quite soon, so he has only a short time in which to carry out the seduction in the privacy of the apartment.

On Sunday afternoon, Menelao eats lunch with Gisela's family. The family consists of Gisela's mother, father, and two elderly and easily scandalized aunts who spend most of their time arguing about religion. After lunch, Menelao takes Gisela to his mother's apartment where he will attempt to give her lessons in "sexology" (pp. 32-38). This seduction scene sets a pattern which recurs later in the novel. Menelao first steers the conversation to sexual subjects, then tries to overcome Gisela's shyness and her religious and practical objections. His rather pompous pronouncements are quite funny, and even funnier is the way in which Gisela, by her ingenuousness, constantly deflates his rhetorical balloon:

> --Nuestros besos--comencé en tono doctoral--, son más agradables ahora que dentro de cinco años. Piensa, reflexiona.
> --Pero/
> --Son apasionados--no quería dejarla hablar--; después serán fríos, automáticos. Nuestra piel no será tan suave ni tan hermosa nuestra entrega ni el sabor de nuestra saliva ni el olor de nuestro sudor. Comprendo que es algo insólita nuestra relación/
> --No entiendo. Que es <u>insólita</u>? (p. 37)

Finally Menelao makes some progress, and Gisela seems prepared to submit to his advances. However, he suddenly gets

cold feet and suggests that they leave the apartment. Confronted with the difference between his pretensions of sophistication and the reality of sexual relations, Menelao feels very nervous and apprehensive. This is quite natural, since he is as innocent of sexual experience as Gisela, although he knows more of the technical terms associated with it than she does.

In the course of this seduction scene, the mirror in the apartment is referred to repeatedly. As he uses his prepared seduction "lines," Menelao looks in the mirror, "fascinated," as one critic has said, "by his new identity as lover."[5] Later he writes a kind of love letter on the mirror with a marking pen, and as they are about to leave the apartment he describes their images in the mirror: "Nos reflejábamos en el espejo. Cuatro adoloscentes se abrazaban y rechazaban; los hombres salieron de la habitacion; las mujeres se arreglaron el pelo; se quitaron varios pasadores; los acomodaron; se alisaron exactamente los mismos cabellos, una frente a otra" (p. 38). This association of mirrors with sexuality has cropped up before: after hearing from Menelao that the female body is the most beautiful thing in the world, Gisela looks at herself naked in the mirror to see what all the fuss is about (p. 26). These references clearly suggest that the teenagers are developing their sense of identity by interacting emotionally and sexually with each other.

On the following day, Monday, Menelao waits for Gisela to return from school; when she does not arrive, he grows impatient and leaves. Later, Mauricio (Menelao's roommate) lures Gisela to the apartment by telling her that Menelao is expected soon. When she arrives, Mauricio uses the last remaining reel of tape to record an account, perhaps a gazapo, of his alleged sexual activities with his girlfriend Bikina. After he makes the tape, he and Gisela listen to it, and are apparently about to do so again since the tape ends with the request "Por favor, escucha esta grabación otra vez" (p. 64). This rather unusual activity (making tape recordings and listening to them repeatedly) is a source of immense amusement to all the teenagers in the novel, and is one of their principal pastimes. In this case, however, Mauricio and Gisela are interrupted by the arrival of Menelao. Mauricio, who apparently did not expect Menelao so soon, leaves in some embarrassment. Menelao upbraids Gisela for allowing Mauricio to talk to her about sexual matters, even indirectly through the tape recorder. This conversation serves as a preliminary to his own sexual advances, and now the second major seduction scene takes place.

This episode is even funnier and more awkward than Menelao's first attempt. Menelao's well-laid plans do not seem to be working out: "Me levanto furioso y comienzo a desvestirme. Ella ni siquiera me mira. Es un ingrediente

inesperado, espero que se arroje sobre mí. Simulo no encontrar una bata. Ella no se sorprende. Encuentro la bata y me la pongo" (p. 68). Then everything starts to go wrong. Menelao has forgotten to turn on the water heater and is forced to take an ice-cold shower. His mother calls from Cuernavaca and wants to return to Mexico City, raising the possibility that Menelao's seduction attempt may be unexpectedly interrupted. Bill collectors begin to knock on the door, demanding payment on the many overdue bills Menelao's mother has accumulated. The floor of the apartment is very dirty, and Menelao's feet, still wet from the cold shower, are soon caked with mud. Menelao is casting about for the right approach to Gisela; he tries and discards a number of different postures or masks. He feigns anger: "--Vete a la recámara y te desnudas inmediatamente!--grito, en apariencia enojadísimo--. Si no, verás, te agarro a patadas" (p. 69). He shifts into sweet reasonableness: "¿Cómo crees, conejita? Es comedia. No puedo obligarte a nada. ¿Cómo crees que te pueda obligar a esto?" (p. 70).

These shifting postures are not only funny but also, as Lanin A. Gyurko has pointed out, "epistemological in nature. Interaction between the two adolescents provides a means of knowing the self. New emotions are experienced and new reactions tested as the youths attempt to define the self through its effect on others."[6] This is made

clear when Menelao takes the marking pen with which he wrote on the mirror the previous day and begins to write on Gisela's body, identifying the parts of it:

> Trazo una línea sobre su frente. No se mueve, no cree que me atreva a pintarle nada y yo le escribo Frente, con letras grandes y cuidadosas sobre la frente. No abre los ojos, piensa que no puedo atreverme. Escribo: Sen. Les juro que no tengo ningún deseo sexual, sino ganas de jugar. Y me gusta estar así, desnudo, junto a ella. Le escribo Senos y señalo con flechas la dirección en que se encuentran. Su portabustos es demasiado grande, no lo llena. Escribo Brazo en uno de sus brazos, y Mano en una de sus manos, y otras cosas, frenético de saber los nombres de todos ellos. (p. 72)

The process of discovering by naming is clearly related to the teenagers' interest in mirrors, and also suggests the sense of wonder and astonishment that Menelao experiences as he comes to feel more natural and comfortable with Gisela.

However effective Menelao's naming of the parts of Gisela's body may be on a symbolic plane, it definitely causes problems for him on a more mundane level. The ink will not come off. Gisela begins to panic, and they try all the possible remedies that they find in the medicine cabinet, but to no avail. Gisela takes a shower in an attempt to wash off the ink, and while she is in the shower Menelao excitedly calls Arnaldo and tells him that he now sleeps with Gisela. This is indeed true, as James W. Brown comments, "si sólo se piensa en la postura horizontal."[7] This gazapo has disastrous consequences later on, for that night Arnaldo will repeat it to some friends in

a taxicab, unaware that the driver is Gisela's father. Finally a friend of Menelao, Vulbo, calls on the telephone. When he learns of the problem with the ink he suggests that they cover it up with make-up. Menelao goes downstairs to a drugstore to buy it, rather bewildered along the way by the amused stares of the passers-by: his face is covered with dirt and with lipstick from kissing Gisela.

Despite the awkwardness of this encounter, both Menelao and Gisela feel exhilarated by it. As they come to know each other better, they are also building and reinforcing their own personal identities. The feeling of intoxication and fascination of adolescent love is conveyed with a gentle irony: "Me besa otra vez y vuelve a llenarme de maquillaje. No le importa que la regañen, ni que sea demasiado tarde, ni que la gente la mire con burla. Compramos un pastelito de Calvin. Caminamos por San Juan de Letrán, tomados de la mano" (p. 78).

In these two seduction scenes, Menelao is depicted as reinforcing his sense of identity by interacting with Gisela. At the same time, he exaggerates his "successes" with Gisela in order to impress his friends. Again we see the influence of one network of personal relationships on another: Menelao's self-image depends in large part on the way he is perceived by his friends, and this perception is largely determined by his success in portraying himself as a "smooth operator" and as sexually experienced. These

seduction scenes throw into sharp relief the difference between the reality of Menelao's relations with Gisela--fumbling, awkward, inexperienced--and the image that he tries to convey of smoothness and sophistication. In each of these two scenes, Menelao begins to hesitate as soon as Gisela shows signs of sexual arousal and begins to respond.

The third network of relationships through which the character of the protagonist is elucidated consists of Menelao's relationships with his friends. Menelao belongs to a "gang" which includes Vulbo, Balmori, Jacobo, and Arnaldo.[8] Mauricio and Vulbo are also engaged in courting young girls, Bikina and Nácar. Their amorous adventures, most of them wildly exaggerated, serve as a kind of counterpoint or echo of the main relationship between Menelao and Gisela. Menelao's gang is in friendly, and sometimes not so friendly, rivalry with another gang whose leader is called Tricardio. Gisela has accused Tricardio of spying on her through a bathroom window, and Menelao is therefore forced to fight with Tricardio in order to recover his honor. There are two fights between Tricardio and Menelao, although one of them is possibly an invention of Menelao. Both are described in terms which emphasize the narrator's own courage and skill.

Like the other teenagers, Menelao is a self-dramatizer. He invents stories in order to build up his self-image, and like the other teenagers he is almost entirely cut off

from the world of inherited values.[9] The world of the novel is a solipsistic adolescent world in which most of the adults (apart from Menelao's family) are caricatured as repulsive, threatening, or shallow. Menelao and his companions are depicted in the process of forming their notions of self not by reference to adult society and their place in it, but through the images that they try to project to each other of worldliness, fighting prowess, and sexual experience. These images are usually gazapos which are seldom convincing even to the teenagers themselves. Thus Vulbo brags that his girlfriend, Nácar, is the personification of sexuality, and that she lives with him in a hypnotic state "creado auténticamente con la mirada" (p. 83). The teenagers call one another on the telephone and exchange stories about their sexual conquests without really listening to what the other person is saying, impatient for their turn to indulge in fantasy and thus bolster their self-confidence.

Fabrications and fantasies abound in the novel, and embody the teenagers' efforts to portray themselves to each other as possessing the qualities most admired by their peer group: domination and manipulation of women, and skill and courage in personal combat. It follows that honest, candid communication is relatively rare in the novel, at least on a verbal level. Gyurko has commented that in Gazapo "adolescent interaction is founded upon an interchange

of exaggerated images that substitute for the authentic inner self which the juveniles lack."[10] This is an overstatement, but it contains a kernel of truth: the teenagers do not lack an "authentic inner self" but rather a clear conception of it. The sense of self is inchoate, and the fact that none of the teenagers looks to an adult for guidance or as a "role model" is another indication of the obsessive self-interest which binds them together. The gazapos that Menelao and the others delight in spinning are presented humorously and ironically, and are of course seldom believed by the other teenagers. This prevents the novel from degenerating into a diatribe against disingenuousness in personal relationships and also emphasizes the sheer joy of invention which distinguishes the teenagers from the adults in the novel. At one point Vulbo remarks: "nos importa más decir que nos acostamos con una gorda a, en realidad, acostarnos con ella" (p. 163). The role of the imagination and of fantasy in the novel is fundamental, but before it can be described it is necessay to examine some problems created by the novel's structure.

The narrative structure of Gazapo has intrigued and bedevlied readers and critics alike, and among other things makes the preparation of a plot summary an onerous task. Gyurko resorts to a metaphorical description of the novel's structure: "Sainz's technique is similar to the action produced when a stone is dropped into a lake, setting in

motion waves of water that expand into ever-widening circles."[11] James W. Brown has found in the seemingly chaotic jumble of fragments that comprises the novel an intricate pattern directly related to themes and to the characterization of the protagonist, as the title of his article indicates: "Gazapo: Modelo para armar." One reviewer of the English translation simply dismissed the work as "disjointed" and left it at that.[12] Part of the problem doubtless results from the fact that there is no linear, chronological progression in the narrative. The novel consists of ten "chapters" or sections further subdivided into a total of thirty-two fragments. The events are presented through "a technique incorporating rearrangements of time, multiple perspectives on a single action and deliberate blurring of causal and narrative connections."[13] The extreme temporal and spatial fragmentation obviously helps to express Menelao's incomplete and disorderly impressions of his environment. This kind of fragmentation is very common in contemporary novels and does not ordinarily present serious obstacles to analysis.

Gazapo, however, has a number of features which complicate still further the evident fragmentation in its structure. First, there is the fact that the bulk of the novel consists of transcripts of tape recordings, letters, excerpts from diaries, and accounts of telephone conversations. Of course, the inclusion of these kinds of narrative

material is not a new novelistic device by any means. In general, however, such material is used to enhance the credibility of a given story line, to provide documentary evidence in support of a subjective perception.[14] This is especially true of the tape recorder, which by its nature is a neutral preserver of speech. A misleading but suggestive comparison has been made between Sainz's use of tape recordings and the work of Oscar Lewis, the North American anthropologist who uses tape recordings in his studies of Mexican society.[15] Although it is true that the tapes in Gazapo are documentary in the sense that they preserve the speech patterns of a certain social class of Mexican youth in the early sixties, this function is incidental. Sainz's purpose is not anthropological but artistic. In Gazapo we are confronted with different and conflicting accounts of the same episode, all of them on tape and therefore "documented." The idea that truth is multiple and variable is implicit in the fact that the novel is largely composed of fragments which contradict one another. Sainz himself has commented: "A lo largo de la novela, cada capítulo anula en cierta forma a los anteriores y en forma definitiva al inmediato anterior."[16] This is an exaggeration, but it indicates the magnitude of the problem. Fantasies and gazapos are put on tape and thus acquire the stamp of objective truth, and incidentally imply that objective truth may be only fantasy. Just as a tape

recording can be erased and something different recorded on it, many of the events in the novel are "erased" and supplanted by other versions.[17] Facts are replaced by possibilities, and it might even be said that nothing really "happens" in the novel. Events are described, but we subsequently find that they did not occur as described, or did not occur at all.

The use of the tape recorder is a technique rich in implications, and these will be discussed in some detail in the section devoted to narrative technique. For the present it is sufficient to note that the role of the tape recordings in the proliferation of different versions of the same event makes the novel's structure seem chaotic. Another source of confusion is the lack of an authoritative narrator who might resolve inconsistencies and relate the fragmentary episodes to one another. Despite appearances, Gazapo is not really an "open" novel in which the fragments may be rearranged at will. Nor is its structure similar to that of Manuel Puig's La traición de Rita Hayworth, in which the absence of a single controlling narrative voice obliges the reader to make connections ordinarily supplied by the narrator.

Much of the apparent confusion of the novel is at least partly clarified by Sainz's revelation of the temporal placement of the narrator:

> Aunque los límites no se precisan en el texto, la novela transcurre en una semana, de

> viernes a viernes. Un truco narrativo permite que el narrador esté situado en un punto fijo desde el cual domina este período. El punto fijo es el lunes, casi el centro de la semana viernes-viernes. Hacia el primer viernes, Menelao maneja un tiempo real. Hacia el segundo, se complica al hablar de un tiempo creado, lleno de posibilidades y variantes. En esta segunda parte de la novela todo sucede muchas veces. Es el reino de la contingencia, el dominio de la hipótesis. Una visita de Gisela al departamento de Menelao sufre muchas variantes y conduce siempre a diferentes desenlaces. En esta parte ningún conflicto se resuelve.[18]

Following this view of the structure, the novel divides rather neatly into two halves: the first five "chapters" occur on or before Monday, while the last five occur, with one exception, after Monday. A corresponding difference can be seen between Menelao's role as narrator in the two halves of the novel. In the first part, Menelao seems to make a conscious effort to organize his material. For example, in the first chapter he describes a telephone conversation in which Vulbo relates the story of the attempted break-in at Menelao's father's house. Menelao interrupts his description of this telephone conversation to remark: "Vulbo me contará más tarde que el Buick 39 del papá de Fidel estorbaba la salida y yo veré a mi padre limitándose a observar a los muchachos, furioso, y a Vulbo tratando de hacer andar el auto sin lograrlo" (pp. 20-21). By supplying information not learned until later on, Menelao seems to be making a effort to present the story of the attempted break-in in a unified, coherent form instead of merely reporting bits and pieces as he

learns them.

In the latter half of the novel, on the other hand, there is little evidence of any effort by Menelao to reconstruct events by using the materials available to him. This suggests that he is in fact not reconstructing events but inventing them. The narration becomes more and more fragmentary and contradictory. Frequently several different possible openings of an episode are presented on a single page, as Menelao seems to be trying out and discarding variations before settling on one theme to develop for a while. Stylistic evidence of this kind seems to support the division of the novel into a "real" half and a "hypothetical" half.

Although this view of the novel's structure is plausible and resolves some of the problems, it creates others. Monday is a very busy day for Menelao. At his apartment he makes his second attempt to seduce Gisela, the attempt which ends with their frantic efforts to wash off the ink from her body. That night, several of Menelao's friends are in a taxicab on their way to a party, and they repeat Menelao's boast that he sleeps with Gisela, unaware that the driver of the taxi is Gisela's father. Gisela's father is furious, and when he comes home from work late that night he is quite drunk and beats up his daughter, forbidding her to see Menelao again. At six o'clock the following morning--i.e., Tuesday--Gisela calls Menelao on

the telephone and tells him the bad news. Menelao is disturbed, but he convinces Gisela to meet him at noon at the Museum of Hygiene, where Menelao hopes that the exhibitions on venereal disease will stimulate Gisela and soften her up for the "kill." After going to the museum, the two return to Menelao's apartment where they discuss their difficult situation. It is reasonable to suppose that this episode (pp. 98-109) occurs in the "hypothetical" half of the novel, for it begins:

> O MENELAO, FRENTE A LA GRABADORA:
> A las doce del día estoy en varias partes al mismo tiempo. Una es Chapultepec; otra, el cuarto de baño del departamento en Artículo 123; otra, la calle Donceles: observo las caras de mujer en actitud de horror, esculpidas en las puertas de madera del Museo de Higiene. (p. 98)

After a few false starts, Menelao seems to settle on his theme and describes his conversation with Gisela. Soon Gisela's father arrives and begins to knock furiously on the door, swearing vengeance if he finds Gisela with Menelao. The teenagers refuse to open the door, and then Vulbo arrives and tries to persuade Gisela's father that no one is in the apartment. Within the apartment, Menelao and Gisela do a very curious thing: they take the tape recorder and place it near the door, recording the conversation between Gisela's father and Vulbo. Later in the novel they will listen to this tape, and the scene will be presented again in a different form. It seems, then, that this episode may be the "visita de Gisela al departamento de Menelao [que] sufre muchas variantes y conduce

siempre a diferentes desenlaces."

If this view is correct, we do not enter the "reino de la contingencia" until the beginning of the chapter just alluded to--i.e., the seventh chapter. What then becomes of the sixth chapter? The question is not trivial, because in the sixth chapter Menelao and his friends take his grandmother for an outing to Chapúltepec Park. The teenagers leave the old woman to sun herself in the grass and then they go rowing in the lake. When they return, the grandmother is dead. Menelao describes the scene in one of the few examples of interior monologue in the novel:

> la anciana es un cuerpo gigantesco lleno de arrugas y cerrados los ojos llenos de arrugas y abiertos los dedos de las manos y el pasto brotando entre ellos y las manos parecen cáscaras de papa y el cuello de guajolote y el vestido alzado hasta las rodillas las medias de lana sucias deshilachadas en varias partes las zapatillas de paño y las piernas rígidas entreabiertas con el vestido alzado y el pasto circunvalándolas brotando entre ellas y la cabeza desmayada ladeada sobre el hombro los ojos cerrados llenos de arrugas el cuerpo sobre el pasto y una de las manos sobre el pasto dejando brotar el pasto entre los dedos. (pp. 96-97)

Since the grandmother comes to symbolize Menelao's family ties and his past life, it is of some interest to know whether these ties are cut (symbolically, of course) in Menelao's "real" life or in his imagination. In other words, does the death of the grandmother fall into the "real" or the "hypothetical" half of the novel? Gyurko, who otherwise accepts at face value Sainz's statement

that Monday is the dividing line, nevertheless describes the death of the grandmother as a real event which later undergoes imaginative transformation.[19] In the seventh chapter, Menelao does not tell Gisela about the death of his grandmother, even though it occurred (presumably) only a few hours earlier. Instead, he describes the events of the previous chapter as though they were a dream, altering them to include Gisela and to eliminate the trip to Chapultepec Park. Instead of dying at the park, the grandmother is killed in an automobile accident (pp. 103-4).

