

ANGLES OF OTHERNESS: SUBJECTIVITY AND DIFFERENCE
IN THE FICTION OF CRISTINA FERNÁNDEZ CUBAS

by

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Submitted to the Department of Spanish
and Portuguese and the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of
Kansas in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy.

Dissertation Committee:

Dissertation defended: 20 April 1998

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ABSTRACT

Cristina Fernández Cubas has published four collections of short stories, Mi hermana Elba (1980), Los altillos de Brumal (1983), El ángulo del horror (1990), Con Agatha en Estambul (1994); and two novels, El año de Gracia (1985) and El columpio (1995). I analyze these six works to explore the ongoing re-construction of identity in post-totalitarian Spain. In Fernández Cubas's representation of the mediation of subjectivity she always subverts the limits of identity by problematizing the issue of difference--how the subject defines and distinguishes itself from others. She examines the way otherness is implicitly identified within the very subject that professes to exclude it; thus her works interrogate, reverse and finally erode the borders that define the self. Each of the five chapters of this study focuses on a separate theoretical issue--power relations, gender roles, discursive constructions of identity, spatial positioning, and visual constructions of desire--as it is played out in a collection of short stories or the author's two novels. These theoretical considerations illuminate the way subject/object relations are mediated and reversed in the author's fiction in order to reveal identity as a construct that can be altered. By opening subjectivity to angles of otherness, Fernández Cubas's texts show how difference and multiplicity can expand and enrich the subject's vision of itself.

For Robert Spires, with thanks

Acknowledgments

This text is credited to me and, in many ways, it tells the story of the evolution of my thinking over the years. Yet many people who have influenced my life have left their mark on these pages as well. This dissertation is also a credit to them, then, although I must claim its deficiencies as my own.

First, I thank Cristina Fernández Cubas for meeting with me one summer afternoon in 1996 to talk about her work. Her stories have provided me with endless hours of entertainment and provoked me to interrogate my interpretations as well as those of others.

My love and thanks go to my entire family for their persistence in keeping me grounded as I worked through these readings. I especially thank my mother, Joyce Folkart, who recited poems and told stories when I was small to captivate me and kindle my love for language. To Linda Reilly and all my friends scattered Stateside and abroad, I extend my deepest thanks for your kindness, good humor, and companionship. I look forward to many more adventures with you.

One of the greatest adventures of my life has been at the University of Kansas, a place unique for the extraordinary people who work there. To all the friends who have shared my path over these last years: know how much

I appreciate you, for the journey has been much brighter for your company. My KU experience has been singularly shaped by Kirsten Adlung Kellogg (Cosme), Sheila K. Avellanet, Lisa Gaskill Nowak, Bob Hershberger, Mary O'Day, and Dan Rogers (el tercer bandido), indispensable colleagues and friends whose perspectives--so often different than my own--have galvanized and enriched my thinking about worlds both fictional and real. I sincerely appreciate the professors at the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for their enthusiastic support, especially Robert Spires, Vicky Unruh, Andrew Debicki, John Brushwood, and Bob Blue, who waded through various stages of this manuscript with good-humored perseverance and wise advice. I also am very grateful to Juan Velasco for his helpful feedback. Special thanks go to Barry Nowak for his fortitude, and to Linda Shotts and Shirley Wheeler for their eternal patience and encouragement.

My road through Kansas began in Virginia and now will circle back again. I am particularly grateful to Francie Cate-Arries, who inspired me to embrace the field of Hispanism many years ago at William and Mary and has bolstered me ever since with her wisdom and enthusiasm.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to Robert Spires, whose perceptive interpretations, skewed sense of humor and unwavering support have defined the Spanish experience at KU for generations of students. For all this, and more, I thank you.

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Introduction

The concept of subjectivity has figured as the central thread of diverse theoretical tasks, winding its way through historical, political, social, cultural, psychoanalytical, and numerous other treatises, including literary works. Particularly in fields influenced by philosophical notions, the subject is generally posited as the center of perception and power, in contrast to the object, which is what the subject perceives and considers to be “other” than itself. While traditional Western philosophical ideas consider the subject as “the complex but nonetheless unified locus of the constitution of the phenomenal world” (Smith xxvii), more recent, poststructural approaches tend to undermine the validity of privileging the subject over the object. The fiction of Cristina Fernández Cubas enters into this debate by interrogating the very markers of “difference” that distinguish the subject from the object. Whereas phenomenal perception has traditionally informed the consideration of philosophical subjectivity, Fernández Cubas alters the angles of perception in her tales to depict a worldview counter to that of a posited center. In doing so she unmasks the effort to define an enclosed identity as a construction that can be ultimately deconstructed. Her texts thus offer “angles of otherness,” shifts in perception that destabilize absolute terms of

difference and power between the subject and object, in order to engage subjectivity as a dynamic process open to the influence of the other.

Within the context of Spanish culture, the concern for the formation of a unified and unique Spanish subject is difficult to trace, for any origin is arbitrary and one could always find a prior manifestation of some aspect of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, the establishment of the Spanish Crown at the end of the fifteenth century is significant, for it consecrated the quest to construct a coherent sense of Spanishness by emphasizing Spain's difference from other cultural and national identities. The imperial project of the newly formed Spain provided a convenient guise for pulling together diverse, centrifugal political forces within the country under the identity of the Spanish subject, defined in opposition to its colonized others.

The viability of this identity came to a crisis point with the "Disaster" of the Spanish-American War and the push toward modernization at the end of the nineteenth century. The erosion of Spain's power over its others dislodged a foundational precept of what it meant to be Spanish:

Spain's precarious unity between its different regions had been constructed around a common endeavor to extend its dominion and its religion to the empire and to extract the wealth contained therein. With the loss of the last colonies, the already fragile ideological ties binding the regions to the centre from which that

empire had been run were put under even greater strain. (Balfour 29)

The cultural and racial debates that dominated this time of the so-called Generation of '98 harked back to traditional concepts of "*lo español*" in an effort to patch the cracks in Spanish subjectivity:

One such view laid stress on a universalist mission of Spain to bring spirituality to an increasingly materialistic world. According to this vision, the source of Spain's new resurgence lay in the Hispanic traditions it had created in its former empire [. . .]. Other traditional images of national identity focused on the exceptional valour of Spanish men, their highly developed sense of honour, and their 'manliness,' while Spanish women were portrayed as uniquely beautiful and devout. (Balfour 30)

Thus the myth of Spanishness was founded in part on the construct of unity fabricated out of supposed difference from colonized forces outside of Spain, as well as on notions of masculinity/femininity within *lo español*, construed as superior to sexual roles in other parts of the world. As this brief summary indicates, the concept of difference serves as the fundamental mark of identity. Yet, applied across constantly shifting fields of identity such as nation, culture, or gender, "difference" can also be seen as mutable, as

harboring contradictory resonances that obscure notions of fixed subjectivity even into present-day Spain.

Spain is Different. The Spanish Ministry of Tourism of the 1960s proliferated this slogan to cast Spain in an appealing light and to attract international tourism and favor to Franco's fascist regime. Yet this claim has often been viewed negatively, as John Hooper notes: "It seemed just a step away from saying that 'Spaniards are different,' which was one of the ways that Franco had justified his dictatorship--on the assertion that, unlike other Europeans, they could not be trusted to handle their own destiny" (445). Alternatively, General Franco's insistence that Spain was different--i.e., better--than the rest of the world also served as a *post facto* justification and adulation of the country's political and economic isolation from and rejection by the rest of the West. Under Franco, the cultural construction of Spain reinscribed the traditional, univocal representation of the country, as was constantly intoned in his mantra of "*una patria, una lengua, una religión.*" While the dictator occasionally changed the individual elements of the phrase to suit his rhetoric of the moment, the essential *oneness* of its discursive trinity remained constant in his message. Franco's slant on the situation posited Spain as the center that was superior to the other, the (marginal) rest of the world.

The nearly two and a half decades that have passed since Franco's death in November 1975, however, have been marked on many levels by a shift away

from emphasis on the center to a valorization of previously marginalized groups.¹ In this light, the post-totalitarian period in Spain may be characterized by the embracing of difference. The changing politics of the country were the most visible marker of a rejection of a unified, centralized power in recognition of the role of multiple centers of power.² After Franco's death the 1978 Spanish Constitution established the parliamentary monarchy as a union of seventeen autonomous communities and acknowledged four official languages of Spain: *castellano*, *catalán*, *gallego* and *euskera*. Since 1978 the various regions have negotiated the intricacies of regional versus state authority that were sometimes only vaguely delineated in the constitution. Beneath this apparent embracing of difference and centrifugal dispersal of power, however, a centripetal tendency has come to the fore within each culture to define itself on the basis of its difference from the others and, consequently, to distance or denigrate other regional groups within the nation. Indeed, Jo Labanyi has observed that "the current use of culture to manufacture forms of regional identity comes close to replicating its manipulation by early Francoism to fabricate an 'essentially different' Spanishness" (403). This valorization and legalization of regional languages and cultural heritages was accompanied by a drastically altered political scene dominated for more than a decade by Felipe González and the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE).