It is probably impossible to determine whether the death of Menelao's grandmother in Chapultepec Park is "real" or imagined. Like the subsequent descriptions of her funeral, the events surrounding her "death" are presented very ambiguously. If her death is "real", then the subsequent imaginative transformations of the episode suggest Menelao's stubborn refusal to allow the real world to intrude on his inventions. On the other hand, if the death is imaginary, it may be an exteriorization of Menelao's feelings of guilt concerning his relationship with his family, like his unwarranted belief that he was responsible for forcing his mother out of her own apartment. The ambiguity surrounding the episode enriches the novel by making many different interpretations possible.

In a more general sense, the novel is ambiguous because "the borderline between reality and fantasy is constantly

being crossed."[20] One of the virtues of Gazapo is that meaningful patterns can be discerned in the structure without resolving the problem of which events are "real" and which are imaginary. James W. Brown, in a painstaking and illuminating analysis, speaks of three "ejes temáticos" around which the novel is constructed. Using an approach similar to my discussion of three "networks of relationships" by which Menelao is characterized, Brown arrives at the following "esquema tiempo-espacio-temático:"[21]

(A)	(B)
apartamento	casa
madurez	inmadurez
tiempo futuro	tiempo pasado
Gisela	la abuela

(C)
calle
transición
tiempo presente
Tricardio

According to Brown, the series of fights between Menelao and Tricardio is of fundamental importance because it symbolizes a kind of temporal crisis in which the narrator is caught:

> La transcendencia de este conflicto (C) se deriva del hecho que, representando su estado transitorio, y además inestable, entre el pasado y el futuro, también refleja la actual esencia de algo incompleto, fluido, algo no cuajado todavía: Menelao mismo. Éste oscila entre el apartamento y su casa, entre el estado adulto y la niñez, entre el valor y el temor, y entre lo rechazado y lo anhelado. (Brown, p. 243)

The narrative techniques and the language employed in Gazapo are highly contemporary, and play an important

role in the development of character and the expression of themes. The use of tape recordings is one of the most innovative techniques in the novel,[22] and is rich in implications. First, the teenagers use tape recordings to document and validate their experiences. Once the experiences have been preserved on tape they can be recalled at will, and Menelao delights in reliving his experiences in this way. This reflects his realization that the difficult situations in which he finds himself will one day seem wonderful in their innocence. Because the tape recorder he uses is stolen (from his parents' house) he frantically tries to record as much as he can before the theft is discovered, in an effort to salvage something concrete from a stimulating but fleeting period of his life.

The tapes also help Menelao to develop a sense of his own identity. Just as he looks in the mirror during his seductions of Gisela to affirm his physical and sexual identity, he listens to his voice on the tape recorder and hears himself in this "verbal mirror" in the process of growing up.[23] The obsessive self-involvement of Menelao and the other teenagers is expressed by the fact that they frequently talk to each other through tape recordings rather than in person. The distance thus achieved enables the teenagers to say things they would not otherwise say, as when Mauricio makes a tape recording which he hopes will sexually stimulate Gisela, and Menelao exclaims to

her: "¡Con el pretexto de la grabación te dijo cosas que no hubiera dicho frente a mí!" (p. 67). The tapes are also a medium of creative imagination. They enable the teenagers to express their inner motivations and desires, and to "exteriorize a heroic image of self" (Gyurko, p. 120).

Perhaps the most interesting function of the tape recordings is the manner in which they come to supplant "reality" in the latter part of the novel. A particularly complex example of this process begins in chapter seven, when Menelao and Gisela place the tape recorder next to the door of the apartment in order to record Vulbo's efforts to placate Gisela's father (p. 107). Later, in the last chapter, they are apparently listening to this tape (p. 161). The tape suddenly seems to be converted into "reality," and instead of listening to the tape they are now back in the apartment on Tuesday. As before, they agree that Menelao will leave first and they will join each other later at the English School which Gisela attends. Menelao leaves the apartment, but instead of being seen by Gisela's father and chased into a pastry shop as in the first version (pp. 109-112), Menelao escapes and calls Gisela from a phone booth (p. 162). They meet as planned and go for a walk. Vulbo drives by in a taxicab, and together the three teenagers go to a restaurant, La Vaca Negra, in which the last scene of the novel takes place. While they are in the restaurant, Vulbo suggests that they go

to a weight-lifting exhibition in the Ciudad Universitaria (p. 170), which suggests that they are indeed reliving Tuesday, since Vulbo went to this exhibition after the "death" of the grandmother (p. 97). Vulbo even suggests that they listen to the tape made while he was trying to distract Gisela's father, which is quite amusing since he is now "living" inside that very tape. He remarks to Menelao: "Te salvaste por un pelito, si has salido y te ve el padre de Gisela, no estaríamos aquí" (p. 169).

The use of the tape recordings is therefore closely related to the theme of a blurred borderline between reality and fantasy and to the characterization of the teenagers. Another narrative technique whose function is somewhat different is the manipulation of grammatical voices. About two thirds of the novel is narrated in the first person by Menelao, while the remainder is narrated in the third person. This third person voice could possibly be that of Menelao himself, speaking of himself in the third person and thus providing more "objective" versions of events already described in the first person.[24] It is also possible that the third person voice is not a single person, but a group of Menelao's friends--i.e., a different friend every time the voice is used.

This possibility is exemplified in two successive fragments in which a party at Fidel's house is described (pp. 40-44, 44-47). The first fragment begins with a

third person description of a conversation between Fidel's mother and Menelao. Menelao begins to describe a fight with Tricardio which apparently took place that afternoon. For a paragraph or so, Menelao's story is enclosed in quotation marks, and the third person narrator comments on Menelao's way of telling the story: "actúa la narración, imita voces y sonidos" (p. 41). As the story develops, however, it shifts into the first person and remains so for the rest of the fragment. This procedure is similar to the cinematic technique in which a narrator relating a story about someone else is supplanted by the story itself; a flashback, but with a shift in grammatical person whose effect is to make the event seem more immediate.

The following fragment also begins in the third person, but this is apparently not the same third person voice as before. For one thing, it is a description of the same period of time as is covered in the preceding fragment, but there is no mention of any story by Menelao. There are subtler clues, however, which indicate that the perspective is not the same. In the first fragment, Mauricio is described as resting his arm on the shoulder of a girl, lowering his voice, and whispering: "¿Estudias o trabajas? No sé bailar muy bien. Conozco un solo paso e irremediablemente piso a la muchacha" (p. 40). Mauricio and the girl then go out to the dance floor. In the second fragment, we seem to be seeing the same event:

"Mauricio se apoya en el hombro de Nita, junto al balcón. Se dicen algo en secreto. Él la toma de la mano y la lleva a la pista" (p. 44). Clearly, what is said "en secreto" between the two is Mauricio's invitation to dance. But this time the third person narrator, whoever he or she may be, is apparently farther away from the couple than the narrator of the preceding fragment, and is therefore unable to hear the words.

Like the narrative techniques, the language in which the novel is written helps to characterize and to express themes. The freewheeeling colloquial language of the teenagers contrasts with the stultified theological jargon of Gisela's aunts. In addition to the basic colloquial idiom in which most of the novel is written, there are a number of different linguistic "textures" which add humor and aid in characterization. Just as Menelao tries out several different postures and attitudes in his attempted seduction of Gisela, he also uses different kinds of speech. He tries an overblown and rather corny style as in the passage already cited which begins "Nuestros besos son más agradables ahora que dentro de cinco años" (p. 37). He uses technical terms learned from textbooks on sexual behavior. Gisela playfully writes a "power of attorney" in a stilted legalistic style empowering Menelao to represent her in "todos los asuntos relacionados con el disgusto de mi padre provocado por los chismes de los Srs.

Arnaldo y Balmori. . .Dejo a la completa responsabilidad del Sr. J. K. Menelao todo asunto o negocio que exista o surja con relación a dichos reganos" (pp. 107-8).

Another kind of linguistic texture is provided by the intercalation of selections in medieval Spanish from Calila et Dimna. Menelao is reading this book of Oriental fables for one of his school assignments, and the selections provide either ironic contrasts or parallels with the protagonist's own behavior.[25] Vulbo parodies the style of these fables by inserting the names of Menelao and Gisela: "Et cayó en suerte el fijodalgo Menelao enamorarse de una mujer que era muy fermosa e de nome Gisela" (p. 183). Language is also manipulated to express the moods and preoccupations of the narrator. As Menelao sits at his typewriter waiting for Gisela to return from a party, he types a string of free associations. The sound of a car pulling up outside his window, presumably bringing Gisela home, triggers the following disconnected but revealing passage:

> en este momento oigo un auto llegar bajo mi
> ventana y apenas oigo el ruiop jk n un auto
> y me pongo a escribir cualquier cosa no im-
> porta cúal tan sólo hacer ruido con la máquina
> para que tú me oigas y digas allí estaba mi
> conejito mientras yo me pregunto si te enseñaré
> esto mismo mañana si te diré mi enorme tontería
> de estarte amando como un idiota, aunque idiota
> no es la palabra justa ni precisa gisela piel
> de gato amada tierna de manos húmedas llegando
> en auto a las once y cuarentitantos de la noche
> te divertirías me extrañarías realmente quién
> sabe apenas y me duelen los golpes de Tricardio

> y pierdo la hoja de mi lectura con ellery queen y el misterio de las naranjas chinas tan amargas mientras oigo brahms la primera sonata en fa menor segundo movimiento mis lágrimas mojadas lágrimas sobre las teclas ven gisela que te estoy esperando cálida amada gisela te muerdo + te odio + te orino + te beso & te muerdo. (p. 123)

A sense of immediacy and poignancy is achieved by the direct transcription of Menelao's contradictory emotions on the typewriter.

Linguistic games and word plays are also prominent. Menelao's name appears in a number of different versions: Meledao, Melanio, Melomeas, Melenas, Mentoldao, Melachupas. The effect of these variations is primarily humorous, although they incidentally suggest that Menelao's personality is as fluid and changeable as his name. Menelao's calling-card is a spoof of his name that exhibits the sheer joy and humor of linguistic invention:

> J. K. Menelao Ignacio Adolfo Enrique Julio Diego Ricardo Jorge Arturo Gómez Avila Pérez Hurtado González Amezcua Osequera Lozano Ortiz Caro Álvarez Páez Herrera Carreón Carmona López Quiroz Cinta Delgado Gallardo Salazar Cifuentes Ausentes Presentes me clavas los dientes y tú no sientes la Corroconchuda de Tafirulillo Cid Azcoil y Veraniego. (p. 186)

The same kind of pleasure in verbal invention is seen as the teenagers sing a nonsense verse and then vary it by changing all the vowels: "Pancha, Pancha Lápaz/ Chacata para matán"; "Punchu, Punchu Lupuz/ Chucutu puru mutún"; "Penche, Penche Lépez/ ; Pinchi Lípiz y Poncho Lópoz" (p. 52). Another kind of verbal invention is a kind of

dog Latin prayer intoned by a certain Señor Medallas, apparently a guest in the home of Gisela:

> --Sampurratum verpa mea--recito--, ipen pernaculum tua, cebote coyunda quítoles pecata mundi, cogitaciones pilastras meas, mamis bistuits, chíspulis aires malignus, juramentus ghimen, arrímote las bolas sin que te lastimen, amén. (p. 32)

This bizarre sexual incantation is appropriately placed, since it occurs immediately after Menelao has tried to peer through the bathroom window at Gisela and immediately before he tries to seduce her.

In the latter part of the novel, and especially in the last chapter, language acquires a magical power to control events, and even to create them. In the last chapter, the teenagers sit in a restaurant and discuss the possibility of fitting out a panel truck as a kind of mobile bedroom which Menelao and Gisela could use alternately with Vulbo and Nácar. Menelao's mother has returned from Cuernavaca, and her apartment is no longer available for the amorous adventures of the teenagers. After they discuss the possibility of acquiring such a truck, the words themselves seem to create the reality: "Como guiada por las palabras de Vulbo, Gisela está ya de pie junto a un panel cremoso, pintado con diseños y leyendas comerciales" (p. 180).

There are a number of references to the cinema and to photographs in Gazapo, and a number of examples of

narrative techniques influenced by the cinema. In a description of one of his fights with Tricardio, Menelao says: "En cámara lenta, para Tricardio ya no había otra realidad que el puño dirigido precisamente a su punto de equilibrio" (p. 42). The reference to slow motion seems to suggest the way time seems to blur or freeze during moments of stress. Similarly, in describing a fight between two rivals for the attentions of Nácar, Menelao focuses on the sergeant's stripes being ripped from the sleeve of one of the combatants:

> Vulbo vio al hombre rubio que rasgó los galones del cadete y le quitó el sable. Todo esto como entre brumas y durante un momento espantoso. Nunca iban a rasgarse esos galones. Comenzaban a romperse y se alargaban interminables, irremediablemente, y luego todo se quedaba suspendido en un espacio duro, fotografiado, en el cual nada sucedía o todo sucedía trastocado con siglos en lugar de segundos, y silencio en lugar de ruidos. (p. 114)

Like a tape recording, a photograph is a frozen experience or situation. Removed from the flow of time, unchanging, a photograph is the opposite of the constant flux of Menelao's psychological experience. A photograph is, in fact, a "mirror with a memory."[26] It is therefore significant that the last sentence of the novel, set apart from the rest, is "Además: De esa época conservo algunas fotografías." Sainz intended that the novel should end with a series of photographs of the protagonist, although for technical reasons this was not possible in the first printing.[27] Later printings of the novel do contain

these photographs, however, and their symbolism is multiple. They are the concrete culmination of the process of portraying the character of the protagonist. At the same time, they reflect the narrator's awareness of the charm of his adolescent days, and his constant delight in preserving and reviewing them. Sainz remarks: "Creo que el protagonista era muy conciente de su regreso constante a esa adolescencia; de que esos días planos y angustiosos iban a resultar con el tiempo maravillosos."[28]

CHAPTER THREE

OBSESIVOS DIAS CIRCULARES: AVATARS OF THE VOYEUR

Sáinz's second novel, Obsesivos días circulares,[1] is more complex and less accessible than Gazapo, and has attracted a smaller reading public. Some critics find the work excessively hermetic and object to the profusion of literary and cultural allusions which seem to limit the reading public to a highly educated elite.[2] Gazapo, despite the complexity of its narrative structure, presents appealing characters and draws the reader into the story quickly. The universal appeal of the tale of youthful seduction, and the "sentimental irony" that Carlos Fuentes has pointed out,[3] make Gazapo relatively easy to read. Obsesivos días circulares, on the other hand, is a difficult novel to read. Many techniques which in Gazapo serve to animate the reader by inviting him to participate in the composition of the novel tend to have an opposite effect in Obsesivos días circulares. The idea that events are ambiguous and potentially divisible into many different versions, which in Gazapo amuses and intrigues the reader because of the youthful exuberance it suggests, conveys in Obsesivos días circulares the progressive disintegration of the narrator's grasp of reality. Similarly, the many seduction scenes in Obsesivos días circulares are less innocent than those in Gazapo, more suggestive of sexual perversion than of adolescent

excitement.

The novel consists of a short introductory vignette, followed by four chapters of unequal length. The action of the first and third chapters takes place in Mexico City; the second chapter is set in Acapulco, and the final chapter is set on an airplane flying between Mexico City and Acapulco. The chapter titles are signs commonly seen in commercial airliners, and clearly suggest that the novel is a kind of journey, or perhaps a quest: "Fasten Seat Belts" (I), "No Smoking"(II), "Chaleco Salvavidas Bajo el Asiento" (III), and "Exit"(IV). The narration is in the first person throughout, and the action occurs over a period of about two months. The development of the action is constantly interrupted by flashbacks, fantasies, digressions, and games. Although these interruptions in the story line almost invariably have a function in characterization or structure, their volume and frequency tend to obscure the development of a clear plot line. All dialogue is incorporated into the narrator's endless monologue by the suppression of clarifying punctuation. Events of considerable importance in the development of the plot are sometimes broken into fragments and distributed over a lengthy section of the narration, so that it is difficult at first to determine exactly what has happened. In addition, there are numerous and radical shifts in time and space, often without explanatory remarks from the narrator. All these factors give

the action an opaque or blurred quality which communicates the narrator's sense of detachment and isolation.

Still, the basic line of action in the novel is fairly simple. Terencio, the narrator, is employed as a caretaker in a private Catholic school for girls in Mexico City. The school is owned by Papá la Oca, a mysterious underworld figure who is involved in blackmail, murder, and other unsavory activities, and who has political connections in high places. Terencio is required to perform certain collateral duties in addition to his janitorial tasks. He lives with his second wife, Donají, in a second-floor apartment within the school complex. The apartment below them is occupied by Sarro, a gangster in his sixties who works as a hired killer for Papá la Oca, and Sarro's mistress, Yin, a Chilean woman in her early twenties. Soon Yin's younger sister, Lalka, comes to Mexico City and moves in with Sarro and Yin.

In the course of the first chapter we learn that the house behind the one occupied by Terencio is adjacent to the schoolgirls' dressing room. The large mirror in this dressing room has been replaced by a one-way mirror, which is a mirror on one side and a window on the other. This enables the occupants of the adjacent room, called The Crypt, to indulge their voyeuristic urges. The patrons of The Crypt are prominent public figures, and one of Terencio's collateral duties is to tend The Crypt, answer the patrons'

questions, and at the same time to photograph them secretly so that the photos may be used by Papá la Oca for blackmail. Sarro is the dominating figure of the first chapter, and the action consists largely of conversations among Sarro, Yin, Terencio, and Donají. Toward the end of the chapter Sarro suffers a stroke and is taken to the hospital. Yin, Donají, and Terencio gradually realize the radical change that must take place in their lives now that Sarro is gone. After a highly suggestive scene in which the three mourners drunkenly decide to use a jar of instant coffee as a symbol of Sarro's ashes and spread it around the streets of Mexico City, they determine to carry out the plan which they made before Sarro's stroke to take a vacation in Acapulco.

In the second chapter, the vacationers are invited to a party by an architect named López Santos. Leticia Leteo, Terencio's first wife, is also at the party, and Terencio experiences a resurgence of his sexual desire for her. He also has sexual fantasies about Yin, who has been hard hit by the absence of Sarro because, as the narrator remarks, of her sudden drop in orgasms from twenty a month to none at all. During the party at López Santos' apartment, Leticia twice lures Terencio into a closet where she alternately seduces and taunts him, reminding him of his callous behavior toward her when they were married. Finally she takes photographs of his private parts and passes them around to the guests at the party, much to Terencio's

embarrassment. Two near drownings in the ocean add to Terencio's discomfort, and the vacationers finally return to Mexico City in the old orange school bus which is Terencio's only means of transportation. The focus in the second chapter is on Terencio's sexual obsessions and on his relationship with his former wife. We discover that they had a son who is mentally retarded.

In the third chapter, Papá la Oca forces Yin to leave because she has been serendaded one night, giving the school a bad name. After visiting Sarro in the hospital, Terencio is lured by Leticia into her car and they go to her apartment where they engage in a rather desultory orgy. Finally Terencio becomes worried about his responsibilities at the school and calls Donají on the telephone. She tells him that Lalka, Yin's younger sister, has accidentally broken the mirror in The Crypt while it was full of spectators. Terencio takes a cab back to the apartment and, after considerable procrastination, finally gets up the nerve to call Papá la Oca. He intends to report the broken mirror and also the loss of a certain notebook belonging to Sarro which contains incriminating information. Terencio is resolved to resign, but when he calls his employer he is at first unable to get a word in edgewise. Papá la Oca is a loquacious individual and regales Terencio with stale jokes and lengthy anecdotes. The gangster boss finally orders Terencio to carry out a secret mission in Acapulco which

is left quite vague. Terencio loses his nerve and agrees to go, without daring to report what has happened in The Crypt.