Spain's entry into the European Economic Community in 1986

underscored its role in the European and International political realm—another opening of its borders to the difference of political forces. Paradoxically, though, this move also represented a union with other European powers into a centralized force. On the domestic front, the 1996 elections in Spain brought the victory of José María Aznar's conservative Partido Popular (PP). While some Spaniards lament that the recent handover of power signals a return to more reactionary politics, others are relieved at the smooth transition from one ruling party to another which, together with the King's squelching of the attempted military coup in 1981, may be seen as evidence that democracy is solidly in place in Spain. As the country has moved from dictatorship to democracy, the oppositional forms of government have underscored their distinction from one another. Yet a consideration of the contradictory messages projected by political action on the regional, national, and multi-national levels suggests that the dictatorial and democratic Spains share at least one similarity: they discursively define their identities by emphasizing their essential *difference* from other groups. Indeed, the cynical and nostalgic leftist mantra of the *desencanto* years, "Things were better *against* Franco," underscores this tendency (Labanyi 397; italics mine).

In the social environment that has become increasingly liberal in Spain over most of the last three decades, the status of women has also changed. The five years before Franco's death saw a marked increase of women working

outside the home and in 1980 they constituted 27% of the work force. By 1990 that figure had increased to 35% (Montero 382). The year of Franco's death also witnessed the abolition of the *permiso marital*, which had prohibited women from undertaking any activity outside the home without their husbands' consent: "a married woman in Spain could not open a bank account, buy a car, apply for a passport, or even work without her husband's permission. And if she did work with her husband's approval, he had the right to claim her salary" (Montero 381). As of 1978, adultery and concubinage were no longer crimes (previously, adultery committed by women was a crime punishable by prison whereas concubinage—committed by men—met with much less severity), and the sale of contraceptives was legalized. By 1981, notwithstanding ecclesiastical opposition, divorce was officially permissible in Spain. After much dissension abortion under limited circumstances was legalized in 1985, which has somewhat ameliorated the high numbers of abortions performed illegally or abroad on Spaniards (Hooper 160).³

Moreover, women have increased their numbers in education, making up 54% of graduates at all levels in 1990 (Montero 385). The advancement of women's status in society has been fomented by social organizations such as the Instituto de la Mujer, established by the Socialists in 1983. Equality can hardly be said to reign on all levels, however, as John Hooper observes: "Almost certainly the most important reason why there has been so little conflict over the changing

role of Spanish women is that it has so far made relatively little difference to the traditional habits of Spanish men" (174). Eight out of ten men make no contribution to housework at all, the lowest figure of any country in the EC (Montero 382). As with politics, then, the "difference" of women's roles over time is a relative condition, evaluated in terms of the roles of men.

While women's emergence in the extra-domestic sphere reflected and effected many changes in the Spanish socio-cultural scene since the end of the dictatorship, the marked opening in the industry of media communication revolutionized the way Spaniards see themselves and the rest of the world. The domain of the state-run Televisión Española (TVE) was curtailed when a 1983 law passed by the PSOE authorized the introduction of regional television channels, reiterating the shift away from centralism. Then in 1989 Antena 3, Spain's first private television channel, went on the air. It has since been followed by Tele 5 and Canal Plus, a private subscription channel. This relative openness to air time, echoed in the print media by national, regional and private newspapers and journals, has been a key step in the country's democratization.

The economic success and the opening up of the media in the 1980s coincided with tremendous investment in and proliferation of the arts. Music Festivals, new art galleries such as the Reina Sofía, the Thyssen and the Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, and the Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico, a repertory theater company dedicated to the classics, all promoted public interest

in the arts. To undergird the floundering Spanish film industry, the PSOE appointed Pilar Miró, a film director herself, as the Director-General of Film in 1982. Although the late Miró was a polemical figure, the *Ley Miró* of 1983-84 did much to subvent the production of quality Spanish films. Nonetheless, the Spanish movie industry has struggled in contention with formidable foreign competition, particularly Hollywood. The democratic government instituted various quotas to advance Spanish cinema production with only limited success, which was aggravated even more when Spain's entry into the EC meant that European films counted toward the Spanish quota.

Spain's best-known director, Pedro Almodóvar, introduced the movie world to the *movida madrileña*, the quintessential expression of the cultural and economic prosperity and growing political cynicism of the 1980s. The *movida* embodied society's successful boom as well as its *desencanto*, its disillusionment that democracy was hardly utopia:

La *Movida* fue la expresión social de este individualismo al mismo tiempo hedonista y pesimista. [. . .] sus expresiones artísticas e intelectuales se dejan agrupar bajo dos categorías claramente diferenciadas: por un lado el heroísmo mediático de espectáculos culturales, universidades de verano, premios nacionales o *talk shows*, en fin, la *fiesta*; por otro, las expresiones del desencanto,

incluso del pesimismo más apocalíptico, y por tanto de una cierta protesta. (Subirats 212)

A synthesis of the traditional and the new, the banal and the sophisticated, Almodóvar's films projected the anachronous irony that a country barely immersed in modernity should be swept up in the dizzying cynicism of postmodernism. As Jo Labanyi has observed,

This sense of accelerated motion going in all directions at once is captured by the term *la movida* applied to the Madrid cultural scene from 1975 to the mid-1980s, and in particular by the hysteria of Almodóvar's films, presented as a response to the attempt to live simultaneously in the old-fashioned world of sentimental kitsch and the modern world of information technology. (399)

With the rejected reality of the past still penetrating the hyperreality of the present, Spain embodied an uneven postmodernity full of contradictions.

Of course, "postmodernity" and "postmodern" are highly debated terms that have been defined, questioned and undermined by many theoreticians; entire tomes could be--and have been--written on the subject. As it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to recount here all the arguments in the debate, I shall highlight only the central ideas that directly inform my own analyses in this project.⁴ Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola draws on Linda

Hutcheon's A Poetics of Postmodernism in an effort to distill what might be called common characteristics in Spanish "postmodernist" fiction:

una heterogeneidad discursiva que apunta hacia el cuestionamiento de los límites del propio texto/del género, y que problematiza la existencia de una figura autoritaria que lleve a cabo una narración omnisciente; una clara exposición de la marginalidad que desafía los límites del texto, así como un cambio de la dominante que se traduce en una consecuente integración de la "Cultura" en "cultura." (124)

The issue of difference forms the thread that connects these diverse postmodern elements: instead of advancing univocalism, postmodern texts foreground discursive heterogeneity, question the limits of text and genre, and problematize the validity of authority/subjugation and centrality/marginality, all of which demotes any centralized "Culture" to the level of multiple "cultures."

This crisis of Culture/culture precisely characterizes concerns for identity in contemporary Spain. Jo Labanyi associates Spain's experience of postmodernity with the country's anxiety to assert its difference from the rest of the West:

If, as has been said, postmodernism is an expression of political impotence resulting from loss of belief in the master narratives of

liberalism and marxism, and from the media's monopoly control of the images of reality available to us, then Spain is suffering from a bad attack: [. . .] Spain is no longer different. (397)

Labanyi further connects democratic Spain's focus on internal cultural heterogeneity with its lost sense of difference on the international front:

Postmodernist theory deconstructs the concept of unity—and by extension that of identity, in its sense of 'sameness'—exposing it as a political manoeuvre designed to suppress recognition of difference within. It is because Spain has now recognized its cultural plurality that it is no longer possible to make clear-cut distinctions between what is and what is not Spanish: both because incompatible cultural forms may be equally Spanish, and because cultural forms found in Spain are found elsewhere. (397)

This is not to say that 'Spanishness' does not exist. As Labanyi points out, postmodernism "means recognition of the fact that 'Spanishness' is a shifting concept, encompassing plurality and contradiction" (397). In this light, the re-construction of identity in postmodern Spain is an open-ended task, always subject to alteration and contradiction by another 'difference.'

Hence postmodernism blurs the demarcation lines that trace out the perceived difference and identity of any single force, voice, or point of view. In Hutcheon's words, "the contradictions that characterize postmodernism

reject any neat binary opposition that might conceal a secret hierarchy of values. The elements of these contradictions are usually multiple; the focus is on differences, not single otherness [. . .]" (Poetics 42-43). In light of the contradictions produced by constant subversion, many have criticized postmodernism for what might be viewed as its inherent deconstruction of everything, including itself. If everything can be displaced from its former centrality, the argument generally goes, then the only thing that remains is nihilism. Yet postmodernism rejects the absolutism manifest even in the total denial of any valid center. It does not invalidate the effort to establish priorities of order. As Hutcheon points out, its effect is quite the opposite:

What [postmodernism] does say is that there are all kinds of orders and systems in our world—and that we create them all. That is their justification and their limitation. They do not exist 'out there', fixed, given, universal, eternal; they are human constructs in history. This does not make them any the less necessary or desirable. It does, however, condition their 'truth' value. (Poetics 43)

By highlighting the constructed nature of discourse, postmodernism proposes that a multiplicity of perspectives is key to obtaining a broader vision of the world.

As the quintessential creation of language, literature uniquely projects the possibilities and limitations of discourse. Within the context of contemporary Spain, the experimental novels of writers such as Juan Goytisolo, Luis Goytisolo, and Juan Benet revealed in the way discourse constructs and is constructed almost to the exclusion of telling a story. Their language play posed a radical questioning that reflected the environment of increasing *apertura* in Spain and the influence of postmodernism and structuralism in the 1960s and 1970s. Out of this impulse emerges what Gonzalo Sobejano has termed "la novela poemática: la que aspira a ser por entero y por excelencia texto creativo autónomo" (1). In relation to the poetic novel Sobejano registers various manifestations of discursively conscious texts:

La más próxima al poema, hasta confundirse con él, sería la metaficción [. . .]. Aparecieron luego la novela histórica [. . .]; la novela lúdica (que cultiva el entretenimiento parodiando o remozando pautas, policiacas, de espionaje, de ciencia-ficción, tenebrosas, eróticas; la novela de memorias [. . .]); y—en fin y a lo último—la novela testimonial, que ocuparía el lugar más remoto.