The action of the last chapter takes place entirely on an airplane en route to Acapulco. The other twelve passengers on the plane are all gangsters in the pay of Papá la Oca, and Terencio has a growing suspicion that they have been assigned to eliminate him. They tell violent stories, carry guns, and generally behave in a threatening manner. The situation is so unpleasant for Terencio that he retreats from it by reading, writing letters, and finally by escaping into fantasies and dreams. As the airplane descends over the water into Acapulco, he becomes increasingly convinced that his end is near, and begins to think of the endings of novels he has read: La región más transparente, Pedro Páramo, Grande Sertão: Veredas. Although Terencio expresses faith in his good luck, he still feels "un hormigueo en mi pecho" (p. 253). To overcome it, he focuses on a singsong sentence, almost a nonsense verse, from a film of Cantinflas: "De generación en generación las generaciones se degeneran con mayor degeneración" (p. 253). This unhopeful sentence is repeated over and over again for the final thirteen pages of the novel. The size of the type increases with every page, and alternating pages are blurred mirror images of the preceding page.[4] The last page of the novel is nothing but an extreme close-up of a single

blurred "g", which is itself disintegrating.

This recapitulation of the action conveys only a vague idea of what the novel is about. Certain broad parallels among the chapters provide a kind of unity: the first and third chapters focus on Terencio's domestic life and his duties at the school, while the second and fourth involve trips to Acapulco. Another kind of unity arises from the symbolic or oneiric prefiguring of events. In the opening vignette, Yin describes one of the visual images that flash through her mind as she makes love to Sarro: a man breathes harshly and jerks spasmodically in a hospital. This seems to prefigure the stroke Sarro will suffer at the end of the first chapter. Similarly, Lalka asks Terencio to take her downtown to see the large display windows of the department stores, and Terencio jokingly suggests that she dreams of smashing them (p. 54). This jocular suggestion is realized when Lalka smashes the mirror in The Crypt.

Still, it would be difficult to describe the plot of Obsesivos días circulares as a meaningful pattern of action in the traditional sense. In fact, the action of the novel seems in many cases to be trivial and planless. Many lengthy passages are devoted to the description of dinner-table conversations, afternoons at the beach, and other commonplace occurrences. Obsesivos días circulares is an example of the conflict between language and structure which Raymond D. Souza has discerned in a number of contemporary

Latin American novels. According to Souza, the expansive and creative impulse of language conflicts with the ordering impulse of structure; this produces novels whose structures seem chaotic and which are organized, like Tres tristes tigres, by the "interior rhythms and patterns of the language."[5] Like Horacio Oliveira in Rayuela, though perhaps less consistently, Terencio tries to stabilize and organize the flux that surrounds him. In this effort he searches for fixed points of reference and finds them, at least temporarily, in a number of different people and activities. He relies on his relationships with Sarro and Leticia, and on domestic rituals such as the lengthy bath he takes every day with his wife, Donají. He reads James Joyce's Ulysses and a book of Mexican historical readings, He writes letters to Leticia and to Tobías Dorleado, an old friend of his who currently resides in Brazil. Above all, he depends on language as his principal defense against chaos. The central irony of the work is that Terencio's control over his language gradually slips away from him, and this progressive disintegration culminates in the final words of the novel which are stripped of their meaning by constant repetition and by excessive emphasis of their material qualites. Terencio hopes to elude the many traps which he perceives in his surroundings by retreating into words, but words themselves become the final trap.

Before examining the protagonist's efforts to find order, it is necessary to discuss the means by which the sense of his psychological instability is conveyed. Dorothy F. Caram has commented that the reader of Obsesivos días circulares "is forced to receive the narrator's experience, whether real or imaginary, in the form of a mosaic whose pieces sometimes overlap, sometimes are in juxtaposition, and sometimes are scattered randomly through the narrative."[6] The sense of being adrift, without fixed reference points to guide the consciousness and give order to the psychological experience, is evoked by the depiction of events as ambiguous and capable of uncontrollable proliferation, by the profusion of real and imaginary traps, by the artful merging of reality and fantasy, and by cinematic devices such as montage.

The novel begins with a reference to "la ambigüedad de un acto cotidiano" (p. 9), and Terencio elaborates this idea later in the novel: "Como en la línea de la vida en mi mano izquierda los acontecimientos cobran direcciones imprevistas, multiplicándose en centenares de miniacontecimientos con potencialidades terroríficas cada uno" (p. 193). The idea that events may reproduce themselves uncontrollably, like a cancer, is sometimes expressed symbolically. When Lalka arrives at the airport in the first chapter she is carrying two large stuffed turtles named Jack the Ripper and Ramonita Rocamorra. Terencio believes that they are

stuffed with marijuana, but later on he cuts one open only to find a series of progressively smaller turtles. Again, as Terencio is packing his clothes before the vacation trip to Acapulco, the clothing seems to reproduce itself spontaneously: "Y ya no podía cargar con más prendas de ropa y hallaba más y más: parecía que no iba a acabar nunca, que se reproducían. Una camisa era dos camisas que eran tres camisas, y otra más, una camisa y un par de tirantes" (p. 90).

The seemingly infinite divisibility of individual events which Terencio perceives is related to the extreme close-up which ends the novel. Just as the singsong sentence about degeneration is rendered meaningless by repetition and by the ever-increasing obsession with a single element, individual events become indecipherable when they are isolated from related events and their infinite ramifications are contemplated. One of the characters in Aldous Huxley's Point Counter Point is the iconoclastic novelist Philip Quarles, in whose notebook the following sentences are found:

> Everything's incredible, if you can skin off the crust of obviousness our habits put on it. Every object and event contains within itself an infinity of depths within depths. Nothing's in the least like what it seems--or rather it's like several million other things at the same time. All India rushes like a cinema film through his head. . . [7]

The possibility of becoming enmeshed in the infinite ramifications of an event is one of Terencio's greatest fears.

The confusion and fear that Terencio experiences in much of the novel is evoked in large part by a complex interplay between observer and observed. Terencio is an observer, both by profession and inclination. As a writer and in his photographic work for Papá la Oca, he feels the detachment and sense of superiority that comes from observing without being seen. In the first chapter we discover that Terencio has prepared a series of strategically placed peep-holes in the walls between his apartment and Sarro's which enable the voyeuristic narrator to observe the domestic activities of Sarro and Yin. The scene of the opening vignette in which Sarro and Yin are making love is viewed through one of these peep-holes, though the reader does not discover this until later on. Terencio is an enthusiastic voyeur, yet he is always plagued by the fear of discovery and by the possibility of a sudden reversal of roles by which he would become the victim. In the first chapter, as Terencio and Donají spy on Sarro, the elderly gangster suddenly seems to intuit the presence of the observers and closes the curtains (p. 32). Later on in Acapulco, Terencio makes a small hole in the bathroom door in order to spy on Lalka. While making love to Donají, he imagines that Lalka discovers the hole, waits for him to approach it, then suddenly slips a knitting needle through it, puncturing Terencio's eyeball (p. 111).

This grotesque visual image clearly reflects Terencio's

subliminal guilt and his fear of discovery and vengeance. He feels that his environment is filled with danger, that people and circumstances are constantly laying traps for him. His contemplation of past events often leads him to speculate on the causes of his present situation. This is certainly an ordinary psychological process, but it takes on bizarre and paranoid overtones because Terencio so frequently thinks of his present situation as a kind of trap. He therefore tries to locate a key event in the past which might have sprung the trap. After Sarro's stroke, Terencio wanders aimlessly through the streets with Donají and Yin and makes the following remark: "¿a partir de qué gesto, de qué lucubración, de qué acto nos fuimos acercando inevitablemente para reunirnos aquí, ahora, en esta calle?" (p. 83).

Terencio intuits, or imagines, the existence of malevolent patterns in his life, patterns which he neither understands nor controls. Paranoia is also evoked by coincidences which the narrator's fears convert into mysterious and menacing patterns. As Terencio looks at old photos after Sarro has been hospitalized, he makes random coincidences seem purposeful and menacing:

> . . .y febrilmente evocamos un pasado de rostros y actitudes que se alzaban frente a nosotros para desvanecerse rápidamente. ¿Cuántas estúpidas situaciones, como esa de hablar alrededor del casicadaver del gordo, por ejemplo, no caían dentro de un esquema trazado por otros? ¿Qué poníamos en acción al recrear esas imágenes

> familiares, al encender los cigarros, al repasar la lengua por una muela enferma simultáneamente a centenares de chinos que en su República Popular pasaban o pasan sus lenguas amarillas por muelas enfermas? (p. 71)

Terencio suspects that the "stupid situations" in which he is involved are part of a plan outlined by some mysterious "others." However, since he does not know the whole pattern, his own role in it seems arbitrary and meaningless. It is probably statistically inevitable that at any given moment there are hundreds of Chinese lighting cigarettes or running their tongues over aching teeth. Yet Terencio sees in this apparent coincidence an obscure, menacing pattern.

Like the concept of events as ambiguous and elusive, the idea of the trap is sometimes expressed symbolically. During one of his ritual baths with Donají, Terencio describes "una mancha de jabón extendiéndose sobre el agua como un animal de incertidumbre, envolviéndome, tocándome por todas partes" (p. 193). This idea of an amorphous mass which envelops him reflects Terencio's fear of his inability to place the events of his life in some meaningful order.

A more complex symbolic evocation of the idea of life as a trap is found in the last chapter. Terencio is filled with fear of the gangsters in the plane and of the violent death that he believes awaits him. He desperately tries to evoke some image of the past, a concrete memory of a face or a thing. However, he is unable to summon anything but words. Finally he makes a supreme effort and succeeds

in recalling Lalka's face. There follows a fantasy scene in which he goes with Lalka to a hospital. All the doors are white, but they stop in front of the door which is whitest and as they look in the room they see a strange and terrifying sight:

> Tericio está al fondo, sobre una camisa destendida, con la mirada fija en las puntas de sus pies, como drogado, su piel cobriza y sin alegría, sin inquietudes. Para él la vida fue una trampa, dije o comencé a decir. Una perversa trampa. . .Y él estaba allí, ignorándonos, cabezón y con ojos enormes (p. 249).

Tericio is the mentally retarded son of Terencio and Leticia Leteo. He may also be a projection of Terencio himself, as Caram has suggested.[8] Thus Terencio the observer observes the other, autistic Terencio: mute, trapped in his fixed gaze. At the same time, the presence of Lalka in the fantasy and the similarity between the imaginary hospital and Sarro's hospital room suggest that Sarro is in some mysterious way involved in Terencio's entrapment.

Terencio's conviction that he is surrounded by traps is not entirely without objective foundation. In his paranoia he invents some dangers and exaggerates others, but there are in fact episodes in which Terencio is trapped by other characters. The numerous tricks and traps that Sarro has used in carrying out his assassination assignments, while not usually aimed at Terencio, are nevertheless described in such detail that they remind the reader of the constant possibility of treachery. Papá la Oca

represents a subdued but pervasive menace throughout the novel, and Sarro embodies the constant threat of unexpected violence.

Terencio falls into a real trap during the party at the López Santos apartment in Acapulco. Twice he is lured by his ex-wife into a closet where she has laid a kind of sexual trap for him. Afterwards, he is suddenly pounced upon and beaten by the other guests in a bizarre "game" which ends with Terencio's complete humiliation as he is taunted in front of the other guests by Leticia. This episode is an inversion of Terencio's activities in The Crypt, and is another example of how the hunter may unexpectedly become the hunted. Terencio, who photographs the voyeurs in The Crypt, is himself photographed and mocked by Leticia.

In addition to the interplay between observer and observed and the trap motif, Terencio's tenuous grip on events is expressed by the frequent merging of reality and fantasy. The opening lines of the first chapter present an interesting example of this phenomenon. The first sentence is a translation into Spanish of the first sentence of Joyce's Ulysses. We learn that the narrator is reading this novel, and his reading is interrupted by the arrival of Sarro. The description of Sarro as he enters the apartment is a distorted version of the visual image evoked by the first sentence of Ulysses. Buck Mulligan

is "bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed;"[9] Sarro is described like this: "sus hinchados, torcidos brazos de tubo de desagüe muestran una bandeja rebosante de ropa sucia sobre la cual brillan dos recipientes de rapé, ¿o tres?" (p. 15). This passage suggests some kind of merging of the fictional world of Ulysses with the narrator's immediate surroundings. Does the narrator simply use language reminiscent of Ulysses because he has been reading this novel, or does the visual image evoked in Terencio's mind by reading the first sentence of Ulysses somehow insinuate itself into his "real" environment? It is impossible to say, but the implication is that the two levels of experience--literary and external--are equally real. This description of Sarro is interesting from a technical point of view as well. There seems to be an after-image of Buck Mulligan which persists in the narrator's mind after he has stopped reading the book. Thus we see the importance of film techniques from the very beginning of the novel, for it is this "persistence of vision" from one image to the next which creates the illusion of movement in films.[10]

At the López Santos party there is another example of the subtle merging of reality and fantasy. Terencio tires of the cocktail-hour chatter of the guests and decides to go upstairs to the bedroom. After a glance at his military identification card triggers a flashback to his days

as a conscript, he falls onto the bed, which is covered with the coats of the guests. He describes a few of the things in the room, and then addresses Yin by name. There follows a description of a seduction, in the course of which Terencio says to Yin: "Y me acerqué y acaricié y dije te amo te amo cerrando los ojos y comencé a besarte, a envolverte en palabras como si fueras una pura invención verbal y al callar desaparecieras de golpe" (p. 127). The reader is likely to accept the description of the seduction as readily as the previous description of the objects in the room. Shortly thereafter, however, we learn that the narrator is alone in the room, and that the seduction has been a fantasy. The narrator's fear that Yin would disappear if he stopped talking is therefore quite appropriate and, incidentally, rather amusing. This narrative procedure might be described as a good-natured trap into which the reader inevitably falls, but the relevant point is the merging of fantasy and reality without guidelines from the narrator.

Narrative techniques borrowed from the cinema are particularly effective in expressing the disorientation that Terencio feels. Episodes that arouse anxiety in the narrator, such as Sarro's stroke and the events surrounding it, are presented by means of a montage in which several different things are occurring simultaneously and are superimposed on one another. The effect is to force the

reader to share Terencio's confusion. In the meantime, of course, the reader has a very difficult time determining exactly what has happened, and the technique might easily be taken to extremes which would render the whole work virtually unreadable. But Sainz is careful to maintain a balance between bewildering the reader and helping him along, and the evocation of Terencio's chaotic perceptions is in any case more important than any particular detail of the plot.

The sense of instability and fear which Terencio experiences is created by conceptual inversions like the observer-observed motif and the trap motif, by the merging of reality and fantasy, and by narrative and linguistic devices which produce uncertainty and express paranoia. There are a few defenses that Terencio uses in struggling against the overwhelming flux of his experience. Before examining them, however, it should be noted that the ambiguity which pervades the entire novel applies also to Terencio's struggle. It would be quite inaccurate to think of Terencio as a resolute man trapped in a situation against which he struggles valiantly. The fact is that Terencio is rather slothful, and indifference is at least as important in his personality as anguish. In addition to his lassitude, he is also uncertain about whether he really wants to escape, either from his job with Papá la Oca or from his constant descents into obsessive behavior.

Still, he makes an effort to stabilize his experience and to escape from the disintegration that he feels is overcoming him.

The most obvious defense Terencio uses is literature. Like the other principal characters, the narrator is an avid reader. Like the others, he frequently compares his own experiences to those he has read about in novels. However, it is an exaggeration to say that the lives of the characters are "pure literature," as one critic believes, and that the characters are known to us not by what they say but by what they quote.[11] In one sense, the characters' frequent quotations of literary works is simply another example of the obsessive behavior which they all engage in. Passages like the one in the last chapter in which Terencio compares his life to "una acumulación de citas, conversaciones, palabras ajenas, párrafos sueltos, preocupaciones sin sentido" (p. 252) should not be interpreted in isolation. They do not imply that Terencio thinks of himself as a literary character in the Pirandellian style, but rather that he perceives his past life as extremely disconnected and disorderly. The references to "palabras ajenas" and "párrafos sueltos" again emphasize the effect of considering things in isolation: they are rendered meaningless and unreal.

For Terencio, literature is a source of stability. He depends on literature to provide fixed reference points

in his otherwise chaotic existence. He even takes pleasure in the material qualities of the volume of Ulysses as he holds it in his hands: "Extraño el peso y grosor del libro, la temperatura que le di con las manos" (p. 18). Terencio's dependence can be seen not only in his remarks about the books he reads, but also in the important role that the reading of books plays in the structure of the novel. The reading of Ulysses is a leitmotif which helps to unify the narration, at least in the first part of the novel. The descriptions of pre-Hispanic Mexico in Lecturas Históricas Mexicanas,[12] which are quoted extensively in the second chapter, provide the backdrop for much of the social satire with which that chapter is largely concerned. Terencio's readings of these works gives a sense of purpose and direction to the first two chapters. Even Ulysses, however, is sometimes ineffective against the panic the narrator feels:

> regresé al Ulysses. Pero apenas lo tomé desconocí la velocidad de mi pulso, ¿temblaba? Abrí el volumen, tal parece que sólo para ver desvanecerse lo leído. No conseguía dilucidar páginas enteras, las frases terminaban a media letra, los protagonistas parloteaban de manera ininteligible o se multiplicaban hasta el mareo (p. 37).

In the third chapter Terencio's life becomes noticeably more chaotic. Things seem to be disintegrating rapidly, and there is no literary work that he reads regularly. The literary references in this chapter are mainly

to works which present life as a kind of maze. During the orgy at Leticia's apartment, Terencio describes the two highly experimental "novels" he has written. In the first, all the words were arranged alphabetically and numbered, so that the reader must re-arrange them into their original order on a blank notebook which is conveniently supplied with the novel. In the second of Terencio's works, he wrote nineteen hundred sentences and had one sentence printed on each of nineteen hundred copies, in its exact position on the right page and with the rest of the book blank. Thus, in order to read the novel, all of the nineteen hundred purchasers must get together and read their sentences in the proper order.

This passage is clearly satirical. Terencio is talking to upper middle class friends of Leticia, and when one of them inquires whether all the copies have been sold, the narrator replies: "bueno, quedan algunos, aunque se cotizan a precio de secretos de espionaje, comprenda, son cosas insólitas para burguesitos intelectuales" (p. 212). The point, however, is that when literature is reduced to such esoteric games it ceases to provide the kind of support that Terencio once found in Ulysses. In their concentration on the tricks inherent in the novel form, Terencio's "novels" resemble the mindless focusing on one sentence which ends the novel. Literature has changed from a defense against chaos to a further manifestation of chaos.

This transformation can be seen in Terencio's propensity for comparing himself and other characters to fictional characters, which contributes to the intermingling of reality and fantasy. In the most extreme case Terencio comes to think of his own life as a movie, and describes it in the same way he used to describe other movies during his days as a film censor. In the last chapter, when trapped aboard the airliner with Papá la Oca's thugs, he imagines a movie whose plot corresponds with his own life:

> La película Obsesivos días circulares (Años fantasmas), editada en México, contenida, con títulos explicativos en, con, producida y dirigida por, distribuida y exportada por, con domicilio en, supervisada por/ La acción se desarrolla en un avión que vuela sobre la República Mexicana. ¿Quién puede sintetizar algo tan sin pies ni cabeza? Todos los pasajeros participan en un secreto común, excepto el narrador, quien lo intuye. Son bandoleros, pistoleros o policías y desarrollan conversaciones circunstanciales. El protagonista pretende intervenir, convencido de que jamás podría embeberse en un libro que carga sobre las rodillas, o en una carta a medio escribir que ya se ha guardado en el bolsillo. (p. 244)

By his description of his immediate environment as though it were fictional, Terencio is clearly trying to diminish the fear he feels at being surrounded by thugs. Yet his fantasy is no less threatening than the "real" situation.