(1)

For Sobejano, Camilo José Cela's Mazurca para dos muertos (1983) embodies the poetic, Luis Goytisolo's collection Antagonía (1973-81) heralds the

metafictional, Lourdes Ortiz's Urraca (1982) re-writes history, the detectivesque fiction of Vázquez Montalbán or Eduardo Mendoza foregrounds the ludic, Carmen Martín Gaité's El cuarto de atrás (1977) exemplifies the novel of memory, and Visión del ahogado (1977) represents the testimonial novel.

I would add that many of these works, as products of postmodernism, overflow the constructed borders of such categories to occupy more than one or to question the discursive nature of each. Indeed, the tendency of contemporary Spanish novels to problematize notions of history, myth, memory, metafiction, high and popular culture, and genres such as the *novela negra*, constitutes a literary demonstration of the constructive nature of discourse. Such works frequently turn back on themselves to destabilize the very tenets that define them, as seen in Claudia Schaefer-Rodríguez's observations about the new Spanish *novela negra*: "the *novela negra* calls into question the idea of 'crime' itself as well as the possibility of a solution" (137). While the novel has been a devouring genre since its inception, the postmodern novel proves to be deliberately self-conscious in its voracious questioning of totalizing possibilities of all discourse in general, and its own discourse in particular.

Applying the degree of this overt consciousness of discourse as a litmus test, Robert Spires hones Sobejano's paradigm by plotting post-

Francoist fiction along a spectrum of "writerly" versus "readerly" texts. For Spires, the year of Franco's death constitutes an apex of the two extremes in Spanish narrative. Positing Juan Goytisolo's Juan sin Tierra (1975) as one pole that focuses solely on the discursive construction of narrative, and Eduardo Mendoza's La verdad sobre el caso Savolta (1975) as the opposite endpoint that emphasizes the story told, Spires views works of contemporary fiction as relative combinations of writing-centered and reading-centered approaches: "To a large degree Spanish fiction from 1975 to the present can be seen as an effort to reconcile the conflict between process and product, between discourse and story" (Post-Totalitarian 200). Their structural opposition notwithstanding, the novels of this period all display a questioning of absolutes and a consciousness of how stories come to be told; in doing so, they promote agency within the limits imposed by discourse.⁵ For Spires, this is the "common legacy" of the distinct works of post-totalitarian fiction (87).⁶

Cristina Fernández Cubas, born in Arenys de Mar, Barcelona, in 1945, has been acclaimed in Spain and the rest of Europe as one of the key writers who expresses the national exploration of post-totalitarian identity.⁷ While the concept of "generations" is a questionable construct at best, Fernández Cubas is generally grouped by critics in the generation of '68: authors born in the late 1930s-1940s, who were inevitably influenced by the 1968 upheavals in France

and around Europe and who came into their own "coincidiendo con la agonía del franquismo, el apogeo de la narrativa experimental y la influencia del estructuralismo, a la vez que, a finales del período señalado, también empezaba a vislumbrarse una vuelta a la recuperación de los elementos clásicos del relato" (Basanta 64-65). Other members of her group who share in the glory of the *nueva narrativa española* include Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Alvaro Pombo, Lourdes Ortiz, Eduardo Mendoza, José María Guelbenzu, Juan José Millás, Ana María Moix and Soledad Puértolas.

Although most of these writers began publishing around the early 1970s, Fernández Cubas abandoned journalism to explore Spanish narrative relatively late. She emerged in the Hispanic literary world in 1980 with her first collection of short stories, Mi hermana Elba, which critics and writers alike have hailed as the initiator of a renaissance in the short fiction genre in Spain.⁸ A few years later she published another collection entitled Los atillos de Brumal (1983). Her first novel, El año de Gracia (1985), ensued shortly thereafter. She followed this work with two more collections of short stories, El ángulo del horror (1990) and Con Agatha en Estambul (1994), which have truly established her as a master of the genre. Finally, Fernández Cubas released her second novel, El columpio, in 1995.

Set against the backdrop of social, cultural, and political alterations that I have sketched here, Fernández Cubas's works are marked by prominent themes

that coalesce to advance her underlying design: to change the way readers see the world and, ultimately, to change the way they desire to be. Toward this end, she investigates discursive constructs of the self imposed by society and explores ways in which the subject can exercise agency. Moreover, she examines the struggle for power between individuals in their efforts to define themselves, as they play out their attractions and repulsions to difference in each other. It may seem surprising at first, then, that this female writer from Barcelona refuses to engage specifically issues of Catalán nationalism or of feminism. I suspect that this may be because, rather than accentuate and reify distinctions of cultural and sexual identity, Fernández Cubas prefers to interrogate the parameters by which such identities are constituted.⁹ Toward this end, she undermines patriarchal privileging of centrality, of logic, and of cause and effect relations in order to reveal that a richer experience is often gained by losing oneself in the unexpected and the inexplicable.

In numerous articles, conference papers, and several dissertation or book chapters, other scholars have acclaimed the innovation and dynamism of Fernández Cubas's work. Spires examines how the author dismantles authority when she explores "the illogic of logic" in El ángulo del horror ("Postmodernism/Paralogism" 234). Moreover, he features El año de Gracia as a key representation of the postmodern episteme in his Post-Totalitarian Spanish Fiction. In her dissertation, Julie Gleue stresses the impact that the postmodern

"bizarre worlds" of El ángulo del horror have on the self and its perception of reality. John B. Margenot, III, examines El año de Gracia as a parodic repetition of Robinson Crusoe, while Catherine Bellver concludes that the intertextual juxtaposition with Defoe's novel condemns the nihilistic social context of the postmodern novel ("Robinson Crusoe Revisited" 115). On the other hand, I tend to view Fernández Cubas's first novel as regenerative and celebratory through its act of repeating foundational literary models with a difference.¹⁰

Many critics have signaled the subversive element of the fantastic in Fernández Cubas's stories, as seen in articles by Mary Lee Bretz, José Ortega, Lynn K. Talbot, and Phyllis Zatlin. Concha Alborg notes this quality as typical of fiction of the Spanish transition period. The fantastic is indeed one prominent mode of blurring the boundaries of absolute conceptions of reality in these texts. As Luis Suñén observes, her works reveal "la otra cara de lo real, de lo que bien podríamos llamar el lado oculto de las personas y de los objetos [. . .]" (5). Fernández Cubas does not restrict her exploration of the other side of reality to the fantastic genre; she also has written marvelous, uncanny, and even realist stories. For this reason, I seek to complement the aforementioned critics' studies of the fantastic by examining the subversive effects of Fernández Cubas's narratives through other means.

Apart from the fantastic, other studies of Fernández Cubas's work focus on her manipulation of language. Scholars such as Ana Rueda and Fernando

Valls ("De las certezas") emphasize a polarity between orality and the written word, or between irrational and rational language. Catherine Bellver treats El año de Gracia as a postmodern text in which both the oral and written word are finally displaced. She concludes that "since [. . .] words—both oral and written—are dis-placed, communication on a collective level ceases" ("El año de Gracia and the Displacement of the Word" 232). Similarly, Kathleen Glenn shows how the writer highlights "the arbitrariness of boundaries" by stressing the indecipherability of language and the inability of language to communicate ("Gothic Indecipherability" 126). Displacement of the meaning of language is certainly a key technique, yet I argue that communication does not cease in Fernández Cubas's texts; instead, the author dislodges hierarchical, patriarchally privileged meanings to create new possibilities for communication.

By exploiting the multiple and often ambiguous meanings of language, the author reveals that the multiplicity of difference, incarnated in the displacement of a single, all-encompassing meaning, can enhance instead of impede one's understanding of the other. As Fernández Cubas is of those authors who reject extreme experimentalism (although she does play with metafiction) in favor of a *vuelta a la palabra*, her tales could be categorized as reading-centered. Yet her return to the word does not express ingenuous faith in its capacity to capture absolute meaning. In her fictional world, Fernández Cubas deconstructs any direct correlation between the signifier (the letters of the

word) and the signified (the meaning of the word), which readers might assume to exist, in order to unleash the creativity and elusiveness of the sign (the word as mark and meaning). If language is the basis of how we conceive of ourselves and our world, as Saussure and Lacan have indicated, the post-structuralist awareness of the multiplicity of meaning inherent in every sign may be seen as the cornerstone to understanding Fernández Cubas's work. She wields the written word to question the world view, based on binary oppositions, that society—or patriarchy—has conditioned us to accept.

Implicit in those patriarchal structures is a fear of difference, expressed in the identification of the self in opposition to and through the subjugation of the other. In Fernández Cubas's representation of the mediation of identity, she constantly destabilizes the limits of subjectivity by problematizing the issue of difference. Why do all subject positions depend on the status of difference? What do we leave out of our subjectivity in order to define who we are? And does not that excluded otherness reveal as much about the contours of our identity as what we profess to embrace as part of ourselves? In this post-Franco period of flux, uncertainty, and redefinition, Fernández Cubas's texts play with alternative "angles," alternative perspectives of any given situation, to show how the differences of others can expand and enrich the subject's vision of itself.