Terencio also relies on language in a general sense as a source of order. There are several direct references to language which suggest the magical creative power of words. One is the episode already discussed in which Terencio maintains his tenuous hold on the sexual fantasy involving

Yin, only to see it disappear when he stops talking. In another case, immediately after Sarro's stroke the narrator describes Yin as she stands over her paralyzed lover: "rezaba junto al gordo, o le hablaba, lo envolvía en palabras, como si al amparo de sílabas afectuosas, imperceptibles, tal vez ni siquiera pronunciadas, aquel redondo cuerpo fuera a animarse, quejándose quizás, lentamente" (p. 79).

However, in general Terencio does not rely on words alone but rather on the memories that words evoke. The distinction is crucial, for when words are separated from the images they evoke they become meaningless and even destructive. Language triggers memories for Terencio, images of the past which somehow validate his present experience. Once, while sitting in the office of the school principal, Terencio feels a profound sense of order in which all his experiences and appetites "se distribuyen en delicado equilibrio dentro de un esquema mnemotécnico muy bien controlado" (p. 173). This orderliness of memory is particularly reassuring for the narrator, but even disorderly memories are comforting, so long as they are detailed: "Sonreí a las imágenes que volvían, precisas y regocijantes, sin orden pero con detalles como las manos de Leticia recorriéndome, su boca, las pequeñas cicatrices alrededor de la cintura" (p. 189).

As the control of his language begins to slip away from him it becomes more and more difficult for him to achieve the temporary respite from chaos which memory provides. The close relationship between these two processes of disintegration can be clearly seen in the orgy which takes place at Leticia's apartment in the third chapter (pp. 208-17). Terencio finds little comfort in the false comradeship of the other guests, and in an effort to achieve "cierta serenidad" he tries to recover some images of the past:

> el problema, apremiante ahora, de recuperar un pasado, varios años fantasmas que parecen borrarse por inumerables sortilegios, igual que centenares de argumentos fílmicos y la esencia de los libros, para no mencionar sus avatares. Total: enjuicio la existencia de la memoria; el problema de recordar no existe y plantearlo revela una sospechosa ingenuidad, una curiosa confianza en uno mismo, un serio optimismo que más vale ahogar en Grand Old Parr distilled and bottled in Scotland under British Government supervision (pp. 212-13).

Terencio's effort to evoke an image of the past fails, and he begins to confuse his own experiences with the plots of films he has seen and books he has read. The same thing happened to him earlier in the scene in which he speaks of a "delicate equilibrium within a well-controlled mnemonic system;" that hopeful passage deteriorated into a recitation of the titles of films he had seen with Leticia.

The final and complete separation of words from their meanings and from the memories they evoke occurs in the last chapter. Terencio's attempts to escape from his

threatening surroundings into memory produce only the fantasy of Tericio, his mentally retarded son. This scene is perhaps even more terrifying than his "real" situation. Finally he remarks: "Cuando se acerca el fin. . .ya no quedan imágenes del recuerdo; sólo quedan palabras. . .Y trato de no envolverme en palabras, de caer en recuerdos silenciosos y gratos" (p. 247). Of course, Terencio's fear is justified. His whole consciousness becomes filled with one meaningless sentence, which grows and grows until language has dissolved into a disintegrating graphic sign. The use of this typographical device to end the novel also invites less abstract interpretations. Perhaps the narrator really is killed by the gangsters on the plane, and the disintegrating "g" is the last visual image of his life.[13]

Terencio's unsuccessful struggle against chaos is one of the principal means by which he is characterized. Physical setting is also an important method of characterization. As Wellek and Warren point out, "domestic interiors may be viewed as metonymic, or metaphoric, expressions of character."[14] The school complex in which much of the action takes place has a number of unusual and revealing features. The peep-holes leading from Terencio's apartment to Sarro's suggest Terencio's fascination with the sixty-year-old gangster, and also with sex, since the holes are used principally to observe the sexual activities of

the narrator's neighbors. Sarro's apartment is filthy and cluttered, and on the wall there is a blow-up of a photograph of Sarro and Papá la Oca shaking hands. This suggests the omnipresence of Papá la Oca's influence. The Crypt, with its black curtains and one-way mirror, is an appropriately sinister setting for the voyeurism and blackmail which take place there, and intensifies the unfavorable light in which the spectators are presented by emphasizing their fear of being exposed. In the same way, the luxuriousness of the López Santos apartment in Acapulco reinforces the social criticism inherent in the scenes which take place there.

Several of the characters are referred to by a number of different names, usually humorous and suggestive of their personalities or of Terencio's attitude toward them. As in Cabrera Infante's Tres tristes tigres, the use of different names for the same character conveys a sense of constant change and upheaval. Sarro's name clearly suggests his repulsive character, and he is also known as Gordopótamo, Gordofofo, Ultragordo, Dinosarro, Sarroglobo, and El Barrilento, all of which suggest either his grotesque physical qualities or the mixture of fear and fascination which he evokes in the narrator. Lalka is referred to by names which indicate her innocence and Terencio's sexual interest in her: Virgencita, Trusita, Piernas de Terciopelo, Niña inmaculable. Other examples of onomastic invention

simply exemplify the linguistic playfulness that Sainz exhibits in all his novels: Tobías Dorleado is Toby, Joby, Jobías, Jobitos, Jorobas, Jorobados, Jobías Epicto. Papá la Oca's name is sinister because of its ironic contrast with his personality.

In a first-person novel like Obsesivos días circulares, the narrator can characterize himself not only by conscious and direct means, but also indirectly and sometimes unconsciously. The reader learns what the narrator is like by considering his descriptions of other characters and his reactions to them, his selection of things to include in the narration, and the style and language in which he expresses himself.[15] As a highly self-conscious narrator, Terencio does occasionally make direct comments about his own personality. In describing a photo of the spectators in The Crypt, after outlining what will presumably be their fate at the hands of Papá la Oca, Terencio remarks:

> Y en la foto impresa provisionalmente se ven demasiado estúpidos, demasiado enfermos, demasiado morbosos, demasiado imprevisores, demasiado cobardes, demasiado capaces de contentarse con un espectáculo que no los colma, demasiado como nosotros mismos. (p. 167)

Because all of the other characters are seen through Terencio's eyes, the clarity of their characterization varies with Terencio's perception of them, and is frequently revealing of his personality. Some of the characters, like Sarro and Leticia, are drawn in bold strokes and are described in considerable physical detail. This suggests the

immense and intrusive presence of Sarro in the first part of the novel and the narrator's sexual fascination with Leticia. Papá la Oca, on the other hand, is deliberately kept in the background and is usually described only in veiled allusions, reflecting the vague menace which he represents for the narrator. Many of the physical descriptions of the characters seem out of balance or out of focus, emphasizing a few characteristics disproportionately and so suggesting Terencio's reactions. The physical description of Lalka is limited to her lips, thighs, breasts, and legs, which are described at length as they are seen through the narrator's peep-holes or in his fantasies. The young schoolgirls often seem like projections of Terencio's sexual fantasies, and the emphasis on sexual characteristics of Yin, Lalka, Leticia, and Donají clearly express the narrator's lustfulness.

The descriptions of Sarro are particularly revealing of the narrator's personality. Paradoxically, Terencio's relationship with Sarro is one of the fixed points that he uses in his effort to get a grip on his life. The paradox lies in the fact that Sarro is extremely unpredictable, and in the obvious ambiguity of the narrator's attitude toward him. Terencio is both repulsed and fascinated by Sarro, and this ambivalence is expressed in descriptions which combine ludicrous and threatening elements to produce a grotesque effect. In the opening vignette, Sarro

is described as "un oso gigantesco, blando, gordo, ciego, y sin pelo" (p. 9). Everything about the gangster is overblown and outlandish: he is compared to a huge amoeba, he has dead zombie eyes and a slack mouth. He has two ways of speaking: "Una: palabras deformadas al pasar por los labios secos y semiabiertos; o dos: palabras atropellándose para vencer el bloqueo de la estática sonrisa y salir a trompicones" (p. 33). In most of the descriptions there is a suggestion of the latent violence of Sarro's personality, as well as an indication of Terencio's ambivalence. In the following passage the narrator is clearly revolted, yet he exhibits a strange fascination:

> Me faltaba valor para mirar a Gordopótamo retadoramente: su satisfacción y mal gusto a cuestas, como el cadáver de un vietnamés, el saco de piel de antílopes--un centenar de antílopes, por lo menos--, y la ridícula corbata de moño, angosta al centro y dura como una hélice, para no hablar de su pesada y calva cabeza descansando sobre rollos de grasa. . .ni de su expresión principal: hosca, ausente, más patética que misteriosa pero misteriosa y amenazadora, cómico y cruel a un tiempo. . .Comía y bebía como un enorme perro, eructando con frecuencia. (p. 22)

This passage comes close to caricature, yet Sarro's violence is very real and always close to the surface. Sometimes it breaks out unexpectedly, reinforcing the paranoia of the narrator and the atmosphere of menace and danger which pervades the novel. Early in the first chapter, after eating dinner in Terencio's apartment, Sarro goes to a window and sees a rat across the courtyard. He suddenly pulls

out his pistol and kills the animal--"despanzurrar" is the verb the narrator uses--in a gratuitous outburst of violence.

Throughout the first chapter Sarro is a dominating influence on Terencio's life. When Sarro suffers a stroke and is taken to the hospital, Terencio begins to realize the extent to which his daily schedule and his attitudes have depended on Sarro. The uncertainty as to whether Sarro will live or die has an unsettling effect on the narrator and also on Donají and Yin: "Teníamos necesidad de Sarro, de algo contundente que acabara con él o nos lo devolviera, no que ese compás de espera, semejantes puntos suspensivos, este paréntesis: coño" (pp. 83-84). A more indirect suggestion of Sarro's role as a fixed reference point for the narrator is found in the second chapter, as Terencio describes the unconscious Sarro in a flashback to the hsopital room:

> Y el gordo en el hospital, como una montaña en un paisaje de José María Velasco, el blanco e imponente Popocatépeptl, o las accitadas cumbres del Iztaccíhuatl, nuestros ojos revisándolo desde atrás de una puerta de vidrio: las agrestes arrugas, cañadas de lana y comezón, la carne brillante y la cabezota redonda y fuerte como las cabezas gigantes de Tula, grises y petrificadas al pie de las pirámides. (p. 157)

In his comparison of Sarro to the volcanos and to the huge pre-Hispanic heads of Tula, Terencio implies that Sarro's presence is a stabilizing influence as well as a disruptive one. The same idea is expressed a few pages later as Terencio laments the "ausencia de Sarro y presencia de

nuevas responsabilidades" (p. 160).

Terencio's descriptions of Sarro's political activities further illuminate the mixture of fear and fascination which the gangster evokes. We learn that after a brief youthful association with the Communist Party, Sarro served as a bodyguard for a number of important politicians, committing murders and landing in jail several times. In 1956 he shaved his head, vowing not to let his hair grow again until the death of Fidel Castro. In 1963 he was jailed for a particularly bloody murder, but was secretly released by the government so that his talents might be employed in officially sanctioned brutality. These facts are reported directly by the narrator and are supported by numerous anecdotes in which Sarro kills peasants, tortures political prisoners, and generally does the dirty work for the political interest groups supported by Papá la Oca. Although Terencio is occasionally horrified by the details of Sarro's atrocities, in general he is indifferent. Indeed, it would be difficult for him to condemn Sarro, since he makes his own living by aiding in the perpetuation of Papá la Oca's power.

Except in flashbacks and brief allusions, Sarro does not appear after the end of the first chapter. However, we learn that instead of dying he is gradually recovering, and the possibility of his return hangs in the air as a threat which is unresolved at the end of the novel. On a

symbolic plane this suggests the permanence of violence as a political tool. Although Sarro is too complex to be described as a symbol of a particular political position, his personality clearly suggests the corruption and repression by force which often function behind the democratic facade of official Mexico. Particularly illuminating in this respect is an episode in which, during a political demonstration, five young students take refuge from the police by coming onto the school grounds. They have the same names as some of the characters in Gazapo, and seem in many respects like younger, less cynical versions of Terencio himself. After offering them drinks and sympathetically discussing their political views with them, Sarro cynically turns them over to the police, who take them away in paddy wagons. Terencio disapproves, but his disapproval is not strong enough to cause him to leave the service of Papá la Oca. In the same way, when he finally decides to resign it is not from outrage at the social injustice which Papá la Oca's organization protects, but from his fear of vengeance when the loss of Sarro's notebook and the accident in The Crypt are discovered.

One critic has commented that the central character of Obsesivos días circulares is surrounded by "cierto número de comparsas que sirven para delinearlo y destacarlo."[16] Although this critic mistakenly asserts that Sarro is the central character, when in fact it is Terencio, his

suggestion that all the other characters are "comparsas" and are subordinated to the characterization of the protagonist is partly correct. Sarro is in part a projection of Terencio's fear and paranoia; Leticia is the object of his lust and brings out his masochism, while López Santos and the spectators in The Crypt externalize his self-contempt and his acquisitive urges. Donají, the narrator's wife, is the most shadowy of the major characters. She seems to embody Terencio's frustrated domestic inclinations and his intellectual and literary eccentricity.

All of the dialogue in the novel is incorporated without clarifying punctuation into the narrator's enormous monologue. Nevertheless, the characters can be distinguished from one another by the way they speak. Sarro can be identified by his frequently humorous combinations of highly literate allusions and gutter slang; Leticia laces her speech with many obscenities and her tone is sarcastic and taunting. The former acquaintance whom Terencio meets in a taxi speaks with the vocabulary and rhythms of the lower classes of urban Mexico, as do the thugs in the final chapter. A clear social distinction is evident between their manner of speaking and that of the architects, with their cynical, sometimes polished echoings of the political and cultural commonplaces of the Mexican bourgeoisie. There are passages which in their style and rhythm seem to prefigure the speech patterns of La princesa del Palacio de

Hierro. Yin, who is ordinarily not at all talkative, breaks down after Sarro's stroke and launches into the following monologue about her family's reaction to Sarro (note the abrupt transition in speaker from Terencio to Yin):

> Meses de silencio y monosílabos que se convertían en una telenovela con teléfonos que sonaban y ¿sabe que su hija anda con marihuanos?, ¿sabe que el amante de su hija mató a mis hijos? Y no había nadie en la casa, se habían ido todos y ya lo había pensado un poco mejor, esa vez no le abriría dije, y el timbre se retorcía en mi cuerpo, me latigueaba y hacía hervir la sangre, las manos y ya estás grandecita me decía, ya estás crecida, ya puedes respetar una decisión, no puedes comportarte como una recién nacida, se trata de no abrir y basta con eso. (p. 95)

Like the other characters, Terencio reveals himself at least partially by the kind of language he uses. There are occasions when he comments directly on his own choice of words, thus emphasizing his extreme self-consciousness as a narrator. During a visit to the hospital to see Sarro, Yin drops a pack of cigarettes, and the narrator remarks: "Yin dejó caer la cajetilla y me incliné a recogerla: cilindros blancos sobre la alfombra hermatológica. ¿Cilindros blancos? Puta madre, y ¿por qué no cigarros?" (p. 185). This interest in observing himself in the act of narrating is another indication of Terencio's obsessive introspection.

Punctuation is manipulated to alter the normal rhythms of speech and make them correspond with the subject being described. In the opening vignette Yin gives the following description of the images that cross her mind while making

love to Sarro: "Vi a un hombre, por ejemplo--inhalando--; y exhalando luego, que se arrojaba desesperado; y aspirando, contra las paredes de un hospital; y suspirando, lleno de luz. Por espasmos" (p. 9). The jerky rhythm and distorted syntax suggest the image of a man jerking spasmodically. On a larger scale, contrasting narrative rhythms are used in two sections of the third chapter. Twice Terencio travels by car across Mexico City. The first time he is driven by Leticia, who drives recklessly and rapidly, nearly colliding with several cars along the way. Later, when Terencio is in a hurry to return to the school to examine the damage done by Lalka in breaking the mirror in The Crypt, he goes by taxi. A man whom Terencio knows slightly gets in the cab with him and regales him with anecdotes about the cruelty of Sarro and Papá la Oca. The cab gets caught in a traffic jam and the journey seems endless. The reckless speed of the first journey contrasts with Terencio's hesitation about seeing Leticia again, while the extreme slowness of the second trip contrasts with his desire to get home quickly.

The very large number of linguistic games and tricks, both semantic and typographical, help to characterize Terencio by emphasizing the importance of words themselves without reference to their meaning. This process converts language into a trap from which the narrator cannot escape and which expresses his sense of isolation. The power of

words can be creative, but it can also destroy. At times there is a suggestion that words may somehow reproduce themselves uncontrollably, slipping out of the narrator's hands and propelling themselves along until they are forcibly stopped. Typographical tricks help to suggest the breakdown of language as a means of communication. Here the narrator trails off into a series of phonetic variations:

. . .y la lucha en silencio, jo-
doos
o
oo
quo
jo
dos
o
oo
homo
do
dos
o
ooo
ros
go
ños
oo
o
brozos
ooo
bosos
o
oo
movoo
so o
longuo
oo
ooo
oo
o
o
o (pp. 185-6)

This passage occurs while the narrator is visiting Sarro in the hospital, and may represent the groaning of the invalid gangster. It may also be an attempt to portray the disconnected psychological process of the narrator. In either case, certain words are discernible: "quojodos" (quejidos), "homododos" (húmedos), "rosgoños" (rasguños), "brozos" (brazos), "bosos" (besos), "movoo so o longuo" (moveo sólo lengua).

Another example of linguistic game-playing involving codes, and also suggesting Terencio's self-consciousness as a narrator, occurs in a letter to Tobías Dorleado at the beginning of the second chapter. This time the game is "fill in the blanks," and it is impossible to resist the inference that Sainz is spoofing the contemporary tendency, which he fully shares, of involving the reader in the composition of the novel:

> Pinche Jobías: acabamos de llegar al bello y siempre mal ponderado puerto de . . . . .(pon el nombre correcto). Hicimos seis horas de viaje en el camión glande (léase grande): el 4, precaución escolar; el 6, alto total al cruzar las avenidas; el 8, encierro en Nápoles 59 (señala la frase correcta). (p. 101)

And later:

> Llegué hecho cisco (que es mi manera de decir completamente completamente completamente jodido: y perdona que no te deje oportunidad de elegir pero ¿cómo diablos vas a saber cómo llegué? (p. 101)

The use of newspaper headlines printed in capital letters is another typographical device that can aid in character-

ization. Throughout the first chapter, Terencio and the others read the headlines of the many newspaper clippings that are tacked on the walls. Terencio's interior monologues are interrupted as the other characters read the headlines, suggesting the way in which the external environment is intruding only intermittently on the narrator's reveries. As the novel goes on, Terencio sometimes describes his own experiences as though he had read about them in a newspaper. When he meets his first wife by chance at the airport he remarks: "ENCUENTRO INESPERADO EN EL AEROPUERTO. Ciudad de México (UPI)" (p. 56). This device underlines the narrator's feeling of detachment from his surroundings and his perception of his experiences as unreal or as unrelated to him personally.