Thus Fernández Cubas's works advocate the embracing of difference by subverting basic structures of patriarchal thought, especially as it is embodied in

language, and by underscoring the importance of self/other relations to the development of identity. In their turn, these often disquieting texts position themselves as oppositional “others” in relation to readers, and thus serve as direct mediators in readers’ own processes of subject formation. In this way, her fiction causes readers to see “other”wise and learn to exercise agency in their subject positions.

This study examines how Fernández Cubas employs discourse to explore the contemporary reconstruction of identity as negotiated through the difference implicit in power relations, gender roles, literary and historical depictions of the subject, space, and altered perspectives. While these concerns emerge in almost every text Fernández Cubas has published, I have organized my study so that each chapter will foreground one theme as manifested in a single novel or collection of short fiction.¹¹ The dynamics of power are fundamental to any subject/object relationship. I draw on Foucauldian conceptions of power in chapter 1 to analyze the author's first work, Mi hermana Elba, which came out during the early stages of the shift in post-totalitarian Spanish fiction from the focus on a central authority figure as the locus that governs the balance of power in society, toward an examination of how power relations permeate all levels of human interaction.¹² In my second chapter I draw on Judith Butler's theories of the performativity of gender to show how, in Los atillos de Brumal, the creation of narrative discourse can alter the pre-script of gender.

In the third chapter I discuss Fernández Cubas's discursive repetitions in El año de Gracia as a postcolonial revision of the canonical literary representation of the Western subject, and in El columpio as a re-interpretation of the Francoist depiction of the historical Spanish subject. In the fourth chapter I explore various theories of subjectivity in relation to the way space marks out the contours of the subject in Con Agatha en Estambul. My fifth and final chapter features the stories of El ángulo del horror in a consideration of how shifting angles of vision, motivated and mediated by desire, construct both the subject that sees and the object that is seen. With its overt emphasis on 'angles' of otherness, El ángulo del horror serves as a metaphor for Fernández Cubas's fictional project: by accentuating the limited vision that any single, closed-off subject position affords, her works advocate difference as an indispensable force that pulverizes subjective stasis with the agency inherent in seeing otherwise.

The connecting thread of all these theories and texts is the tension of self/other that typifies the perception of identity. In exploring the dynamics of subjects and objects and the definitions of their differences from each other, the stories of Fernández Cubas invert and ultimately subvert such duality. In her initial work, Mi hermana Elba, the author offers a sort of *arte poético* on the reversibility of dialectical relationships through power, which I address in chapter 1.

Looking Objectively at the Subject

The Spectacle of Power in Mi hermana Elba

In his anthology Son cuentos: Antología del relato breve español, 1975-1993, Fernando Valls credits the publication of Cristina Fernández Cubas's first work, Mi hermana Elba (1980) as the inauguration of a renaissance in the short story genre in Spain. Surprisingly, relatively few critical analyses have been published on this collection. In her dissertation, Julie Gleue explores the fractured self in the author's short fiction. Mary Lee Bretz, José Ortega, Lynn K. Talbot and Phyllis Zatlin ("Amnesia, Strangulation. . .") have stressed elements of the fantastic and gothic in Fernández Cubas's narrative. The polarity between orality and the written word, or between irrational and rational language, is the focus of Ana Rueda's and Fernando Valls's ("De las certezas") studies of this work. Situating language as a manifestation of power fundamental to the negotiation of subjectivity, I analyze the stories of Mi hermana Elba as representations of the discursive practices that determine how people think, act, and view themselves and reality.

In all her works, Fernández Cubas investigates discursive constructs of the self imposed by society and explores ways in which the subject can exercise agency. Key to this endeavor is her examination of the struggle for power between individuals in their efforts to define themselves, as they play out their

attractions and repulsions to difference in one another. While power constitutes a significant motif in all her texts, the publication in 1980 of Mi hermana Elba foregrounds the dynamic at a key point in Spain's political and cultural evolution. Critics have debated about exactly when the transition toward a post-Franco mode of thinking actually began—whether in the late 60s before the dictator's death in 1975, or in the late 70s after the change of government.¹³ Overall, however, the early fiction of this type reveals a common preoccupation with a central authority figure that governs the balance of power in society.¹⁴ As Fernández Cubas's initial collection of short fiction demonstrates, the post-totalitarian portrayal of the dynamics of power in fictional worlds soon evolves toward an examination of how relations of dominance and struggle permeate all levels of human interaction.

Many of Michel Foucault's observations on power elucidate the struggles of interpersonal relationships that Fernández Cubas depicts in her fiction. The French philosopher analyzes the right to power not as something legitimately possessed, but as a phenomenon effected by a temporary condition of domination. Foucault's study centers on the tactics that realize subjugation: "Let us not, therefore, ask why certain people want to dominate [. . .]. Let us ask, instead, how things work at the level of on-going subjugation, at the level of those continuous and un-interrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors, etc." (Power/Knowledge 97).¹⁵ In effect,

Foucault explores not just the way power circulates through people as its vehicles, but the way it functions at the level of the discourses that produce people as subjects.

Inherent to these power operations is the element of knowledge, for power and knowledge produce and feed off one another. This symbiotic relationship implies an ongoing struggle between the subject who knows and the object who is known:

These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. (DP 28)

Power relations establish an ever-present, though ever-changeable, dialectic between the dominated and the dominant. Those individuals are produced, according to Foucault, by a collaboration of power and knowledge that imposes patterns of discipline:

The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called 'discipline.' We

must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms [. . .]. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (DP 194)

Thus technologies of power produce individuals, who in turn strive for power over one another in order to alter or affirm their own positions.

Struggles for power permeate the four stories of Mi hermana Elba as the characters observe, document, evaluate and define one another in their efforts to evoke truth through rituals and hence to establish their own identities of dominance, normality, and right. The dynamics of watching and being watched emerge, therefore, as fundamental to the mediation of power. Often the characters, aware that they are being observed, perform their chosen roles in order to convince their spectators that their representation is really truth. Images of the gaze and theatrical techniques highlight the concepts of life as performance and identity as a changeable role, while the motif of the uncertain composition and alteration of written records points to the distance between the representation of language and the "truth" of reality. Fernández Cubas's stories unveil the discourses that position one character over another in the game of power. Furthermore, she exposes the characters' struggle to alter these discourses as they manipulate language in order to subjugate and rewrite one

another. Ultimately, in Mi hermana Elba, identity is unveiled as a construct to be modified and dominance as a precarious balance to be undermined.

"Lúnula y Violeta":

"Lúnula y Violeta," the first story in Mi hermana Elba, underscores the unstable nature of power relations between individuals in the clash between the two eponymous characters. Violeta's initial position of superiority is established by her control of the narration. She gradually cedes her power to Lúnula in what might be compared, in Foucault's history of shifting power relations, to sovereign power yielding to a mechanics of discipline. Such a transition is represented by the combination of the "spectacle of torture" and the panoptic power of the gaze, when Lúnula's vigilance forces Violeta to slaughter a rooster. Finally, even the power of Violeta's narrative discourse is undermined when other voices contest its validity and question the identity of Violeta herself. In this story, then, control hinges on the power of the word and subjectification by the gaze. But if power is never static, how is it transformed? How and why might the subject and object change places in a given relationship? By exploring these dynamics, Fernández Cubas ventures beyond Foucault's paradigm to explore what happens when the object exploits the subject's position of strength in order to wrest control, and what happens when the subject surrenders its power because of its need to become the object of the gaze.

In this story, Violeta incarnates the lost, lonely woman in search of an "other." In the beginning, she is eager for Lúnula, still a stranger, to share her table in a café, since the chance encounter affords the protagonist a much longed-for interlocutor. Violeta suffers from "la necesidad, apenas disimulada, de repetir en alta voz los monólogos tantas veces ensayados frente al espejo" (13). Moreover, the home where she spends most of her time is an enclosed, prison-like space and she dreads having to leave the café to "recluirme una vez más en aquella habitación angosta" (14). Finally, Violeta hates her own "aborrecida imagen" that she sees daily in the mirror (14). Her identity is, in effect, a void that yearns to be filled by another.

Numerous references to mirrors in this story illustrate the dynamic of finding one's desired image reflected in the gaze of the other. Symbolically, after meeting Lúnula, Violeta shatters the glass of her hated mirror in the hope of obliterating the image it returns: "Al recoger mis cosas, mi última mirada fue para la luna desgastada de aquel espejo empeñado en devolverme día tras día mi aborrecida imagen. Sentí un fuerte impulso y lo seguí. Desde el suelo cientos de cristales de las más caprichosas formas se retorcieron durante un largo rato bajo el impacto de mi golpe" (14). Textual evidence, such as it is (considering the unreliability of the narration, which I will address later) suggests that Violeta is not unattractive physically. Yet her self-image is odious until *Lúnula's* admiring gaze replaces the unappealing image returned by the "luna desgastada de aquel

espejo" (*italics mine*). The reflection of this live "luna" projects a relative view of Violeta in a more pleasing light. Violeta imagines that Lúnula, whose name evokes the moon, is simply an object that will passively reflect a fine image to replace her abhorrent one. Indeed, Lúnula's difference accentuates all the qualities that Violeta likes best about herself; that is to say, in the protagonist's mind Lúnula's ugliness—Violeta depicts her as a sexless bulk with bad teeth—enhances her own attractiveness. Thus, Violeta initially establishes herself as the center, polarizing Lúnula as the "other" whose difference defines Violeta as the superior one.