These typographical devices, along with the use of foreign words (English, French, Portuguese, German, Latin), are elements of what Sainz has called the "texture" of the novel: "la novela está contada en varios planos de lenguaje, en diversas tensiones, y aún más, en algo que yo llamo 'textura'. Esto es, un dibujo sobre la página hace la velocidad de la prosa o el uso de mayúsculas o paréntesis o portugués o latín, y sobre la mente también, un dibujo que el tono narrativo hace en nosotros."[17] The many allusions to literary works and quotations from them also form part of the texture of the novel. It is interesting that the concept of "texture" is also used, mutatis mutandis,

in film criticism. Directors such as Jean-Luc Godard have been criticized for their use of literary, cultural, and historical allusions not logically integrated into the narrative and into the psychology of the characters. While these allusions, considered individually, may be only idiosyncratic manifestations of taste or intellectual autobiography, in their totality they may reflect an ambivalence toward society. One critic has said of Godard that while he "manifests a documentarist's concern for the real, he seems at the same time to harbor an almost neurotic abhorrence for the reality he deals with."[18] In Obsesivos días circulares this abhorrence is also evident and is expressed by the futile effort to escape into the world of literature.

Although the main focus of Obsesivos días circulares is on the psychological tension within the narrator, social and political criticism and satire are also prominent. The cultural pretensions of López Santos and his friends are lampooned without resorting to caricature or invective. The pathetic spectators in The Crypt, sexually repressed and cowardly, are depicted with contempt tempered by the narrator's honest recognition that he shares many of their disagreeable qualities. They too are victims of Papá la Oca. The sharpest criticism is reserved for Sarro and Papá la Oca. These ruthless gangsters, whose hatred of leftists and of peasants is virulent and obsessive, rely on officially sanctioned violence to maintain their

privileges and to protect those of the wealthy classes. They are, as Caram has observed, "the god-like powers that control the rest of the kosmos and threaten the continued existence of the others."[19] There is great irony in the use of a religious school for girls as a front for the violent and treacherous activities of Sarro and Papá la Oca. Terencio's half-hearted efforts to escape from the influence of Papá la Oca are futile. In an interview given while he was writing the novel, Sainz said:

> Es una novela sobre los abusos del poder, sobre la violencia urbana, sobre la educación en México, sobre la aniquilación de la pareja en pro del grupo erótico, sobre obsesiones de toda índole y desde luego sobre el problema mismo de la novela, la validez de la belleza literaria y la inutilidad de la denuncia.[20]

Sainz has also described Obsesivos días circulares as a "novela de lenguaje."[21] This is true, but the statement requires elaboration. Clearly, the artful use of language to express themes and effect characterization is not sufficient to make a novel into a "novel of language." Language is a theme in Obsesivos días circulares, but its importance is not only thematic. The narrator's grip on reality is maintained through language. His loss of control over the language he uses causes, and at the same time reflects, the disintegration of his psychological experience.

CHAPTER FOUR

LA PRINCESA DEL PALACIO DE HIERRO: THE MONK AND THE PRINCESS

La princesa del Palacio de Hierro[1] was published at the end of 1974 amid one of the most extensive publicity campaigns ever undertaken in behalf of a Mexican novel. The author traveled to Brazil, Argentina, and the United States to give public readings of selections from the novel. A number of artists had prepared illustrations for the work, and these were so numerous that an exhibition of them was held in a Mexico City art gallery. This exhibition attracted large crowds and received newspaper coverage which would certainly not have been given to a novel released in the ordinary way. The Palacio de Hierro, which is a department store in Mexico City, agreed to promote the novel and supplied four models to assist Sainz in a two-week personal appearance.

This emphasis on publicity clearly indicates that Sainz was trying to reach a larger reading public than had been attracted to Obsesivos días circulares. The latter novel, despite its many virtues, has not been a commercial success. At the time of this writing (1977), it has been reprinted only once (1974). La princesa del Palacio de Hierro, on the other hand, has been reprinted four times in the two years since its release, and an

English translation is being prepared. Reasons for the difference in popularity are found not only in the publicity campaign but also in the nature of the works themselves. Obsesivos días circulares is a highly experimental novel employing complex contemporary techniques and containing a large number of cultural and literary references likely to be understood only by a highly educated readership. The narrator of Obsesivos días circulares is extremely introspective and self-conscious, and his ruminations impede the smooth flow of the narrative and obscure the outlines of the plot. The reader is required to make a considerable effort in order to piece together the plot, and may not be able to do so without a second or even a third reading.

La princesa del Palacio de Hierro presents very few obstacles to the reader. With a few exceptions, the vocabulary and syntax are elementary and uncomplicated. It is never difficult to tell what is going on or who is speaking. Cultural and literary references are limited to the worlds of television, the movies, and comic books. The things that interest the narrator are likely to interest large numbers of people: gossip about love affairs and friends, glamorous parties and trips to Europe. The narrator herself is not particularly unusual, except perhaps because of the extraordinary careers of some of her friends and because of the wealthy, sophisticated circles in which she travels. Undoubtedly, many people have been

able to see in the narrator characteristics shared by people they know personally. It would be much more difficult to feel this identification with the narrator of Obsesivos días circulares, whose occupation and interests seem more perverted than appealing.

Two other characteristics of the novel contribute to its wide appeal. First, La princesa del Palacio de Hierro is a very funny novel. The sources of humor will be discussed at some length later on, but they can be divided generally into humor of language, of character, and of situation. The tone of the humor is more akin to that of Gazapo than to the cynical black humor of Obsesivos días circulares. Second, the reader's interest is maintained by the fact that something is always happening. There are very few lengthy descriptions of people or places, and little space is devoted to the exposition of character except by means of anecdotes. As in a popular mystery or adventure novel, every chapter contains rapid action scenes. Automobile wrecks, wild journeys through the streets of Mexico City at 140 kilometers per hour, murders, rapes, bizarre confrontations in night clubs and restaurants follow one another in rapid succession. The narrator's enthusiastic descriptions of such events hold the reader's interest, and also serve a more subtle end in the characterization of the Princess. As will be seen, her enthusiasm is part of an effort to keep boredom, or perhaps emptiness,

at arm's length.

The novel consists of twenty-one chapters, each of which has a title and is followed by a passage in parentheses and quotation marks. These passages are sometimes in verse and sometimes in prose, and all are taken from the work of Oliverio Girondo, an Argentine poet of the 1930's. Their function is to provide a kind of poetic summary of the narrator's mood in a given chapter. For example, the fifth chapter ("En el Palacio de Hierro ganaba poquitísimo dinero") is primarily a description of a series of lovers' spats between the Princess and one of her boyfriends. The Princess is very angry, and the chapter ends with the following fine piece of contumely, quoted only in part:

> ("Que los ruidos te perforen los dientes como una lima de dentista; que te crezca en cada uno de los poros una pata de araña; que sólo puedas alimentarte de barajas usadas. . .que tu único entretenimiento consista en instalarte en la sala de espera de los dentistas, disfrazado de cocodrilo, y que te enamoras tan locamente de una caja de hierro que no puedas dejar, ni un solo instante, de lamerle la cerradura.") (p. 85)

The chapter titles are a mixed lot. Two of them are quotations from Girondo.[2] Of the rest, some seem to be clearly the work of the Princess: "¡Que se me caigan los dientes si miento!" (p. 155), "Tenía cara de Chivas Regal" (p. 44). Others do not sound like the narrator, and may be some of the unattributed quotations which Sainz attests to in a section called "Reconocimientos": "Algunos verbos castellanos conjugados" (p. 105), "Conjugaciones conyugales"

(p. 292). The chapter titles function in the traditional way, suggesting the contents or emphasis of the chapter in question. The novel ends with a quotation from Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot.

The narrator of La princesa del Palacio de Hierro is a woman in her early or middle thirties whose name the reader never discovers.[3] The title of the novel is an interesting combination of allusions to different periods of the narrator's life. "Princess" is a name the narrator's mother called her as a child, while the reference to the Palacio de Hierro belongs to a later period of her life, when she worked in this department store first as a salesgirl and later as a model. We learn that at the time of her narration the Princess is married, although we never discover the identity of her husband.

The novel is contrived as a very lengthy telephone conversation in which the Princess recalls events of her life beginning when she was about fifteen years old and extending up to the time of narration. The reader never hears the other side of the conversation, nor is the person to whom the Princess is speaking ever identified. It is obvious, however, that this passive interlocutor is a friend of the Princess and is familiar with many of the same people and places. This is clear not only from the use of the familiar tú, but also from a series of questions and comments which the Princess directs to her listener

and which assume a knowledge of certain areas of Mexico City and a familiarity with the narrator's friends. These questions and comments are fairly common at the beginning of the novel:

> ¿te acuerdas de Mercedes, la que era novia de mi hermano? (p. 9)
>
> al ladito de donde vivíamos, ¿nunca fuiste? (p. 30)
>
> Entonces nos ponemos a hablar de nuestras familias, de cosas que nos han pasado, ¿no? Como tú y yo. (p. 87)
>
> No sé si te acuerdas, pero llegaste a conocer mi casa del Pedregal, ¿verdad? (p. 121)

There are a few occasions in which the narrator's questions seem to imply that she is not speaking to her friend on the telephone, but rather in person: "Ves esta cicatriz. Pues es de esa vez. Fue una golpiza histórica" (p. 94). Sometimes the fictional listener seems to be used as an excuse to allow the Princess to say things that might otherwise seem too clever for her: "¿Fuiste tú quien dijo que el amor es la más conversadora de las pasiones?" (p. 44).

The comments and questions which assume a specific fictional listener diminish in frequency as the novel progresses and are accompanied by a large number of questions and exclamations of a more general sort. These are typically phrased in the tú form and call for listener participation or assent, but are sufficiently vague and rhetorical that they do not suggest a specific listener.

Among the most common of these verbal mannerisms of the Princess are: "¿Puedes creerlo?", "¿Te imaginas?", "¿No te importa que. . .?", "¿Verdad?", "¿No?", "Fíjate que. . .", "Imagínate. . .". These questions and commands are typical of oral speech, and certainly add to the verisimilitude of the Princess' narration. Because of their frequency, and because of the relative scarcity of questions which assume a specific listener, the reader is in a way invited to fill the role left vacant by the fictional listener. In other words, there is a tendency to eliminate one link in the chain of narration, and to feel that the Princess' story is coming directly from her to the reader. This may lead to a more intimate relationship between narrator and reader, although it can also be manipulated for ironic effect. The reader becomes accustomed to the assumed intimacy of this narrative relationship, then is brought up short by a question which does assume a specific listener. The effect is to intensify the awareness of the act of narration; or, to put it another way, the reader is suddenly confronted with the fact of artifice.

Like most modern novels, La princesa del Palacio de Hierro is characterized by the use of distributed rather than preliminary exposition. The exposition is woven into the main line of action "in the form of short alternating or even intermingling retrospective and anticipatory flashes. . .The focus of presentness shifts continually;

the relative pastness and presentness are deliberately dissolved; the tenses are confused or rather fused, so that the past is felt not as distinct from the present but included in it and permeating it."[4] The intermingling or fusion of past and present occurs in La princesa del Palacio de Hierro in spite of the fact that much of the novel takes place at least ten years before the time of narration, and in spite of the many elements which remind the reader of the temporal distance between the experiencing and the narrating self. For example, the ubiquitous expressions calling for listener assent or participation would seem to diminish the sense of presentness or immediacy in the description of past events by reminding the reader of the narrative situation, i.e., of the telephone call. Yet these expressions are so numerous that they soon lose their value as questions or commands and become simply verbal twitches or tics.

The frequent alternation of past and present grammatical tenses within the same passage, and sometimes even within a single sentence, adds to the sense of immediacy in descriptions of past events and diminishes the effect of intrusions by the narrating self. Often a passage in the present tense directed to the fictional listener will be followed by a description of a past event in which the verbs, at least for a time, remain in the present tense. In the following passage, for example, a long self-

justification in the present tense directed to the fictional listener leads into a description of a conversation in the past:

> Bueno, porque yo digo en mi persona, hablando dentro de mí, muchas cosas me han pasado, muchas cosas me han dolido y yo nunca podría ensañarme, digo, estar resentida contra otra persona durante años y años, de quien fuera, no importa si conocido o desconocido. . .Nunca me he atrevido a pensar que pudiera hacer mal a alguien. . .
> Entonces me dice. . .Entonces como que iban a sonar las palabras más terribles del mundo, ¿no? Entonces me dice ella, La Tapatía Grande, mi amiga de quince o más años, mi vecina, casi mi hermana, dice por qué me inventaste. . .(pp. 319-21)

Because of this virtual fusion of the narrating and experiencing present, there is a gradual change in the tone of the novel. This change corresponds to and is caused by the increasing disillusionment of the Princess and her frustration at her inability to define herself as a person. Although the Princess is not particularly introspective, she is extremely self-centered. In the first part of the novel, which focuses primarily on her adolescence and early twenties, the tone is carefree and enthusiastic. This reflects the young Princess' relative lack of concern for the question of her identity as a human being. She feels herself as part of an exciting and sophisticated group of people, although she is occasionally disturbed by what she perceives as their shallowness. As the novel progresses, and particularly in the last four

chapters, the Princess becomes more and more embittered about her life and its apparent lack of direction and focus. She sees her friends get married and quarrel with their husbands and wives, and she feels an increasing boredom with the pretentions of sophistication which she once admired so much. As we shall see, this sense of dissatisfaction does not lead her to greater honesty about herself, but rather to a retreat into childhood memories and sexual obsessions. The shifting tone suggests an identification between the narrating self and the different periods in the life of the experiencing self.

The social and economic environment in which the Princess lives, and in which most of the novel takes place, is quite different from those of Gazapo and Obsesivos días circulares. The Princess' family lives in Pedregal de San Ángel, an upper middle class residential district of Mexico City. Her father knows the President of the Republic, and a cabinet minister is a regular monthly guest for dinner. The Princess owns a car from the age of fifteen, even before she knows how to drive. When she begins to work in the Palacio de Hierro, it is not for economic reasons, but rather as an excuse to leave the house in order to meet her boyfriend whom her parents have forbidden her to see. In the course of the novel the Princess takes several trips to the United States and to Europe.

Most of the narrator's friends are also members of the upper middle class. Many of them are involved in marginally legal or plainly illegal but profitable activities such as smuggling and drug peddling. The Princess is rather proud of the fact that most of her friends are eccentric. Gabriel Infante, for example, is a dentist who also drives racing cars in professional competitions and is a stunt pilot. El Guapo Guapo, also known as El Loco Valdiosera, is a smuggler and drug peddler who always dresses in green. Toward the end of the novel he accepts a contract to kill a man in a steam bath, is jailed for eleven months, and while in prison proposes marriage to three different women, two of whom accept even though they know they will have to share him. "Por algo es el guapo guapo, ¿no?" (p. 301). Mauricio is a judo and karate expert, a drug addict, and owner of a lamp factory. El Monje, also called "El Obispo de los Camellos" and sometimes "Pancho," is an ex-seminarian who speaks four languages and is private secretary to the cabinet minister who regularly eats dinner in the Princess' home. He is a reluctant seducer of the Princess, constantly berating himself for the sinfulness of his carnal urges as he undresses her. Alexis Stamatis is a night-club owner from Acapulco whose brother, Carlos, is a champion water-skier.

The Princess' closest female friends are also rather odd. Two daughters of a wealthy Guadalajara industrialist

are known collectively as Las Tapatías, Las Tapaderas, or sometimes as "Las de Guadalajara pues." Individually they are referred to as La Tapatía Grande and La Tapatía Chica. Despite the wealth of their parents, they are so profligate that they constantly need to find men who can give them economic support. One of them works as a fashion writer for a Mexican magazine, and the other is a model. The Princess' closest friend is a slender woman always referred to as La Vestida de Hombre, because of her habit of wearing men's clothing. She is the daughter of a Jewish woman who survived the Nazi concentration camps. She is so nervous that she constantly breaks out in rashes, to which she applies ointment. For this reason she is sometimes called "La Reina de las Pomaditas." Her favorite activity is to make men fall in love with her, wait for them to propose marriage, then send them packing.

This is certainly an unusual group of friends, at least as unusual as the characters in Obsesivos días circulares. They live in an atmosphere of conspicuous consumption. The Princess accumulates this odd assortment of friends at least in part as a reaction against the traditional middle class social attitudes of her parents. Generally speaking, her parents do not approve of the company she keeps. The Princess describes her mother's attitude as follows:

Pero mi mamá era de esas gentes que no

> toleraban que me mezclara con gente diferente, no, quiero decir que anduviera con personas que ella no conociera, que ella no conociera a las familias, ¿no? Sobre todo tenían que ser aristócratas cien por ciento, porque si no, a ella no le parecía. Toda la gente que no se considerara aristocrata para mi mamá no tenía ningún valor. (pp. 91-92)

The narrator's father holds similar views, and this description of him might serve as an epitome of the respectable middle class Mexican father:

> Imagínate, para mi papá había dos clases de mujeres, nada más dos clases, categorías, o géneros: las muchachas buenas y las prostitutas, ¿no? Una muchacha buena, como yo, por ejemplo, nunca podía tener amigos que no conociera a la familia, tenía que salir sola y exclusivamente con un hombre, de quien tenía que mantenerse alejada sin, como decían las sirvientas y uno que otro cuate, caldear. A mis amigos los tenía que conocer en reuniones familiares, y nunca debía ir sola al cine, ni a bares, ni a fiestas. Para eso estaba mi hermano, para acompañarme. Incluso cuando salía con un muchacho me acompañaba mi hermano, tú. Mi padre oía música de Agustín Lara, y antes se iba a bailar con mi mamá al Ciro's. También imponía la idea de los placeres masculinos y algunas noches se esfumaba porque había box o porque era viernes y tenía parranda con sus ruidosos amigos: Los Chicos Malos. . . (p. 47)

When the Princess starts to go out with El Guapo Guapo, her uncle hires detectives to investigate his background. When the family discovers the unsavory activities in which El Guapo Guapo is involved they forbid the Princess to leave the house. It is then that she begins to work in the Palacio de Hierro, as a pretext to get out and meet El Guapo Guapo.

The Princess reacts strongly against these attitudes of her parents. She recognizes, with uncharacteristic open-mindedness, that her mother's attitudes derive from her difficult childhood. But she rejects the attitudes themselves, or at least she claims to reject them. Reactions by a younger generation against the entrenched social attitudes of their parents seldom produce more intelligent or tolerant substitutes, and the Princess' rebellion certainly does not lead her to a more mature way of evaluating people than the social and economic criteria used by her mother. The Princess is attracted to people who are flamboyant and unusual. She is impressed by flashy cars, expensive clothes, and adventurous activities like smuggling. Her way of judging people is, if anything, more superficial than that of her parents, and despite her protestations she often shares the same prejudices. Sometimes her friends and acquaintances seem to be chosen more for their shock value to her parents than out of any sincere interest. For example, she and her brother invite a troupe of twenty-one Cuban dancers to their home for dinner. All of the dancers are black. The Princess gleefully describes the scandalized reaction of her parents, but her own comment reveals the same kind of racism exhibited by her parents: "Entonces nos hicimos muy amigos mi hermano y yo de ellos. Puros negros. . .Horribles, ¿no?" (p. 21). The narrator claims to be attracted to "serious" people:

> Me gusta más la gente profunda, la gente que tiene cosas más adentro, que te deja adivinar que hay más y más, ¿me explico? Quiero decir. . .Me choca la gente superficial, no soporto a la gente superficial y tampoco me gusta la gente demasiado buena. Muy buena no me gusta la gente porque me da la impresión de que es débil. No me gusta la gente débil desde ningún punto de vista, y los hombres, bueno, me gusta que sean un poco cabrones. Cabrones es la palabra. (pp. 98-99)

It might be said that the Princess' friends fulfill the second of her requirements but not the first. With the possible exception of El Monje, whose personality at least suggests the possibility of self-analysis, the Princess' friends are all very superficial people. Their pretentions of liberal social attitudes are belied by their actions. Gabriel Infante's idea of rebellion against social norms is epitomized in the phrase "preferría vivir cinco días drogado que veinte años de pendejo" (p. 47). His attitude toward marriage, as we later discover, is extremely traditional, as is his belief that his many infidelities to the Princess when they are lovers are excused by his assurances that she is "la primera entre todas." Las Tapatías, who according to the narrator "han llevado una vida muy liberal," are scandalized when a friend of the Princess undresses in front of her young children.