Violeta's superiority is duly esteemed by Lúnula, whose position of subservience precludes her from having any power at all—or so Violeta believes. Initially, this state of affairs seems plausible indeed, for Lúnula invites Violeta to stay at her countryhouse and gives Violeta the spacious bedroom while she herself occupies a tiny, claustrophobic room. Violeta muses contentedly about Lúnula's eagerness to please in an excerpt from her notebook, which she intercalates into her narration: "Lúnula se mostraba preocupada porque yo me encontrara a gusto en todo momento. Cocinaba mis platos preferidos con una habilidad extraordinaria, escuchaba interesada mis confesiones en el zaguán y parecía disfrutar sinceramente de mi compañía" (20). Lúnula's ingratiating acts confirm Violeta's improved sense of self.

Violeta's apparent supremacy over Lúnula is paradoxically upheld by a game of her subservience to Lúnula: the act of confession. Violeta is unaware, however, of the power she invests in Lúnula through her confessions; by giving away information about herself, she discloses ways in which Lúnula can invert the power equation. In fact, while Violeta glories in the pleasure of confiding her secrets to another, she simultaneously inscribes herself into a discourse that defines and controls her:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation. (HS1 62)

The relationship of confession embodies multiple nuances of the word "subject." In confessing her secrets to Lúnula, Violeta is a speaking subject. Her active voice is only a mirage of power, however, since by inscribing herself as the subject of discourse, she in effect becomes an object of a discourse (confession) with a long history of producing the "truth" about the self. Finally, by placing Lúnula in the position to judge, castigate, console, or pardon, Violeta subjects herself to her friend's power.

For Foucault, the "truth" of a confessor is ultimately determined by the one who hears the confession. In an inversion of subject/object dominance, the act of confession invests the receiver of the discourse with the power to interpret: "The truth did not reside solely in the subject who, by confessing, would reveal it wholly formed. [. . .] it could only reach completion in the one who assimilated and recorded it. It was the latter's function to verify this obscure truth: the revelation of confession had to be coupled with the decipherment of what it said" (HS1 66). Thus Lúnula not only receives knowledge through Violeta's confessions, but also constructs the truth of Violeta's identity by *interpreting* that knowledge. Confession gives Lúnula the power to constitute the truth of Violeta as a subject turned object.

Thanks to the women's intimate conversations, Lúnula discovers that her key weapon to invert the balance of power is her talent for telling stories. From the beginning, Lúnula's talent shines in her oral storytelling:

En cierta forma, mi amiga pertenecía a la estirpe casi extinguida de narradores. El arte de la palabra, el dominio del tono, el conocimiento de la pausa y el silencio, eran terrenos en los que se movía con absoluta seguridad. Sentadas en el zaguán, a menudo me había parecido, en estos días, una entrañable ama de lámina sudista, una fabuladora capaz de diluir su figura en la atmósfera para resurgir, en cualquier momento, con los atributos de una Penélope sollozante, de una Penteseilea guerrera, de una gloriosa madre yaqui. Sabía palabras—o las inventaba quizás—en swahili, quechua y aymara. Ilustraba sus relatos con todo tipo de precisiones geográficas y su conocimiento de la naturaleza era apreciable. (21)

Lúnula's role as storyteller could potentially subjugate her as an object whose truth is interpreted by her listener. Violeta foregoes this opportunity for power, however, when she willingly suspends her disbelief. She prefers to envision Lúnula as the embodiment of the characters that she orally impersonates in her tales. With its kaleidoscopic display of discursive artifice, fiction suggests that the truth is constructed by both the teller and the receiver of the tale; it is a contract that can be negotiated, betrayed and revamped accordingly. Violeta is outwitted in this game, for she willingly suspends her disbelief instead of subversively interpreting the "truth" projected by the speaker.

Lúnula's verbal dexterity soon encroaches onto Violeta's domain of the written word. The outcast closets herself away to read Violeta's painstakingly wrought manuscript, making Violeta feel like an interloper upon an act of private sanctity when she stumbles upon Lúnula interpreting the text. Violeta later discovers her manuscript pages strewn across the floor, and her indignation turns to angst with the realization that Lúnula has superimposed her own narration over Violeta's words:

Lo que en algunas hojas no son más que simples indicaciones escritas a lápiz, correcciones personales que Lúnula, con mi aquiescencia, se tomó el trabajo de incluir, en otras se convierten en verdaderos textos superpuestos, con su propia identidad, sus propias llamadas y subnotaciones. A medida que avanzo en la lectura veo que el lápiz, tímido y respetuoso, ha sido sustituido por una agresiva tinta roja. En algunos puntos apenas puedo reconocer lo que yo había escrito. En otros tal operación es sencillamente imposible: mis párrafos han sido tachados y destruidos. (20)

Unlike Violeta, Lúnula does not suspend her disbelief but instead interprets and re-writes her companion's tale. Just as with the confessions, Lúnula has effectively taken control of Violeta's discourse, this time by replacing the manuscript's story with her own. In this case, the power of the critic eclipses that

of the writer. As readers, then, we are uncertain if the words we consume in our narrative text are the words of Violeta or those of Lúnula.

Beyond altering the power paradigm by undermining Violeta's literary prowess, Lúnula paradoxically solidifies her control over Violeta by falling ill, a condition that allows Lúnula to exploit her own helpless status. For Foucault, the sick are the weak and subjugated, so we might imagine Lúnula to be the weak one. In Fernández Cubas's text, however, Lúnula's illness positions Violeta as the enslaved caretaker and severely curtails Violeta's freedom to act or even speak: "Tiene un poco de fiebre y me ha pedido que retrase mi vuelta a la ciudad. No he sabido negarme [. . .]" (19). In his analysis of the sick as categorized and subjugated, Foucault does not deal explicitly with the corresponding subjugation of the caretaker; however, Fernández Cubas underscores this side of the equation as a technique of opposition to and inversion of power. It is more than mere coincidence that the sickness ensues immediately after Lúnula first reads the manuscript. In addition to forcing Violeta to prolong her stay in the isolated countryhouse, the illness provides plausible cause for a switch in bedrooms: Violeta moves into the smaller one and Lúnula the larger one, "mucho más adecuado para su estado actual" (19). Lúnula's physical decline thus furthers her hierarchical ascent.

From the apparently invalidated position as the "invalid," Lúnula disciplines Violeta into obeying the vigilance of her gaze. As the household

rapidly deteriorates under Violeta's inept control, the "healthy" woman is forced in desperation to kill a rooster for food, since the grocer has mysteriously neglected to make his delivery. The slaughter takes place under Lúnula's supervision, as Violeta recounts:

Lúnula, envuelta en un batín de seda china, se ha encargado de dirigir la operación desde la ventana de su cuarto. "Retuércele el cuello," decía. "Con decisión. No le demuestres que tienes miedo. Es un momento nada más. Atóntalo. Maréalo. No le des respiro." He intentado inútilmente seguir sus consejos. El gallo estaba asustado, picoteando mis brazos, dejando entre mis dedos manojos de plumas. He sentido náuseas y, por un momento, he abandonado corriendo el corral. Pero Lúnula seguía gritando. "No lo dejes ahora. ¿No ves que está agonizando? Casi lo habías estrangulado, Violeta. Remátalo con el hacha. Así. Otra vez. No, ahí no. Procura darle en el cuello. No te preocupe la sangre. Estos gallos son muy aparatosos. Aún no está muerto. ¿No ves cómo su cabeza se convulsiona, cómo se abren y cierran sus ojitos? Eso es. Hasta que no se mueva una sola pluma. Hasta que no sientas el más leve latido. Ahora sí. Murió. Cerciórate. Un gran trabajo, Violeta." (23-24)

Such a blood-and-gore confrontation, described in minute detail, recalls the famous depiction of the execution of Damiens in the opening pages of Foucault's Discipline and Punish.¹⁶ Indeed, both encounters reveal much about roles within the performance of power.

Under the rule of torture, which for Foucault lasted until the late eighteenth century, the people held the role of spectators. Spectatorship was a crucial component of the theatrical performance of power: "Not only must people know, they must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid; but also because they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment, and because they must to a certain extent take part in it" (DP 58). Violeta, incorporated under the surveillance rule of Lúnula, is called to extend her role of spectator and become the inflictor of torture and execution in this scene. She is still a kind of audience, nonetheless, for even as she participates directly, she also witnesses it via Lúnula's grotesque description. One can imagine Violeta experiencing the horrific torture and killing with her five senses, and also enduring the verbal assault of Lúnula's explicit representation—for it is Lúnula's direct discourse, cited in the text, that vividly paints the scene for readers and interpellates them, too, as spectators. By directly transmitting Lúnula's words to the readers, Violeta momentarily positions them in her place as the object of Lúnula's discourse.

As Foucault chronicled, under the rule of the sovereign there was, however, an intrinsic danger to the spectacle of torture. At times, empathy could provoke the witnesses to revolt: “the people never felt closer to those who paid the penalty than in those rituals intended to show the horror of the crime and the invincibility of power; never did the people feel more threatened, like them, by a legal violence exercised without moderation or restraint” (DP 63). The execution of the rooster—who is killed here, significantly, not in punishment for a crime but in sacrifice to the needs of the greater power—reveals a shift from a dying power structure (the sovereign's display of absolute control) to an emerging disciplinary structure: Lúnula deters any revolt by imposing discipline with her vigilant gaze to ensure Violeta's obedience. Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham's panoptic prison as the quintessential image of the ideal disciplinary paradigm in which all prisoners are exposed to a potentially omnipresent gaze that they cannot see: “Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap” (DP 200). In the Fernández Cubas text, the status of the rooster as the object of torture and Violeta as the object of the gaze is underscored by Lúnula's directly cited words; the rooster is the direct object described by her discourse, while Violeta is the indirect object inscribed as the receiver of her discourse. The juxtaposition of the two technologies of power emphasize, finally, the shared role of Violeta and the rooster—and readers—as objects of discursive power.