In addition to their conspicuous consumerism and their hypocrisy with respect to established social mores, the Princess and her friends are extremely selfish and insensi-

tive to suffering in others. Examples of callousness and gratuitous cruelty abound in the novel. Frequently such incidents are accompanied by an atmosphere of subdued menace and the suggestion of random violence. La Vestida de Hombre, who for a time has an affair with the Princess' uncle, lives in a house he has bought for her. One day they have a quarrel and she pushes him backwards down the stairs. He crashes to the bottom, landing next to a small telephone table. He has broken bones and internal injuries, and is moaning and pleading for help. The telephone rings, and La Vestida de Hombre stands right next to her injured lover and talks on the telephone for six hours without making a move to help him (pp. 176-7). In another incident, a friend of the Princess is involved in an automobile accident and is beheaded along with her two children. When the narrator's mother sees the bodies, her reaction is almost incredible: "imagínate que vio los cadáveres degollados de mi amiga y sus hijos y dijo mira que inocentes se ven, si hasta todavía están quemaditos, qué bueno que se van juntos al cielo. Y los cadáveres estaban sin cabeza, ¿verdad?" (pp. 51-52).

Although the Princess complains of this insensitivity in her mother, she displays even greater callousness on a number of occasions. Her tendency to place herself at the center of almost every episode she relates leads her to spend whole pages describing minor irritations, while

catastrophes in the lives of others are casually described in a sentence or two. The most extreme example of the narrator's callousness is her reaction to the death of her father. She claims to feel a real affection for her father: "Entonces yo me uní mucho a mi papá, porque éramos muy parecidos, congeniábamos muy bien" (p. 91). Yet her description of his death is almost unbelievably casual: "A mi papá, fíjate, lo mataron en el frontón por unas apuestas. Fue muy especial, ¿no? Porque cuando se murió mi papá, como yo siempre fui la fuerte de la familia, la que sostenía todo, la que tenía fuerzas para todo" (p. 101). Her only reaction to her father's death is self-pity because of the responsibilities she is forced to assume.

An episode toward the end of the novel reveals that the Princess has a streak of gratuitous cruelty in her personality in addition to her insensitivity. By spreading a rumor about the sexual activities of La Tapatía Grande, the narrator almost manages to spoil the marriage of her friend. No explanation is offered other than the open admission of malice which ends the chapter: "Pero fíjate qué increíble, porque yo nada más por la mentira, nada más por la intriga la hubiera mandado a la chingada, no me digas que no, ¿verdad? Y era una de mis mejores amigas. . ." (pp. 326-7).

Because the novel is in a sense a retrospective self-portrait of the Princess, it will be useful at this point

to discuss the structure of the work and the relationship between structure and characterization. At first glance, most of the chapters in the novel may seem to be fairly disorderly conglomerations of incidents whose only connection to one another is the subjective associative process of the narrator. But this is not the case. A few of the chapters are rather loosely structured, but the vast majority are unified narrative segments. Four basic types of organization can be discerned in the individual chapters. One or two chapters of each type will be examined in some detail to show the mechanisms at work.[5] The detailed analyses of ordering principles will begin with the loosest and end with the most rigorous.

Three of the twenty-one chapters are organized in a very simple way by the use of a framing device which allows the inclusion of various episodes with widely differing emphases. In Chapter 6, appropriately entitled "Confluencias de cúmulos recuerdos y luzlatidos cotidianos," the framing device is the narrator's habit of dining on Saturday nights with her friends, Las Tapatías. The dinner-table conversations touch on many diverse topics. The chapter begins with a description of Las Tapatías. An episode in which La Tapatía Chica is attacked on the outskirts of the city by a youth on a bicycle (p. 89) is followed by the narrator's remark "Pero hablábamos principalmente de nuestras familias, ¿no?" (p. 90). Most of the rest of the

chapter is devoted to a description of the strained relations between the Princess and her mother. The narrator feels that her mother is too restrictive, and many examples of petty irritations are presented. The mother's objections to the company her daughter keeps reveal, as has already been pointed out, her essentially middle class social values.

After a particularly nasty scene between the Princess and her mother, the narrator starts seeing a psychiatrist. Her visits to the psychiatrist seem to improve her relationship with her mother, although she chooses to express the improvement by saying that it is her mother who has changed. The comment "Ay, esas comidas" (p. 96) serves to change the subject of the conversation. The Princess describes lavish parties in the penthouse apartment of her friend Napoleón, and talks about her relationship with Gabriel Infante. After this digression, which serves to contrast the narrator's good relationships with her friends with her bad relationship with her mother, she returns to the subject of her family. Again, the psychiatric help seems to have produced good results; after describing the difficult childhood her mother experienced, she remarks on the improvement in their relationship, although she again refuses to accept any blame for the friction:

> Entonces, cuando analizaba yo estas cosas, así, comparando, ¿me entiendes? Lo que yo tenía y lo que ella había tenido. . .La empecé a

> justificar, ¿no? Ella no me entendía porque nunca había vivido lo que yo había vivido, ni había estudiado lo que yo había estudiado, ni había ido a todos los lugares a los que yo había ido. Entonces la entendí un poco más y comenzamos a llevarnos un poco mejor, ¿no? Un poquito mejor. Al menos ya no se metía en mis asuntos, ya no me molestaba tanto, y sobre todo, estaba dispuesta a darme más libertad, ¿no? Bueno, no es que me la diera, es que me la tomé, ¿verdad? (p. 101)

The story of the narrator's relationship with her mother is brought forward to the present of narration, as the Princess describes relatively recent events (pp. 103-4). The chapter ends with a final reference to the framing device, completing the sketchy but effective unifying procedure: "Iba yo [al siquíatra] dos veces por semana y pasaron un montón de chistosadas, ¿verdad? Con Las Tapatías, en cambio, comía todos los sábados. Y sabes qué. . . Ellas eran mis verdaderas sicoanalistas" (p. 104).

In this type of chapter organization, unity of time is of little importance. The episodes described are not causally related to one another, and apart from the formal unity provided by the framing device the only linkage between episodes is the narrator's process of association. Nevertheless, within the individual episodes a rough chronology is observed.

A more rigorous kind of organization is found in seven chapters which are unified by a common thematic thread. The narrator describes logically related episodes in chronological order. These descriptions are interrupted

by digressions which are often only marginally related to the central concern of the chapter. However, the narrator always regains the thread of the story. A good example of this ordering principle is Chapter 13 ("La muchacha fantasma de la Colonia del Valle"). The basic story line in this chapter is the appearance of a mysterious, fantasmagorical girl in a house belonging to the narrator's aunt Ema. Ema's lover is a Lithuanian-Mexican Nazi named Kurt, who worked in a concentration camp during World War II. The couple is so frightened by the nightly appearance of the "muchacha fantasma," a young blond girl dressed in white, that they take refuge in the home of the Princess' family. Although they say they will stay only until they can find an apartment, they tarry for months. They are obnoxious house-guests, always demanding coffee and condemning the Jews. There are digressions about Nazi war crimes (pp. 195-6) and about Ema's interest in boxing (p. 203). The digressions are not the product of free association on the part of the narrator; they follow logically from external stimuli. For example, the Princess borrows the key to the "haunted" house from Ema with the intention of using it as a place to meet with El Monje. Together they go into the house and begin poking around in corners. They open a closet door and see a number of posters of professional boxers. This triggers an amusing digression in which the narrator describes her aunt's

curious habit of saying her rosary while she watches boxing matches on television:

> Cuando veía las peleas de box en mi casa cogía su rosario. Entonces empezaba Dios te salve María, llena eres de gracia, ¡el Señor es contigo! SANTA MARIA MADRE DE DIOS! Pégale pendejo, mátalo, mátalo! ¡No te midas, pégale, mátalo, mátalo! Y luego Padre nuestro que estás en los cielos, santificado. . .¡Hijo de la chingada, ya te volvieron a pegar! ¡Cabrón!. . .PEGALE, PEGALE DURO EN LOS BAJOS, MATALO. . . (p. 203)

The chapter ends with a description of the unexpected passion which the presence of the "muchacha fantasma" evokes in the usually shy Monje. The fact that the apparition has a healthy, invigorating effect on El Monje in contrast with the fear it evokes in Kurt suggests that it may be an externalization of sublimated fears or desires. On the other hand, the Princess' interpretation of the phenomenon is equally plausible:

> Entonces El Monje se convirtió en un pulpo sensual y comenzó a acariciarme por todas partes, tú. Una masa sensual, algo primitivo y terriblemente pasional, feroz, ambicioso, descabellado. . .Entonces no sabíamos que la mujer fantasma estaba entre nosotros, que ingrávida y casi transparente se había acostado a nuestro lado, entre nosotros, y que algunos de esos brazos que eran repeticiones de los del Monje, o ese peso o esa distancia entre los dos, la evidenciaban. . .(p. 210)

From the point of view of chronology, this chapter is interesting because it illustrates the importance of inertia in the Princess' style of narration. She begins a digression about the sex life of Kurt and Ema (pp. 207-8),

and her impulse to finish the story is stronger than her sense of chronology with respect to the main line of action. She is therefore forced to clarify when she returns to the central episode: "Bueno, claro que cuando estaba con El Monje en casa de ellos, todo eso todavía no sucedía" (p. 208).

The chapters in this second category depend for their unity on the narrator's adherence to a particular subject through a considerable period of time. For example, Chapter 15 ("Deja que tu cuerpo se entienda con otro cuerpo") describes the efforts of El Monje's boss, a cabinet minister, to seduce the Princess. The incidents described take place at different times and in widely separated places: Miami, Mexico City, and Acapulco. The narrator ties the story together at the end of the chapter by describing her successful effort to force the minister to leave her alone: she makes tape recordings of one of his passionate telephone calls and sends them to the wife of the President of Mexico.

The third type of chapter organization is based on the description of events occurring in a limited period of time, often as little as an hour. Instead of describing a series of events linked by causality, the narrator describes all the events which take place during the given period. A good example of this procedure is Chapter 1 ("Sé poco de enfermos"). After a brief section in which the narrator introduces La Vestida de Hombre, Las Tapatías,

El Monje, and her brother, the remainder of the chapter is devoted to describing an evening in a restaurant with some friends. Two digressions, couched in the form of dinner-table conversations, are presented. The narrator signals the return to the basic line of action by referring to the arrival of the waiters with coffee and to the reactions of the participants in the conversation.

The first chapter also illustrates the creation of an atmosphere of subdued menace by underlining the constant possibility of violence. The headwaiter of the restaurant, whose name is Tarcisio, is very insistent and quite lascivious. As the Princess and her friends sit at their table, very odd things begin to happen around them:

> Entonces entraron muchos galanes corriendo, una bola de muchachos corriendo. Eran como nueve o diez muchachos y entraron como tromba y atraparon a otro que estaba cenando, sentado, de espaldas a nosotros. Pensamos que era una broma o algo así, una venganza, algún pleito, algo por el estilo, pero el capitán [de meseros] nos dijo no es nada con un guiño maloso, todos son mis amigos. . .Mientras tanto, al tipo lo pusieron junto a un pilar, ¿se dice pilar? Junto a una columna, ¿no? Era muy guapo y lo empezaron a besar en la boca, a desvestir. . .Eran hombres, ¿no? Todos hombres y lo besaban y se atacaban de risa. (p. 16)

This incident, which remains unexplained, is followed by some very odd behavior on the part of Tarcisio. The Princess describes him in terms which suggest his menacing qualities: "Y se inclina el capitán, tú, una especie de pieza de ajedrez, un incisivo alfil negro tropezando con

un peón que no le corresponde" (p. 18). He brings the narrator her soup, and just as it has cooled off enough for her to begin eating, he carries it away to heat it again. The same thing happens with the coffee. When the Princess and her friends finally get their coffee, the waiters keep bringing more and more, continually filling their cups. Again, the narrator evokes the odd atmosphere in a descriptive phrase: "Algo pegosteoso se derramaba sobre todas las cosas. Desde los aperitivos a los que habíamos renunciado no había ninguna esperanza. La situación se nos resbalaba de las manos. Y el capitán sí, sí, otro poquito, sí, los ojos centelleantes, les va a caer retebién su café" (p. 24). Finally the headwaiter refuses to bring them the check, and blocks their path as they try to leave the restaurant.

Chapter 9 ("Hoy el galán de moda, dos funciones") is another example of a chapter unified by the description of all the activities occurring in a short period of time. This chapter covers an evening in which the narrator, Mauricio, and La Vestida de Hombre go out on the town to celebrate the latter's birthday. The chapter is interesting from a technical point of view because it illustrates the care with which the narrator returns to the basic line of action after several digressions. As the Princess and her friends sit in a nightclub, Andrés and Napoleón come in and describe a prank they have just played: they

have picked the pockets of a whole bus full of people. As the Princess describes this trick, which is a digression from the main line of the action, she digresses further to describe how she met Napoleón (p. 143). This leads to a further digression about the marriage between La Tapatía Chica and Napoleón, and about the fact that Las Tapatías' parents died of cancer (pp. 144-5). The narrator then returns to her description of the prank on the bus (p. 145), and when this is finished she goes back to the main line of action (p. 146). The structure of this section of the chapter can be portrayed as follows:

Nightclub---

(Digression) Napoleón's prank on the bus

(Digression) How the narrator met Napoleón

(Digression) Death of Las Tapatías' parents

(Digression) How the narrator met Napoleón

(Digression) Napoleón's prank on the bus

Nightclub---

These two chapters--1 and 9--clearly show that the narrator is not merely piecing together unrelated episodes according to an arbitrary and private associative process, but is making an effort to maintain the coherence of the narrative. This coherence is even more pronounced in the final type of chapter organization. Four chapters consist of a central episode which is preceded by a rather digressive introduction. The introduction is nevertheless

causally related to the main episode, and the digressions which occur are closely linked to the episode in question. In Chapter 3 ("Tenía cara de Chivas Regal"), the narrator accidentally takes an overdose of sleeping pills. This incident, and the reaction of her family to it, constitute the central focus of the chapter. It is introduced by a description of Gabriel Infante's habit of calling the narrator on the telephone to bemoan his problems with women. One day the narrator's mother overhears one of these telephone calls and becomes furious. The narrator's father joins the fracas, threatening to kill Gabriel Infante. The Princess is disturbed, and takes two sleeping pills to relax. She then takes two more, and two more, and two more, a total of eight. The overdose naturally has an adverse physical effect, and her family believes that she has tried to commit suicide. The Princess denies this: "Simplemente yo trataba de descansar y de olvidarme de preocupaciones" (p. 53). The episode of the overdose and the family's reaction to it are presented chronologically even though the narrator was unconscious while the events she described took place. This suggests a definite effort by the narrator to reconstruct the story from later accounts, and is further evidence of her concern for maintaining the coherence of the narration.

Chapter 18 ("Las fiestas de las relaciones elementales") follows the same basic structural pattern as Chapter

3, but is more complex. The narrator's brother is hospitalized with piles, and a description of some comical incidents in the hospital (pp. 275-9) provides a digressive introduction to the central episode of the chapter. When the narrator's brother returns from the hospital, his friends give a party for him in which the principal amusement is a series of pornographic films. Before the guests arrive, however, the Princess gets a telephone call in which she learns that her uncle (the political figure who had an affair with La Vestida de Hombre) has been shot to death on a country road outside Tijuana. This news has a profound effect on the narrator, partly because it confirms a prediction made in the previous chapter that a certain black dress whould bring the Princess bad luck:

> Habían matado a mi tío, ¿te imaginas? Me derrumbé sobre un sillón. El vestido! Traía puesto el vestido negro que Felisa Broder me había dicho que no me pusiera si quería evitar una desgracia. . .Me lo quité inmediatamente, lo desgarré sintiéndome penetrada por una oleada de locura, sintiéndome condenada a una muerte estruendosa y sin sentido, como mi padre, como mi tío. . . (p. 279)

As the guests begin to arrive and the pronographic films begin, the Princess becomes more and more fearful and depressed. While the guests are in a cheerful and joking mood, the narrator describes her disturbed emotional state as follows: "Y la pena crecía dentro de mí como un embarazo vertiginoso. ¡Me sentía embarazada de una iguana!" (p. 281). As the chapter progresses, two types of

descriptions predominate: the external situation (the viewing of the pornographic films and the reactions of the guests) is accompanied by the internal distress of the narrator. The dynamic of the chapter derives from the interplay of these two elements. This duality is expressed in the digressions as well: some of the digressions are triggered by the external situation, others by the Princess' internal agitation. For example, the external situation produces a digression about the reaction of El Monje to some pornographic films he saw in Copenhagen (pp. 283-4), while the narrator's internal stress produces a digression about her mother's absent-mindedness (pp. 285-6). There is an interesting linguistic difference between these two digressions which emphasizes the relative importance of external and internal stimuli. The description of El Monje's reactions to the films is presented in the narrator's usual style of speaking, without adornments or poetic elements. The language of the other digression is quite different. The narrator describes an incident in which her mother forgets her address and is driven aimlessly around Mexico City by a young man who is trying to take her home. The Princess' own sense of panic and fear seems to insinuate itself into the description, resulting in a kind of language which is very unusual for the narrator:

> Se perdía en una ciudad laberíntica, en un infierno de calles asfaltadas y semáforos

> parpadeantes. Todas las esquinas eran desconocidas. Los árboles y los postes de luz mercurial parecían tan imperturbables como los escasos, desvelados peatones. . .Estaba en una prisión donde reinaba el dolor agudo y desesperante de no ser nadie. . .No le quedaba sino hundirse más y más en sí misma hasta enredarse como una cochinilla. . . (p. 286)

The four types of chapter organization discussed reveal in varying degrees the efforts of the narrator to tell a coherent story. In a more general sense, the structure of the novel as a whole is important in the characterization of the narrator. The novel follows a rough chronology: the earlier chapters describe events of the narrator's adolescence and early twenties, while the later chapters focus on her middle and late twenties. As the novel progresses, the Princess becomes more and more concerned with her lack of a clear self-image, and devotes more time to speculating about her own personality. Throughout the novel she makes comments about her own personality, but a clear difference can be seen in the tone and content of those statements which occur in chapters 1-15 and those which occur in chapters 17-21.

In the first fifteen chapters of the novel, the Princess offers many contradictory views of herself. Many of these remarks are intended to show how well-liked she is and to emphasize the influence she wields over her friends and lovers. In Chapter 2, after an unsuccessful start in her university career, she goes to see her adviser.