By giving Lúnula's words precedence in her text, Violeta reveals how much her friend has come to dominate. Only after reporting Lúnula's direct discourse does Violeta translate her experience into her own words: "Y yo me he quedado un buen rato aún junto al charco de entrañas y sangre, de plumas teñidas de rojo, como mis manos, mi delantal, mis cabellos. Llorando también lágrimas rojas, sudando rojo, soñando más tarde sólo en rojo una vez acostada en mi dormitorio: un cuarto angosto sin ventilación alguna al que sólo llegan los suspiros de Lúnula debatiéndose con la fiebre" (24). Together, these two accounts doubly subject the reader to this horrific experience of exerting power over an object, while being objectified and observed by a more powerful subject. The protagonist's objectification beneath Lúnula's gaze during the slaughter is all the more disturbing because of the implication that Violeta, too, could be suffocated and sacrificed—figuratively or literally—by one more powerful than she. The suffocation, at least, has already commenced, as she suffers in her room, imprisoned into acquiescence by the "helpless" groans of her sick friend.

Thereafter, Lúnula's hierarchical ascension becomes increasingly evident in the narrative. It is manifested physically in Lúnula's amazing energy, "llena de una vitalidad alarmante" (25), while Violeta falls ill: "Es posible que ahora tenga fiebre yo" (25), "no tengo fuerzas" (25). It also emerges linguistically, as Lúnula begins to refer to Violeta in terms she has previously reserved for objects:

ha sonreído ante mi inhabilidad: “Violeta, me pregunto a veces qué es lo que sabes hacer aparte de ser hermosa.” Me he quedado sorprendida. Hermosa es una palabra que no había oído hasta ahora en los labios de Lúnula [. . .]. En cuanto a los objetos era distinto. En este punto—y recuerdo los objetos del desván—Lúnula solía prodigar epítetos con verdadera generosidad. (24)

A sign of her physical dominance, Lúnula's discourse reduces Violeta to the rank of a beautiful but useless ornament, just as Violeta's own language earlier relegated Lúnula to the state of an ugly bulk.

Violeta's botched massacre of the rooster is offset by Lúnula's prowess at killing, quartering, and cooking a rabbit. Beneath Violeta's focalizing gaze, the supposed invalid slaughters the creature in a chillingly efficient display of control:

escoge un conejo del corral y, con mano certera, lo mata en mi presencia de un solo golpe. Casi sin sangre, sonriendo, con una limpieza inaudita lo despelleja, le ha sacado los hígados, lo lava, le ha arrancado el corazón, lo adoba con hierbas aromáticas y vino tinto. Ahora parte los troncos de tres en tres, con golpes precisos, sin demostrar fatiga, tranquila como quien resuelve un simple pasatiempo infantil; los dispone sobre unas piedras, enciende un fuego, suspende la piel de unas ramas de higuera. (25)

Lúnula's masterful dismemberment of the rabbit makes Violeta's clumsy slaughter of the rooster seem, in contrast, all the more appalling and macabre for its incompetence. Thus Violeta's focalizing gaze in this passage does not just register Lúnula's skill, but causes her to recognize her own ineptitude at performing rituals of power and subjection.

Immediately after the butchery, Lúnula directs her efficient, examining gaze toward Violeta herself. Now Lúnula describes Violeta in the same graphic terms she used to portray the spectacle of the rooster's suffering: "Pero Violeta. . . Qué mal aspecto tienes. Deja que te mire. Tus ojos están desorbitados, tu cara ajada. . . ¿Qué te pasa Violeta? Pienso también que es la primera vez que habla de ojos, de cara, que no vaya referido a un animal, a un cuadro" (26). Lúnula verbally fragments Violeta—her eyes, her face—the way she neatly dismembered the rabbit's body. Her discourse inscribes Violeta as a (punishable) object. This verbal juxtaposition of Violeta and the rabbit as objects under the control of a newly energized Lúnula signals the obsolescence of bloody, agonizing torture as spectacle, bungled by Violeta's catatonic horror, and the imposition of an efficient, dispassionate operation of discipline, executed under Lúnula's calculating gaze and controlling voice.

Lúnula not only objectifies her friend, but also categorizes her as abnormal. Beneath Lúnula's examining gaze, Violeta is categorized as "deformed" and thus inferior: "¡Y qué rara alimentación te has debido preparar

en estos días! . . . Te noto deformada, extraña" (26). With the normal/strange qualification, Lúnula wields the same binary oppositions to control her other that Violeta used earlier. Such labeling is a common tactic of power, according to Foucault:

Generally speaking, all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal); and that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.).
(DP 199)

Through her submission to constant surveillance, Violeta endures a visual examination that categorizes and defines her. As Foucault has noted, the examination solidifies the power of the dominant: "The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish" (DP 184). Finding her former dominator to be lacking, Lúnula's evaluative gaze effectively objectifies Violeta to convert her into the seen, the abnormal, the subjugated other.

Fernández Cubas augments the ramifications of binary struggles for power in this text by introducing the European/New World power struggle that will inform later works such as El año de Gracia and Con Agatha en Estambul. In this early story, the author problematizes the issue through the image of the "jacarandá," an American tropical plant: "Es un árbol de la familia de las bignonáceas, oriundas de América tropical [. . .]. Es poco probable, pues, que las semillas que ha plantado Lúnula germinen en nuestro huerto, tan necesitado de agua [. . .]. Pero Lúnula es capaz de desafiar a cielos y a infiernos" (26). The tales Lúnula spins about the fabled plant invest it with mysterious power:

Si uno tiene la suerte, la oportunidad o el placer de ser distinguido por su compañía, deberá cerrar los ojos y formular un deseo. Pero mucho cuidado: el deseo debe ser grande, importante y, sobre todo, inédito. Es decir, jamás debe haber sido formulado con anterioridad porque entonces la flor reina, tiránica y veleidosa, se encargará, por secretas artes y maleficios, de desbaratar cualquier solución feliz que el propio destino ofrezca al suplicante. (27)

Through its metonymical association with Lúnula, the mythical power of the jacarandá to alter the dictates of destiny if its supplicant does not obey its rules implicitly underscores the extent of her control.

Lúnula's power becomes so pervasive that Violeta recognizes her own inability to control even language, in contrast with Lúnula's linguistic adroitness.

As a result, the narrator considers abandoning her efforts to compose a manuscript:

He roto definitivamente mi block de notas; ¿para qué me puede servir ya? Sin embargo, he conservado por unos instantes algunas páginas. Basura, pura basura. ¿Cómo se me pudo ocurrir alguna vez que yo podía narrar historias? La palabra, mi palabra al menos, es de una pobreza alarmante. Mi palabra no basta, como no bastan tampoco las escasas frases felices que he logrado acuñar a lo largo de este cuadernillo. Ella en cambio parece disfrutar en demostrarme cuán fácil es el dominio de la palabra. No deja de hablarme, de cantar, de provocar imágenes que yo nunca hubiese soñado siquiera sugerir. Lúnula despilfarra. Palabras, energía, imaginación, actividad. (27-28)¹⁷

While Violeta cannot even summon the bare minimum of words, her nemesis is so prolific that she is positively wasteful. Hence Violeta recognizes her defeat in the manipulation of discourse.

In a rather bizarre quirk of victim psychology, Violeta now ridicules and berates herself. Remembering her previous attempts to define how Lúnula dominated everything, Violeta mocks her own futile efforts at rational, adequate expression through language:

“Lúnula,” había escrito en una de esas hojas que ahora devora el fuego, “es *excesiva*.” ¿Qué he pretendido expresar con *excesiva*?, me pregunto. ¡Y con qué tranquilidad intento definir la arrollante personalidad de mi amiga en una sola palabra! Pienso *excesiva*, *exceso*, *excedente*, *arrollo*, *arrolladora*, *arroyo* y me pongo a reír a carcajadas. (28)

Having set up a grammatical pattern of adjective ("excesiva"), noun ("exceso"), adjective and noun in one ("excedente"), and then starting to repeat the pattern with the synonymous noun ("arrollo") and adjective ("arrolladora"), Violeta suddenly twists her constructed order by listing a homonym ("arroyo"). This shift in the logic of categorization evokes Foucault's fascination with Borges's alternative modes of classification, which the French philosopher cites in The Order of Things: "This passage quotes a 'certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which it is written that 'animals are divided into, (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous [. . .]'" (xv). Upon glimpsing a surrogate pattern, different from the established norm, Violeta is wildly amused. Indeed, her outburst of laughter at her own illogical digression makes her seem almost insane. Yet as Foucault has demonstrated in Madness and Civilization, insanity itself is a marginalized category of the "other" that serves to reflect and define what it means to be normal. Violeta's move toward

insanity—toward a skewed perception of life—cinches her submission to Lúnula, who is the subject that establishes the norm.