He agrees to admit her to another program, conditionally:

> Entonces me dijo si usted me promete que va a estar cuatro horas en el café cada día, yo la acepto y le doy el pase. Entonces me explicó que iba a ser muy alentador para los muchachos ir a oir todas las proezas que contaba yo, porque era payasísima en esos días. (p. 37)[6]

Sometimes the narrator is quite impressed with her own virtue: "me consideraba y creo que ahora también me considero, bueno, que era buenísima, que era una niña de lo más bueno que hay en el mundo" (p. 96). At other times she feels quite differently, particularly after fights with her boyfriends: "Entonces me deprimí durante un buen rato y me reproché por ser la mujer más perversa de todo el Pedregal de San Ángel" (p. 129). She describes the differences between herself and El Monje in the following terms:

> Para empezar, él había estudiado en un seminario y era el muchacho más intelectual del mundo. . .Y yo era la más, este, ¿cómo decirlo? La más alocada, digo, si me ponía a leer un ejemplar de La Pequeña Lulú en ocho días, bueno, olvídate, acababa yo en la cama con calentura. No, no, era yo la más superficial del mundo. (p. 221)

Although these remarks contradict one another, they do not suggest conscious uncertainty in the narrator. The Princess changes her mind about herself, but she is not at a loss for epitomes. In chapters 17-21, on the other hand, the narrator is much less certain and emphatic in her self-characterization. The increasing frustration of her effort at self-definition is at first expressed symbolically. In Chapter 17, the narrator goes to a series

of fortune tellers, ostensibly to find out whether she should marry her Italian boyfriend, Yiovani [sic]. Instead she arrives at a more general view of her difficulties in self-definition:

> Llegué y con todas [las cartomancias] me pasaba, ¿eh? Decían no le puedo leer nada. . . Nunca nadie me pudo leer nada. . .Jamás. . .Y todas me decían lo mismo, que les dolía la cabeza, que la vela tenía el humo gris, gris, y que no se podía ver nada. . .Decían que me cerraba yo durísimo, que no los dejaba entrar, ni medio penetrar. . .Nunca. (p. 264)

This difficulty in self-understanding that the narrator experiences is intensified by her increasing realization that many of the friendships of her earlier life were quite superficial, and that she learned very little about herself from her friends:

> No sé si soy mala o buena, si soy una gente bondadosa o muy cínica, si soy una gente caritativa o una vieja voluble. . .Y he ido con gente a que me lean cartas, a que me digan cómo soy, porque tengo hambre de que alguien me diga eres buena, eres bonita, eres una hija de la chingada, intentas aparentar bondad y nobleza y en el fondo eres una desviada. (p. 303)

Later, in describing the deterioration of her relationship with Alexis Stamatis, she remarks:

> Antes nos identificábamos, no sé, por el descubrimiento del sexo, por su espíritu aventurero, digo, el tenía un hogar, gozábamos el misterio de vernos a escondidas, como tú quieras, siempre con la idea de que iba a divorciarse alguna vez. ¿Para qué? El día que me propuso matrimonio lo mandé a la goma. (p. 307)

The disillusionment that the Princess experiences reaches its climax in the last chapter. Structurally,

this chapter cannot be placed in any of the four previously discussed categories. The central part of the chapter is a description of the narrator's wedding (pp. 335-7). This is preceded by an account of the reaction of Alexis Stamatis to the narrator's decision to get married, and followed by an account of the reaction of El Monje. It is obvious that the narrator sees little hope of defining herself through her marriage, which is given little emphasis. Instead she still searches for someone who will tell her what she is like and give her a clear sense of her own identity. Her relationship with Alexis cannot provide this support, but El Monje is a different matter. Throughout the novel El Monje is the one character who continually reinforces the narrator's sense of herself as a good and truthful woman. When he calls her on the telephone the morning after her wedding, she goes to see him and spends three days locked up with him in a cabin in the country. She begins to confuse him with her mother:

> La segunda noche nos confundimos en un abrazo desesperado. . .Los ruidos del bosque simulaban voces de otro tiempo, y en sueños retrocedí hasta mi infancia. Jugueteaba con un perro lanudo, pedaleaba un triciclo nacarado por un jardín neblinoso. . .Pero los brazos del Monje y su calor eran los de mi madre. Mi madre a los veinte años, con un vestido blanco, hermosísima! Olía a jazmines y a muñecas de peluche, a leche tibia, a talco boratado. Mi madre surgía de la noche, eterna y continua, fluyendo en un vestido de suaves pliegues, el rostro sonrosado, los cabellos flotando en suaves jeroglíficos plenos de sensualismo. (p. 341)

It is clear that the association between El Monje and the narrator's mother derives from El Monje's continual affirmations of the Princess' innocence and from her strong desire to believe that she is indeed innocent. Yet the irony of this final encounter with El Monje is evident: the implication is not that the Princess has managed to preserve her innocence in spite of her many and varied experiences, but that as a jaded woman entering middle age she yearns nostalgically and somewhat foolishly for the simplicity of her childhood days.

The narrator's conception of her own personality undergoes a radical change as her frustration builds. The pivotal chapter in this process is Chapter 16 ("Ay te pido y te pido, Ay te pido y te pido por compasión"). This chapter is very brief and is written entirely in the present tense. It is the only chapter in the novel in which the narrator makes a direct reference to the fact that she is talking on the telephone: "Estoy hablando por teléfono y al mismo tiempo reviso mi ropa y la arreglo" (p. 248). This direct reference to the telephone raises perplexing questions about the relationship between narrator, fictional listener, and reader. It is not likely that the narrator is speaking to the fictional listener, since this unidentified friend would surely be aware that they are talking to each other on the telephone. At the same time, the chapter contains only one question directed to a listener:

a final "¿no es cierto?" which could as easily be directed to the reader or to the narrator herself as to the fictional listener. Nothing of particular importance occurs in the chapter, but the last sentence reveals for the first time in the novel the narrator's awareness of the passage of time: "Y así pasa el tiempo, se va pronto, pasa rapidísimo, como un coche esport que corre hecho la madre, ¿no es cierto?" (p. 251). The quotation from Oliverio Girondo which appears at the end of the chapter is of special importance, for it suggests that the chapter is a turning point in the narrator's perception of herself and her friends:

> ("Pero dime/ --si puedes--/ qué haces/ allí,
> sentado/ entre seres ficticios/ que en vez
> de carne y hueso/ tienen letras,/ acentos,/
> consonantes,/ vocales?") (p. 251)

This quotation is interesting in its ambiguity. Obviously, it may be interpreted as a question directed to the Princess, calling on her to examine the solidity of her friendships and the superficiality of her preoccupations. At the same time, however, it may be seen as a question directed to the reader, who is indeed seated among "seres ficticios" who are made up of letters, consonants, and vowels. The question might be seen as directed to the novelist who creates these purely verbal creatures, or even as directed by the Princess to herself. The quotation from Beckett's Waiting for Godot which appears at the end of the novel aptly summarizes the final emptiness which the narrator

begins to intuit in Chapter 16 and which causes her increasing depression and embitterment in the final chapters of the novel:

VLADIMIR: ¿Que dicen?
ESTRAGÓN: Hablan acerca de su vida.
VLADIMIR: Haber vivido no les basta.
ESTRAGÓN: Tienen que hablar acerca de ello.
VLADIMIR: Estar muertas no les basta.
ESTRAGÓN: No es suficiente.

Silencio

VLADIMIR: Hacen un ruido como de plumas.
ESTRAGÓN: Como de hojas.
VLADIMIR: Como de ceniza.
ESTRAGÓN: Como de hojas. (p. 345)

The stylistic characteristic of La princesa del Palacio de Hierro which first attracts the attention of most readers is the use of language. One reviewer has commented that the novel is written entirely in an unchanging voice.[7] This is not quite true, although the voice is of a single person. Three different levels or styles of language can be discerned in the novel; they are distinguishable from one another by differences in syntax, vocabulary, and tone. These different levels correspond to and externalize different levels of the narrator's personality, and the interplay among them is often a source of humor and irony.

The first type of language is the most common: a highly colloquial and conversational Mexican Spanish. A few exemplary selections will illustrate its principal characteristics. In the following passage the Princess describes a scene in a restaurant:

> Entonces al rato, ¿no?, El Monje y yo plática y plática, pero yo nerviosísima porque el capitán [de meseros] trajo la sopa y se quedó parado allí, mirándonos fijo fijo, con la mirada muy fija y ándenle, tómense su sopita como diciendo ¿les gustaría acostarse conmigo?, si, todos juntos, El Monje inclusive. Su sopita. . .Una enorme sonrisa ávida! Total, de repente que callan los cancioneros y sólo se oye el escrach de La Vestida de Hombre. Que lleno la cuchara de sopa, ¿no?, y de repente estamos rodeados de mariachis, doce, trece, quince mariachis. ¿Dije que Las Tapatías comían como gallinas? Fíjate que vivían junto a mi casa y se creían Las Clásicas Muchachas Muy Vividas, tú, las que se las sabían de todas todas, ¿no? (p. 17)

This passage has several characteristics of spoken language:

1) Run-on sentences, such as the first sentence in the passage.

2) The repetition of words for emphasis: "plática plática," "mirándonos fijo fijo," "se las sabían de todas todas."

3) The use of anglicisms spelled phonetically in order to reproduce the pronunciation of a Mexican:[8] "el escrach de La Vestida de Hombre."

4) The use of questions and commands which call for the assent of the listener: "¿no?", "Fíjate que. . ."

5) The use of the present tense to describe past events, and the combination of present and past tenses in the same passage: "el capitán trajo la sopa," "lleno la cuchara de sopa."

6) The use of capital letters to express a teasing tone of voice: "Las Clásicas Muchachas Muy Vividas."

Colloquial spoken language is often uneconomical, using several sentences to express an idea which only needs a few words. The following passage illustrates this tendency, and also exemplifies the use of both direct and indirect reporting of dialogue: "Entonces que se acerca el capitán de meseros. Que viene el capitán de meseros y nos dice ¿una copita? Preguntó si queríamos una copa o no" (p. 15). The repetitiousness of these sentences is a good approximation of the mechanism of conversational speech: the last part of each sentence is repeated in the beginning of the following one, and the account proceeds in this rather jerky way.

The second level of language in the novel is more sophisticated in syntax and vocabulary. The Princess uses many metaphors and images which suggest a facility and precision in language. Some of these may be examples of the "unas cuantas citas no señaladas en el texto" which Sainz refers to in the section called "Reconocimientos" (p. 347). However, the fact that they may be unattributed quotations is not relevant to their role in the experience of the novel. The reader does not pause to wonder whether a given sentence might be a quotation from Hortensia Moreno or Manuel Bandeira, but simply accepts the remarks as coming from the Princess and adjusts his opinion of her accordingly.

This kind of relatively sophisticated language is mainly used in passages in which the Princess describes

her emotions:

> me da un beso, un beso tú, que duró como mil años, de veras, increíble, casi eterno, larguísimo, ardiente y dulce como la vida misma, desbordado y masticador, hermético, suave, y dentro del cual comenzó a formarse cada vez más concretamente esa cosa mágica y cosquilladora que es el deseo, un deseo que empezaba a jalar hilitos en las partes más vulnerables del cuerpo. (p. 68)

Expressive language like this is often contrasted, for comic effect, with the narrator's ordinary way of speaking. In the following passage the narrator describes the lecherous glances of the headwaiter Tarcisio: "Su voz se resbalaba por nuestros cuerpos como una cosa absurda y tierna que despertaba escalofríos sensuales. . .Al mismo tiempo su mirada era tan fuerte que podía hacer saltar todos tus botones" (p. 15). Some of the narrator's remarks are delivered with a dry, ironic precision which is quite amusing. She comments on an invitation to go to a nightclub: "Como ninguno de sus ademanes era ortodoxo la invitación terminó pareciéndome surrealista" (p. 241).

The novel is sprinkled with a series of exclamations whose tone suggests that they belong in the second level of language. These exclamations are usually sexual or zoological in nature, and are often quite funny. Here are some typical examples: "¡Prepucios de elefante!" (p. 34), "¡Cocodrilos con blenorragia!" (p. 131), "¡Tapires bisexuales!" (p. 197), "¡Guacamayas polígamas!" (p. 279), "¡Armadillos fornicadores!" (p. 339).

The third and most sophisticated level of language is used only infrequently. Generally speaking, it is reserved for situations in which the narrator is imagining or speculating about the emotions of a character who is experiencing fear or stress. This level of language is distinguished from the second level by its heavy reliance on images and metaphors, its fluid and carefully wrought syntax, and the complexity and precision of the ideas expressed. The passage already cited in which the narrator describes her mother's panic at being lost in Mexico City is a good example of the use of subtle and expressive language to evoke the fear felt by another character. In the following passage the Princess describes the death of her uncle, and her own sense of disorientation and fear is evident:

> [el coche] rueda elegante pero hay algo raro en la carretera, un caballo viejo, y tiene que disminuir su velocidad, ¿no? Entonces una telaraña estrepitosa en el parabrisas, pedazos de cristal contra la piel del rostro, golpes precisos en el costado, secos y astillados en el brazo izquierdo, ruidosos, calientes y definitivos en los muslos. . . El cuerpo entero se derrumba bajo esos golpes de hacha. . .Ni siquiera supo que Sabueso alcanzó a abrir la portezuela y saltar hacia afuera. . . Entonces el silencio. . .El motor apagado y el auto rodando en línea recta; su cuerpo encogido afianzando el volante. . .En silencio. . .Su cabeza de sátiro fue destruida con tan terrible fuerza que apenas los dientes, descarnados como en una maqueta de dentista, llegaron a salvarse. . . Las rodillas se torcieron, convulsas, y se abrieron como para un parto. . .Su piel parecía explotar hacia todos lados a partir de orificios escandalosos. . .De uno de ellos como otra boca,

> junto a la medallita católica y dorada, aún
> brotaba la sangre en leve y rojo chorro cuando
> llegaron los policías. . .(pp. 289-91)

In his review of La princesa del Palacio de Hierro Bruce-Novoa notes that "la princesa habla para crear un espacio en el mundo, para afirmar la historicidad de su época, como si ella no lo hiciera todo dejaría de existir."[9] What is this "space" that the Princess creates or evokes? It is a world thoroughly impregnated with the values and aspirations of middle class Mexican society. The narrator's blithe acceptance of these values in the early part of the novel contrasts with her increasing awarenesss of the hypocrisy of her friends and of her own dissatisfaction. At the end of the novel she is disillusioned by the realization that the things she has yearned for are incapable of satisfying her:

> Mi esposo es guapísimo y muy comprensivo
> y me puedo vestir como quiero. Tengo todo
> tipo de comodidades pendejas, porque yo no
> te pido viajes a Europa, digo, ya no, ya he
> ido trece veces a Europa, no es que me aburra,
> pero es que hace mucho que ya no es mi máximo.
> Pido cosas más sencillas que ir a la luna, ¿no?
> Y no sé a quién agradecerle mi tranquilidad eco-
> nómica, bueno, mira, vamos a suponer que yo gano
> diez mil pesos al mes. Esos diez mil pesos me
> sirven para botármelos a mí, en mi casa, en mi
> marido, en decirle te compré unos zapatos, te
> compré esto, te compré esto otro. Entonces
> dime por qué. ¿Por qué no soy feliz? ¿Por qué
> no? (p. 305)

The novel contains many other elements which lend themselves to social interpretations. Injustices in the political and legal systems are excoriated, always implicitly, and the

corruption of the police is given special attention. Many readers will see the whole novel as an effort to debunk the myths and fantasies of the Mexican middle classes.[10]

Nevertheless, the principal focus of the novel is not social but psychological. The growth of self-awareness in the narrator is paralleled by her increasing disillusionment. Her compulsive monologue becomes less and less a boastful celebration and more and more a frantic defense against the emptiness on the other side of her words.

CONCLUSION

The three novels of Gustavo Sainz analyzed in this dissertation are very different from one another in a number of respects. Still, they share some fundamental traits which give a general idea of Sainz's main interests and of his approach to the craft. All three of the novels are written in the first person and can be viewed as character studies of the narrator-protagonists. Although the complexity of personal relationships is sometimes given detailed attention, in general the secondary characters are subordinated to the characterization of the protagonist. Even characters like Sarro in Obsesivos días circulares or Gisela in Gazapo, who are presented in some detail, are seen in a narrow focus limited by the narrator's self-centered personality. They therefore tend to be externalizations or projections of the desires and fears of the central characters. In La princesa del Palacio de Hierro the narrator is constantly talking about her relationships with other people, but the emphasis is always on the personality of the narrator as revealed by these relationships rather than on the relationships themselves. In other words, we learn little about the people whom the Princess knows except as they contribute to the elucidation of her own personality.

This concentration on the central character is of course intensified by the fact that all three of the narrators are extremely self-centered. Although they are introspective in widely differing degrees, they all tend to reduce everything that happens to its effect on themselves. The Princess, for example, regards the death of her father only as an excuse for bragging about her common sense and her ability to keep the family together afterwards. The death of Menelao's grandmother is presented as an inconvenience to the narrator rather than as a serious and sad event. This insensitivity to the suffering of others is less pronounced in Gazapo than in the later novels. The characters in Gazapo also seem to have a genuine innocence which is lacking in Obsesivos días circulares and La princesa del Palacio de Hierro. A review of the latter novel was very aptly entitled "Una novela sin benevolencia."[1] Another difference between Gazapo and the two later novels is the fact that Menelao is part of a fairly closely knit group of friends with whom he shares his experiences, while the narrators of the other two novels are essentially isolated people, cut off from real friendships, not to mention love. There is in these two novels, to borrow a phrase from Carlos Fuentes, "una radical ausencia de la inocencia en la sociedad, una imposibilidad de la inocencia."[2]

The novels of Sainz are urban novels. They are set in Mexico City and all three of them have an undercurrent

of frenzy which is clearly associated with city life. Specific places and streets in Mexico City are mentioned frequently, and the different neighborhoods described are depicted with an accuracy obviously derived from extended personal experience. There is nothing new, of course, about urban novels in Mexico. El periquillo sarniento, the first Mexican novel, is set in Mexico City and has lengthy descriptions of the neighborhoods and customs. Many other examples of urban novels from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries might be mentioned.[3] It is fair to say, however, that Sainz writes a kind of urban novel which really began with Carlos Fuentes' La región más transparente in 1958. The city is not merely the backdrop for action or a handy subject for lengthy descriptions in the costumbrista manner. The city is an active, often disturbing and disruptive element in La región más transparente; nothing could be further from the respectful and even boastful costumbrista manner than the well known description of Mexico City which occurs in the first section of La región más transparente:

> Ven, déjate caer conmigo en la cicatriz lunar de nuestra ciudad, ciudad puñado de alcantarillas, ciudad cristal de vahos y escarcha mineral, ciudad presencia de todos nuestros olvidos, ciudad de alcantilados carnívoros, ciudad dolor inmóvil, ciudad de la brevedad inmensa, ciudad del sol detenido, ciudad de calcinaciones largas, ciudad a fuego lento. . .[4]

The frantic and unstable atmosphere of Obsesivos días circulares and La princesa del Palacio de Hierro is a result

not only of the urban setting but also of the constant suggestion of violence just beneath the surface. Both novels are permeated with a sense of imminent violence which only occasionally breaks out into the open and which is clearly associated with life in the city. The threat of violence also contributes to the immediacy of the experience of the novels. Carlos Fuentes has remarked:

> México es el país del instante. El mañana es totalmente improbable, peligroso: te pueden matar en una cantina, a la vuelta de una esquina, porque miraste feo, porque comiste un taco. Vives el hoy porque el mañana es improbable.5

The possibility of sudden, random violence is so fundamental to the tone of Obsesivos días circulares and La princesa del Palacio de Hierro that it may be worth while to list briefly some of the more outstanding examples, most of which have been discussed in the text. In Obsesivos días circulares Sarro murders a labor leader by shooting him eight times in the face in the presence of his wife. Political prisoners are tortured and then thrown from the top of a building. The narrator is pounced upon and severely beaten by guests at a party under the pretext of playing a game in which Terencio plays the role of an Aztec sacrificial victim. In La princesa del Palacio de Hierro, a mother and her two children are decapitated in an automobile accident. El Guapo Guapo murders a man in a steam bath for money. The narrator's uncle is machine-

gunned to death. Most of these extremely violent events are narrated without any perceptible change of tone, a fact which heightens their shock value.