Significantly, Violeta feels impotent because she can approximate neither the power of Lúnula's gaze nor the skill of her narrative discourse. Moreover, she cannot begin to imitate her superior's captivation of an audience: "¿Cómo puedo atreverme a intentar siquiera transcribir cualquiera de sus habituales historias o fábulas si no sé suplir aquel brillo especial de su mirada, aquellas pausas con que mi amiga sabe cortar el aire, aquellas inflexiones que me pueden producir el calor más ardiente o el frío más aterrador?" (28). As Violeta recognizes, the manipulation of the gaze, of language, and of others are three key tactics in the technology of power. Lúnula has effectively usurped them from Violeta, transforming herself from object to subject in the struggle for control.

At this point, Violeta would rather surrender to her friend than resist her domination. Her need for Lúnula is greater than her desire to defend the autonomy of her written work: "Ella seguramente quiso ayudarme, ¿para qué seguir, pues? Oigo ya sus pasos, pero intento releer algún párrafo más. No encuentro los míos. Están casi todos tachados, enmendados. . . ¿Dónde termino yo y dónde empieza ella?" (29). Violeta's submission is now total: projecting her writing as the symbolic image of her self, she can no longer separate her identity from that of Lúnula. Thus, the victim sutures herself to her victimizer and loses all hope of resistance. The destructive outcome of this power play culminates

when Violeta seeks to burn the rest of her manuscript. This final gesture aims to obliterate any remaining vestiges of her own discursively represented identity, which was already substantially erased and rewritten by Lúnula.

The inversion of power between the two women is complete by the end of the story, when Violeta portrays herself as a servant, willingly subjected and confined by Lúnula. Significantly, Violeta now describes Lúnula as beautiful instead of as a sexless lump: "Estaba hermosa. Antes, mientras le cepillaba y trenzaba el cabello, se lo he dicho. Cada día que pasa sus ojos son más luminosos y azules, su belleza más serena" (29). In the final pages of the story, we find that Violeta has devotedly groomed Lúnula before the latter's departure for town, and now she plans out the arduous tasks she will accomplish in order to win Lúnula's approval upon her return. Violeta has become a true product of discipline, as described by Foucault: "it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, speed and determinacy that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies" (DP 138). Completely disciplined by her master, Violeta positions herself to sleep on the floor in front of the door, "como un perro guardián" who occupies herself "vigilando constantemente por si algún zorro intenta devorar nuestras gallinas" (30). In this debased state of objectification and animalization

the constant vigilance of the panopticon flourishes, as Violeta now watches for any stray predator who might seek to transgress the borders of Lúnula's prison.

Even as Violeta would slaughter other animals, she gladly sacrifices herself to Lúnula, denying herself water and obsessively curing the pelts of rabbits "que he debido sacrificar en los últimos tiempos" (30). This tone of sacrificial rhetoric heightens the sense of ritualization that imbues Violeta's submission to Lúnula. In effect, Violeta now functions as a sort of intermediary—a priestess, one might say—who sacrifices animals to appease the wrath of the omnipotent one. Lúnula, whose name evokes a celestial body, thus becomes a sort of goddess who is all seeing, all knowing, and all powerful. She has created a cult of visibility that operates smoothly even in her temporary absence, just as Foucault's panoptic paradigm creates self-regulating subjects who ensure obedience from everyone, based on the mere possibility of suddenly being observed:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (DP 202-3)

By remaining subservient to Lúnula's gaze, whether absent or present, Violeta perpetuates her own imprisonment and ensures the automatic functioning of Lúnula's "panopticon."

With the conclusion of Violeta's story, any authority and power that readers might attribute to her narration is undermined completely by an Editor's note. This addendum ruptures the illusion, normally created in stories, of a direct relationship between the narrator and the receiver of the tale. The Editor's note reveals not only that the narrative control is different from what readers expected, but that the narrative sequence is quite possibly random or coincidental instead of planned and ordered. Before reading this final part, it is confusing to try to establish the temporal relationship between the textual sections narrated in the present tense and the segments from Violeta's notebook cited in the past tense. If the former are narrated in installments, much like a diary, at what point in this eternal present did Violeta record her notebooks in the past, and why? Not even Violeta can answer this question: "¿Por qué hablaré de Lúnula en pasado?, me pregunto ahora" (22). In this sentence alone, the inclusion of the future tense (which, in this case, expresses speculation about the present), along with the present and past tenses underlines the problematic and contradictory nature of time in this story.

Readers might hope to solve the mystery and suture this lacerated chronology back together. Yet the Editor of the text questions the viability of

such an endeavor: “NOTA DEL EDITOR: Estos papeles, dispersos, deslavazados y ofrecidos hoy al lector en el mismo orden en que fueron hallados (si su disposición horizontal en el suelo de una granja aislada puede considerarse un orden), no llevaban firma visible [. . .]” (31). The indeterminate sequence of the papers precludes any effort to impose what might be considered a "normal, logical" order. Moreover, in the vein of Borges's Chinese encyclopedia and Foucault's The Order of Things, this textual dishevelment serves to question the concept of order itself. Thus, by constantly undermining any conventional interpretation or categorization, the narrative presents itself as a bizarre mutation that might have been conjured directly from Borges's delightfully random encyclopedia.

To enhance the emerging chaos, the true authorship of Violeta's papers is questioned as well. According to the Editor, the cadaver found in the house was wearing a flowered skirt and a sportshirt with the initials "V.L." hand-embroidered on it. This is the only clue to the woman's identity, since no other documentation of any kind was found. Some neighbors testified that the woman who lived at the farm was one señorita Victoria, while others asserted that she was called señora Luz. Still others thought the name Victoria Luz sounded familiar, while none recognized the names Violeta or Lúnula. Such a dizzying array of possibilities and impossibilities regarding the identity of "la(s) posible(s) moradora(s) de la granja" (31) cancels out any hope of certainty for readers.¹⁸

Thus, the text itself engages readers in a sort of power play, the goal of which is to determine the dominant order. While readers attempt to analyze the events according to conventional logic, the text imposes the "logic" of chaos and uncertainty.

Narrative unreliability is also generated by the ambiguous textual sources of the narrative, which are doubted, subverted, and sometimes destroyed—or so readers are told. Did Violeta really burn her writing, as she claimed? If at least some of her writing survived, does the text we read consist of the manuscript, the notebook, or a combination of both? If this story is what remains of Violeta's text, how much of it originated, in fact, from Violeta, and how much of it comes from the "corrections" of Lúnula? If Violeta lied about burning her manuscript, is she a trustworthy narrator? And if she was "crazy" enough to sacrifice herself completely to Lúnula, as the text describes, what reader would trust her as a narrator anyway? Finally, the very existence of Lúnula and Violeta is called into question by the testimonies of the neighbors, as reported by the Editor. In order to prove his own credibility, the Editor evokes the authority of a forensics expert who examined the body, and cites a known biologist who denies the existence of a jacarandá plant in that region. One testimony, subjected by another testimony, subjected by another testimony; in the end, the very construction of this text dramatizes the struggle for power. The text draws readers in, inviting them to subject it to their analytical gaze, daring them to impose an order onto its chaos.

"Lúnula y Violeta" thus demonstrates how Fernández Cubas employs language to explore relations of power as a means of challenging traditionally established modes of thought and order. By positing methods for subverting existing power structures, Fernández Cubas's stories deepen and extend the ramifications, initially posed by Foucault, of the ways in which subjects—whether characters or readers—exercise agency in the midst of the mechanics of power. Dominated objects resist in Fernández Cubas's texts by using the very tactics of the powerful in order to gain agency. By exploring the nuances of attraction and repulsion to the gaze, as well as the imposition and evasion of the gaze, she shows how the seen and controlled object becomes the seeing and controlling subject. Key to that dominion is the ability to manipulate discourse, which also heralds subject-object relations in the way the subject inscribes the other as its object of discourse. Simultaneously, the object inscribes the truth of the subject through its interpretation of that discourse. Fernández Cubas challenges our efforts to construct an absolute truth of subjectivity through this power relation. While the act of telling, like confession, inscribes the speaker into discourse and allows the listener to interpret the truth of the speaker, by constantly eroding the authenticity of origins this text denies readers the power to interpret with certainty or to construct any singular, all-embracing truth. In the end, fiction potentially empowers its "listeners" much more than confession; its very nature unveils truth as a simulacrum by flaunting the art of lies.

"La ventana del jardín":

Whereas Violeta lost the struggle for power with Lúnula because she could not manipulate language as well as her other, the narrator and protagonist of "La ventana del jardín" finds himself powerless and confused because, on a remote farm, he confronts a language and logic entirely different from his own. Since discourse itself is an imposed order that reflects the way one is conditioned to see the world, as "Lúnula y Violeta" illustrated, it follows that the constant efforts of the narrator of "La ventana" to interpret the new language, actions, and gazes that he encounters are futile, because the lens of logic through which he perceives his new surroundings is always out of focus. In that sense, the entire narration constitutes his search for the correct prescription to adjust his sight, so that he might understand the events that occur. Indeed, as with the author's later collection El ángulo del horror, vision is a central motif in this story, magnified by the narrator's frequent comparisons of the events to performance and spectacle. This entire tale foregrounds the theatricality of power, to which Foucault alludes in Discipline and Punish. While Foucault features the subject who gazes as the one with power, Fernández Cubas inverts the paradigm to show the object of the gaze as the manipulator of the spectator, in a trick similar to that of "Lúnula y Violeta." In the end, the narrator of "La ventana del jardín" discovers that the dynamics of power are not at all as he imagined, for the "order of things" in this fictional world follows a different logic altogether.