All the indications are that the novel Sainz is presently writing, Compadre Lobo, will carry the element of violence even farther than the previous two novels.[6] Gratuitous violence is an integral part of the lower and lower middle class social milieu in which the novel is set. The novel is a study of Mexico City after dark and of the violence provoked by the supression of creativity in adolescents. Sainz has recently described the work in progress in the following terms:

> es la novela de la noche en la Ciudad de México, es la novela de los cabarets, de los bares, de la violencia urbana, de los sentimientos animales, o poco desarrollados; pero también es la novela de la supervivencia de algunos ritos y mitos indígenas en la Ciudad de México de hoy, por ejemplo, la idea de sacrificio de los aztecas.[7]

It is clearly impossible to make any evaluation of a novel which has not yet been completed, but the indications at least are that Compadre Lobo will continue the emphasis on urban life and violence which are so prominent in the previous two novels.

The importance of the city in Sainz's novels is not limited to making the violence more believable. All three of the novels can be seen as studies of the interaction of an individual human being with an environment; it is

probably fair to say that in Obsesivos días circulares and La princesa del Palacio de Hierro the protagonists are overwhelmed and defeated by their environment. This is not meant to imply that they are swallowed up by the city in the same way that the protagonist of La vorágine is swallowed up by the jungle. In the case of Terencio in Obsesivos días circulares, it is really a kind of cumulative moral enervation which contributes directly to his loss of control over his language and his environment. It is impossible to work for a corrupt organization and directly contribute to its preservation without becoming corrupted, and Terencio is too intelligent not to realize this. His final rootlessness is not only metaphysical but moral as well. The case of La princesa del Palacio de Hierro is rather different. Over the course of many years the narrator adopts the attitudes and aspirations of the consumer-oriented Mexican middle class; only at the end of the novel does she realize that she has achieved all of her material goals without satisfying her spiritual and emotional needs at all. The fact that the novel ends with a nostalgic yearning for her childhood, and with an affair with El Monje, the only character who is consistently associated with non-material values, suggests that a whole side of the narrator's personality has been smothered by the consumer-oriented society in which she lives.

All three of Sainz's novels have important graphic

elements. Sainz designs book jackets for Joaquín Mortiz, and his interest in the possibilities of illustration and typographical innovation is evident in his own novels. Gazapo ends with a series of photographs of the protagonist which, as was pointed out in Chapter II, are an important part of the experience of the novel because they represent the visual culmination of the characterization of the protagonist. Like the tape recordings, they are an effort to freeze experience. The graphic elements in Obsesivos días circulares are also an integral part of the experience of the novel and have a thematic function. The extraordinary ending of the novel, with its increasingly large type size and progressive blurring, symbolizes the final disintegration of language and of the narrator's control over his environment. La princesa del Palacio de Hierro contains a series of illustrations which enrich the reading of the novel without being directly related to themes or characterization.

The use of several different languages, including English, French, Italian, Latin, Old Spanish, and Portuguese, is characteristic of all three of Sainz's novels. Along with the innovative and sometimes surprising use of punctuation, these elements contribute to the texture of the novels and constantly remind the reader that he is indeed reading a novel. The point is not trivial; the nineteenth century writer of realistic novels and the

contemporary writer of suspense or action novels take great pains to convince the reader that he is not reading but rather living the experiences described. Sainz, along with many other contemporary novelists, makes no such effort. Indeed, the consciousness of artifice is a fundamental part of the experience of many recent novels. The narrator of Obsesivos días circulares reads Joyce's Ulysses and often confuses the fictional world of this novel with his own "real" surroundings, just as we read Obsesivos días circulares and may come to confuse the world created in this novel with our own experiences. Thus we are invited to reflect on the nature of fiction itself, which brings home to us more effectively one of the principal themes of the novel: the narrator's frequent inability to distinguish between "reality" and fantasy.

A fundamental similarity among the three novels is that the action is frequently advanced not by the characters, but by the dynamic and forward impulse of the language. Associated with this effect is an unusual relationship between the narrators and the language they use. A clear distinction is seen in this respect between Gazapo on the one hand and the two later novels on the other. The narrator of Gazapo struggles with language, but the struggle is playful and exuberant. The tape recordings, diaries, and letters seem to proliferate and create different versions of the same event almost on their own power.

Language seems to slip out of the narrator's control, but this loss of control does not have a negative effect on Menelao. Rather, it seems to amuse him, and it certainly expresses the youthful enthusiasm which all the teenagers share. Language is a creative, vital force in Gazapo; the incident in which Menelao identifies the parts of Gisela's body by writing their names in marking pen exemplifies this joy of discovering by naming.

The relationship between the narrator and language is much different in Obsesivos días circulares and La princesa del Palacio de Hierro. In the former, the narrator's struggle with language is a constant effort to impose order on his chaotic and threatening surroundings by reducing them to linguistic terms. The highly intellectual and introspective narrator finds that his language turns against him and becomes the ultimate manifestation of chaos rather than a defense against it. It would be difficult to imagine a more hopeless ending than the mindless focusing on one graphic sign, stripped of all meaning except the purely visual, which ends the novel. The narrator of La princesa del Palacio de Hierro is neither intellectual nor particularly introspective, but she too is finally trapped by the language which she formerly used to organize her existence. From the first page of the novel her whole life is spread out before us in a disarmingly egocentric way, with its oriental tinkle of hopes and disappointments,

in an unstoppable flow of words which eventually seems to propel itself along by its own momentum. It is sometimes easy to forget that the Princess is actually talking to someone; her language gradually loses its significance as an act of communication. As a defense against emptiness and isolation, the narrator's use of language is a failure.

The three novels of Sainz are not "galleries of voices" like Cabrera Infante's Tres tristes tigres. Each of the novels is organized around a single character and a single point of view. In a sense, the novels are portraits of emotional states: in Gazapo, the turbulence and exuberance of adolescence; in Obsesivos días circulares, the disillusionment of a frustrated and cynical intellectual; and in La princesa del Palacio de Hierro, the depressing evolution of a limited mind from ingenuousness to indifference. But the portraits are specific and idiosyncratic; the emotional states are externalized in the language even as they are grounded in the conflict between character and language. In the final analysis, language in Sainz's novels is paradoxical and ambiguous: it is a creative force but at the same time it can ensnare and destroy.

The principal characteristics of Sainz's novels discussed above illustrate the manner in which theme and technique mutually strengthen and support each other in well-wrought novels. The focus on a single central character

who is essentially isolated from meaningful human contact is sharpened by the urban background and frenetic atmosphere. The conflict between character and environment has social implications, and is paralleled by the conflict between character and language whose implications are both psychological and social. The violence which is so prominent in Sainz's work also functions on more than one level. The threat of personal, physical violence reinforces the instability of the social environment; the violence done to individual human beings by other human beings and by society is paralleled by the violence done to language by the protagonists and by the destructive psychological effects of the disintegration of language.

FOOTNOTES

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

[1]Martha P. Francescato, "Entrevista con Gustavo Sainz," Hispamérica, 5, no. 14 (1976), 75-76.

[2]Francescato, 81.

[3]Francescato, 63-64.

[4]Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "La novela de los nuevos," Mundo Nuevo, 22 (abril 1968), 6.

[5]Rodríguez Monegal, 9.

[6]Carlos Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), pp. 31-32.

[7]Héctor Manjarrez, Lapsus (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1971), pp. 15-16.

[8]Sainz was involved in the editing of the Spanish edition of Dog Years, and corresponded with Günter Grass during the period when he was writing Obsesivos días circulares. Information obtained in a personal interview with Sainz, April, 1977, in Mexico City.

[9]Francescato, 69.

[10]Siegfried Kracauer, Theory of Film (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 95.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

[1]Gustavo Sainz, Gazapo (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1965), p. 16. All subsequent quotations from the text will be noted in parentheses and will refer to this edition.

[2]Vicente Leñero, "Reflexiones en torno a la narrativa joven de México," Mundo Nuevo, 39-40 (septiembre-octubre 1969), 19.

[3]In a lecture given at the University of Kansas in March of 1975, Sainz whimsically remarked that in writing Gazapo he composed a list of the two hundred words least acceptable to the Mexican literary "establishment," then proceeded to incorporate every single one of them into Gazapo.

[4]Stephen Geller, "Gazapo"(Review), The New York Times Review of Books (21 July 1968), 32.

[5]Lanin A. Gyurko, "Reality and Fantasy in Gazapo," Revista de Estudios Hispánicos, 8, no. 1 (enero 1974), 121.

[6]Gyurko, p. 127.

[7]James W. Brown, "Gazapo: Modelo para armar," Nueva Narrativa Hispanoamericana, 3, no. 2 (septiembre 1973), 244.

[8]According to Sainz, Balmori, Mauricio, and Arnaldo

were originally called Melgarejo, Rufo, and Tulio, and the names were changed to correspond to some of Sainz's personal friends "a modo de traviesa dedicatoria." Gazapo contains many other autobiographical elements. See Gustavo Sainz in the series "Nuevos escritores mexicanos presentados por sí mismos" (México: Empresas Editoriales, 1966).

[9]Richard Gilman, "Gazapo"(Review), New Republic (17 August 1968), 30.

[10]Gyurko, p. 121.

[11]Gyurko, pp. 118-19.

[12]Irving A. Leonard, "Gazapo"(Review), Saturday Review (2 August 1968), 24.

[13]Gilman, p. 30.

[14]In this respect, Bertil Romberg comments: "At one stage further away from the epistolary novel, in the direction of the first-person novel proper, we find novels which are described as being narratred on a basis of letters, diary entries, or memoranda, but where the narrator has so to speak taken over the role of the editor, and where the letters or diary entries have the function of verifying the authenticity of the content of the narrator's presentation." Bertil Romberg, Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First-Person Novel (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), p. 54.

[15]Leonard, p. 24.

[16]Gustavo Sainz, p. 7.

[17]See Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "La novela de los nuevos," Mundo Nuevo, 22 (abril 1968), 7.

[18]Gustavo Sainz, p. 6.

[19]Gyurko, p. 133.

[20]Gyurko, p. 134.

[21]Brown, p. 242.

[22]Tape recordings have been used in novels before Gazapo, and also in dramatic works like Samuel Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape. In the latter work, however, the tapes are really only a pretext for the retrospective characterization of the play's only character, while in popular novels like Lawrence Sanders' The Anderson Tapes they are used only to increase the credibility of the story and to intensify suspense by withholding information, and are not integrated into the themes of the novel as they are in Gazapo.

[23]See Gyurko, p. 127.

[24]Sainz raises the possibility that all of the narrative voices and points of view are, in fact, Menelao's, in his interview with Rodríguez Monegal, "La novela de los nuevos," p. 6.

[25]A good account of the parallels and contrasts is given in Gyurko, pp. 139-142.

[26]Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), p. 27.

[27]Gustavo Sainz, p. 58.

[28]"La novela de los nuevos," p. 6.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

[1]Gustavo Sainz, Obsesivos días circulares (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), p. 253. All subsequent quotations will be noted in the text and refer to this edition.

[2]See, for example, Walter M. Langford, The Mexican Novel Comes of Age (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971), pp. 203-4.

[3]Carlos Fuentes, La nueva novela hispanoamericana (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969), p. 30.

[4]In a personal interview in 1973 Sainz stated that the faded appearance of alternate pages at the end of the novel was done accidentally at the printers. Nevertheless, it is highly appropriate. See Dorothy F. Caram, "Gustavo Sainz: An Analysis of Obsesivos días circulares," unpublished Master's thesis, Rice University, 1974, p. 21.

[5]Raymond D. Souza, "Language versus Structure in the

Contemporary Spanish American Novel," Hispania, 52, no. 4 (December 1969), 838.

[6]Caram, p. 21.

[7]Aldous Huxley, Point Counter Point (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 300-301.

[8]Caram, p. 75.

[9]James Joyce, Ulysses (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 3.

[10]See Sergei Eisenstein, The Film Sense, tr. Jay Leda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1947), pp. 79-80.

[11]Federico Campbell, "Obsesivos días circulares"(Review), Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos, 246 (junio 1970), p. 721.

[12]Lecturas históricas mexicanas, ed. Ernesto de la Torre Villar (México: Empresas Editoriales, 1966). This four-volume work contains over a hundred selections from contemporary accounts of Mexican history, beginning with the conquest of Tenochtitlán.

[13]Thanks to Professor Jon S. Vincent for this observation, which proves how easy it is to miss the forest for the trees.

[14]Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956), p. 221.

[15]See Bertil Romberg, Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First-Person Novel (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), pp. 117-24.

[16]Review of Obsesivos días circulares in "Hojas de crítica," supplement to the Revista de la Universidad de México, 24, nos. 3-4 (noviembre-diciembre 1969), 7.

[17]Graciela Mendoza, "Entrevista con Gustavo Sainz," in "Revista mexicana de la cultura," supplement to El Nacional (8 febrero 1970), p. 3.

[18]Royal S. Brown, "Jean-Luc Godard: Nihilism versus aesthetic distantiation," Focus on Godard, ed. Royal S. Brown (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 114.

[19]Caram, p. 88.

[20]"la novela de los nuevos," p. 8.

[21]Quoted in Caram, p. 9.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

[1]Gustavo Sainz, La princesa del Palacio de Hierro (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1974). p. 85. All subsequent references to the novel will be noted in the text and refer to this edition.

[2]Those of Chapters 6 ("Confluencias de cúmulos recuerdos y luzlatido cotidiano") and 20 ("Cada doscientos cuarenta y siete hombres"), according to Sainz's note in the "Reconocimientos" section (p. 347).

[3]Her friends call her "gorda" or "preciosa." We do learn her age, however. She is eighteen years old in 1957, which makes her about thirty-five if we assume that the novel is narrated in 1974. See p. 185.

[4]A. A. Mendilow, Time and the Novel (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), p. 104.

[5]Of the novel's twenty-one chapters, eighteen can be placed in the following four categories:

Type A: Loosely unified by a framing device, containing unrelated episodes and emphases. Little temporal orderliness.

Type B: Unified by a thematic thread which the narrator develops by describing logically related episodes in chronological order. Frequent digressions, only marginally related to the central issue of the chapter.

Type C: Unified by a basic line of action, limited in time and sometimes also in space. Interrupted by digressions, frequently unrelated, but always returning to the basic line.

Type D: Consisting of a central episode which is preceded by a rather digressive introduction; the intro-

duction is causally related to the main episode. Few digressions or none at all; those which appear are closely related to the main episode.

CHAPTER	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
1	C	An odd and menacing restaurant Digressions: Cuban dance troupe (pp. 21-22) Secret room (pp. 22-23)
2	B	The narrator meets El Guapo Guapo; their courtship Digressions: Narrator's university career (pp. 36-37) Car wreck with Gabriel (pp. 38-41)
3	D	Introduction: telephone call from Gabriel Infante Central episode: the drug overdose Digressions: none
4	B	Narrator meets Alexis Stamatis Digressions: Mauricio beats up a drunk who tries to pick up the narrator
5	B	Tensions between the narrator and El Guapo Guapo Digressions: Introduction of the narrator's uncle (p. 73) Narrator's job in the Palacio de Hierro (pp. 75-76)
6	A	Framework: Narrator's dinners with Las Tapatías Narrator's relations with her mother
7	C	Basic lines of action: Car wreck in which a pedestrian is killed (pp. 105-110) Effects of the car wreck on La Tapatía Grande (pp. 111-18)
8	D	Mix-up with three different boyfriends at the same time

CHAPTER	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
9	C	Basic situation: Nightclub Digressions: Napoleón's prank on the bus How the narrator met Napoleón Death of Las Tapatías' parents How the narrator met Napoleón Napoleón's prank on the bus
11	C	Basic situation: Trip to Acapulco Digressions: Narrator's uncle (pp. 173-76) Sabueso the pistolero (p. 177)
12	A	Framework: "A veces nos reuníamos para hablar de nuestros problemas" Digressions: Narrator's relationship with Gabriel Infante (pp. 180-81) Alexis and his lovers (pp. 181-84) Trip to Europe (pp. 185-86) Drug usage among narrator's friends (pp. 188-94)
13	B	Thematic thread: La muchacha fantasma Digressions: Nazi war atrocities (pp. 195-96) Ema's interest in boxing (p. 203) Ema's sex life (pp. 207-8)
14	B	Two thematic threads: Pregnancy of La Vestida de Hombre's maid (pp. 213-18) False pregnancy of the narrator (pp. 219-28) Digression: Capitán Tarcisio (p. 227)
15	B	Thematic thread: The efforts of El Monje's boss to seduce the narrator
17	A	Framework: Adventures in Europe Fun with the other girls (pp. 252-55) Narrator's crush on Yiovani (pp. 255-62) Fortune tellers in Mexico (pp. 262-64) How the narrator first started to model clothes (pp. 264-67) Affair with Dino (pp. 267-73) Yiovani (pp. 273-74)

CHAPTER	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
18	D	Basic situation: Viewing of the pornographic films Digressions: El Monje's reaction to pornographic films in Copenhagen (pp. 283-84) Narrator's mother lost in Mexico City (pp. 285-86)
19	B	The story of everybody's marriage Mauricio-Josefina La Vestida de Hombre-Ezequiel Arjona Andrés-Sandra Tito Caruso-Florencia Guapo-Guapo-two unidentified ladies
20	D	Two main episodes: Car wreck with Tito Caruso (pp. 313-18) Party; betrayal of La Tapatía Grande

The chapters which are not included in this scheme are discussed in the text.

[6]Another more digressive exposition of the narrator's self-importance is the following passage:

> si yo quiero a alguien hago que la gente lo quiera, casi a la fuerza porque te meto a esa persona que yo quiero ¿me entiendes? Te involucro con ella hasta un grado que no tienes idea. . .y al mismo tiempo, cuando esa persona me deja de importar, pues me deja de importar, ¿no? (p. 163)

[7]Bruce-Novoa, "La princesa del Palacio de Hierro" (Review), Revista Iberoamericana, 94 (enero-marzo 1976), p. 136.

[8]There are many other examples of the phonetic spelling of English and other foreign words: "Deiri Cuin"(p. 37),

"alcacélcer"(p. 67), "penjaus"(p. 96), "perritas frenchpudles"(p. 98), "jelou"(p. 329).

[9]Bruce-Novoa, p. 137.

[10]Sainz wrote the introduction for Gabriel Carreaga's Mitos y fantasías de la clase media en México (México: Joaquín Mortiz, 1974), and in many ways this sociological work treats the same themes as La princesa del Palacio de Hierro. Consider the following paragraph:

> Los padres y las madres de la clase media mexicana actual no se han dado cuenta de que su amor viscoso y chantajista no educa, sino deforma; no dan confianza, sino inseguridad; no infunden respeto, sino miedo. En resumen: en lugar de formar seres humanos con alternativas, forman personajes de telenovela, porque al fin y al cabo, de acuerdo a como vive la clase media hoy, es puro melodrama personal y social. No son capaces de alcanzar la tragedia ni la pasión moral; su mundo es el sentimentalismo y la cursilería, la apatía y el conformismo. De tal forma que sus vidas siempre serán un círculo vicioso. (Carreaga, p. 76)

FOOTNOTES TO THE CONCLUSION

[1]Froylán M. López Narváez, "Una novela sin benevolencia," "Diorama de la cultura," supplement to Excelsior (1 diciembre 1974), p. 12.

[2]Carlos Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," Mundo Nuevo, 1 (julio 1966), p. 17.

[3]See María Teresa Bisbal Siller, Los novelistas y

la Ciudad de México (México: Ediciones Botas, 1963), and Antonio Acevedo Escobedo, La Ciudad de México en la novela (México: Departamento del Distrito Federal, Subsecretaria de Obras y Servicios, 1973).

[4]Carlos Fuentes, La región más transparente (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1958), p. 10.

[5]Fuentes, "Situación del escritor en América Latina," p. 7.

[6]These remarks are based on a reading of the first four chapters of Compadre Lobo which Professor John S. Brushwood obtained for me in manuscript from the novelist, and on personal discussions with the novelist in April 1977.

[7]Francescato, p. 77.

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