"La ventana del jardín" is the first-person narration of a man who arrives, unannounced, to visit his old highschool friends, José and Josefina Albert, and their only son, Tomás. He recalls that when he last saw Tomás, two years earlier, the boy had seemed developmentally delayed and had slipped a bizarre note into the visitor's bag. The Alberts are not overjoyed to see their uninvited guest, who becomes increasingly suspicious of the way they keep their child isolated from the world. The discovery that the child speaks a completely invented language, encouraged by his parents, induces the protagonist to fabricate an excuse to spend the night so as to study the situation more. A secret rendezvous with Tomás convinces him that the child needs to be rescued. The protagonist tries to help him escape in the morning, only to discover that the boy is extremely ill and unable to interact or function outside of the protective environment of his home. When he finally departs in a hired car, the narrator is stunned that the driver seems to accept the family's situation as perfectly normal.

The narrator's logical view of life is epitomized by his detectivesque approach, wherein he notes a mystery afoot and seeks to uncover the secret and explain it logically. Even as he attempts to pursue a rational outcome, however, nothing turns out the way he expects, such as when the protagonist anticipates examining the progress of his friends' avocados and chickens, only to discover that they now raise onions and rabbits. Later, he decides that Tomás must be dead, only to be surprised when Josefina takes him up to see the boy playing in

his room. The protagonist's epistemological attempts to find a logical resolution are constantly foiled, for the enigma is never what he imagines.

Tomás's special language incarnates the radically different logic of this place. Indeed, the narrator opens his story with the note written in concentric circles that the child had slipped into his bag two years before this visit:

Cazuela airada,
 Tiznes o visones. Cruces o lagartos. La
 noche era acre aunque las cucarachas
 llorasen. Más
 Olla. (33)

The concentric structure of this note evokes the dizzying vortex of a radically different logic that sucks the detective into its center. The protagonist decides to spend the night with his friends after discovering suspicious evidence: the names "Escoba," "Cuchara," and "Olla" written on the toothbrushes in the bathroom convince him that this bizarre language indicates a mystery brewing. In this world where nothing corroborates his reasoning, the protagonist determines to restore order.

In his suspicion that his friends are attempting to conceal the truth from him, the narrator views them as actors in a play. In particular, the narrator notes, his questions about Tomás seem to set off the theatrical performance:

Mis preguntas parecían inquietarles.

—Está bien—dijo Josefina con aplomo—. Aunque no del todo, claro.

—Ya sabes—añadió José—. Ya sabes—repitió.

—Unos días mejor—dijo Josefina—, otros peor.

—Los oídos, el corazón, el hígado—intervino José.

—Sobre todo los oídos—dijo Josefina—. Hay días en que no se puede hacer el menor ruido. Ni siquiera hablarle—y subrayó la última palabra.

—Pobre Tomás—dijo él.

—Pobre hijo nuestro—insistió ella.

Y así, durante casi una hora, se lamentaron y se deshicieron en quejas. Sin embargo, había algo en toda aquella representación que me movía a pensar que no era la primera vez que ocurría.

Aquellas lamentaciones, aquella confesión pública de las limitaciones de su hijo, me parecieron excesivas y fuera de lugar. En todo caso, resultaba evidente que la comedia o el drama iban destinados a mí, único espectador, y que ambos intérpretes se estaban cansando de mi presencia. De pronto Josefina estalló en sollozos.

—Había puesto tantas ilusiones en este niño. Tantas. . .

Y aquí acabó el primer acto. Intuí en seguida que en este punto estaba prevista la intervención de un tercero con sus frases

de alivio o su tribulación. Pero no me moví ni de mi boca salió
palabra alguna. (36-37)

Through the metaphor of representation, the protagonist views each of his friends as enacting a given role while he himself refuses to interpret the script of commiseration that they assign to him. Instead, he subjects José and Josefina to the critical power of his gaze by casting himself as the spectator of their performance.

As the viewing public, the protagonist has the right to examine and judge the actors, much as Lúnula critiqued Violeta's performance in the rooster massacre. For Foucault, the examination is the supreme ritual of a disciplining gaze:

The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualized. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. (DP 184)

The protagonist elevates himself to the status of examiner, a position that merges theatrically with spectatorship. As a spectator, furthermore, he is conceivably outside the actors' line of vision and thus beyond their control.

The dynamics of visibility and invisibility are central to the theatrical representation of power. For Foucault, the examination consecrated the union between visibility and power:

Disciplinary power [. . .] is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the holder of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection [. . .]. In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification. (DP 187)

The narrator's desire for power influences the way he interprets all his friends' lines, which he, like Violeta before him, categorizes as "excesivas y fuera de lugar" (37)—in essence, "abnormal." By subjecting José and Josefina to his examining gaze, he judges them to be aberrant criminals guilty of mistreating their son and covering up their crime with a farcical performance. His

examination gives way, at least in his mind, to a judicial ceremony of condemnation.

When readers take up their role as examiners, however, they can see another performance enacted in this text. What really bothers the protagonist is that, in the real-life drama of José, Josefina and Tomás, he has no role. His friends have evaluated their son's situation and written a script that constructs a theatrical world tailored to his needs; they direct the scenes as well as act in them and view our protagonist as an intruder, not a spectator whose approbation they seek. But the protagonist, as Fernando Valls has noted, projects himself as the hero of his own fantasy.¹⁹ Aspiring to pass judgment, the would-be hero imposes his own interpretation of the Alberts' representation—an evaluation that is ultimately proven to be incorrect. He imagines that they need him to perform in their play as a sympathizer and exercises his "power" to reject that role, becoming the director instead and recasting himself as the spectator—
theoretically exiting the stage of the visible.

This entire story unfolds as one representation inserted within another. The protagonist perceives the other characters' performance as manipulations of words, action, and light in order to control him, the spectator: from the ceiling of Tomás's room hangs a "luz conscientemente tenue" (41). Despite his desire to abstain from performance, he himself becomes an actor when he steals Tomás's book of drawings the first time he goes to the child's room: "Fue un espectáculo

bochornoso. El espejo me devolvió la imagen de un ladrón frente al producto de su robo: un cuaderno de adolescente" (41-42). Now the protagonist has mounted his own little spectacle, casting himself in the starring role of "thief," within the farce that he imagines his friends to be enacting for him. With the reflection of the mirror, the protagonist operates simultaneously as actor and audience, subject and object of the gaze. This scene presents the first step in his role reversal.²⁰

A web of metatheatrical levels soon ensnares the sleuth. Having spun his own secret plot, he must put on still another show for his friends in order to conceal his real intentions:

Iba a dormirme ya cuando Josefina irrumpió sin llamar en mi cuarto. Traía una toalla en la mano y miraba de un lado a otro como si quisiera cerciorarse de algo. El cuadernillo, entre mi pierna derecha y la sábana, crujió un poco. Josefina dejó la toalla junto al lavabo y me dio las buenas noches. Parecía cansada. Yo me sentí aliviado por no haber sido descubierto. (42)

Now that he, too, is an actor, the protagonist is correspondingly the object of the gaze of himself and others. In this series of reversals subjects become objects and one play is staged to counteract the effects of another; it is to be expected that the integrity of theatrical space and roles will be violated, for in this story all characters are ultimately actors in their own representations.

As highlighted by the title of the story, the consummate threshold between these theatrical worlds is the window between Tomás's room and the garden, through which the protagonist communicates with the child and views his illogical domain. The window is literally an opening in the theatrical "fourth wall" that entices the protagonist as "spectator" to leave the audience and interact with the characters on the stage:

Recordé la ventana por la que Tomás me había deslizado su mensaje en nuestro primer encuentro. Salí al jardín [. . .]. Me deslicé hasta la ventana de Tomás y me apoyé en el alféizar; los postigos no estaban cerrados y había luz en el interior. Tomás, sentado en la cama tal y como lo dejamos, parecía aguardar algo o a alguien. La idea de que era YO el aguardado me hizo golpear con fuerza el cristal que me separaba del niño, pero apenas emití sonido alguno. Entonces agité repetidas veces los brazos, me moví de un lado a otro, me encaramé a la reja y salté otra vez al suelo hasta que Tomás, súbitamente, reparó en mi presencia. Con una rapidez que me dejó perplejo, saltó de la cama, corrió hasta la ventana y la abrió. Ahora estábamos los dos frente a frente. Sin testigos. (43)

The casting call that the protagonist perceives becomes irresistible and he is recruited into the performance. Indeed, he literally clamors for attention until he

gets a part in the play. His mistake, however, is believing his actions to be "sin testigos," exempt from submission to the gaze. In the spectacle of power, shadows and covert action eventually cede to visibility.

The protagonist quickly discovers that this is a part for which he is ill-equipped, since the play is written in a language and governed by a logic that he does not understand. He had glimpsed this other language in Tomás's note from years before, and in the child's notebook stolen on this visit: "Frases absolutamente desprovistas de sentido se barajaban de forma insólita, saltándose todo tipo de reglas conocidas. En algún momento la sintaxis me pareció correcta pero el resultado era siempre el mismo: incomprendible" (42). Despite this sneak preview, the protagonist is unprepared for his first scene in the play with Tomás:

Tomás extendió su mano hacia la mía y dijo: "Luna, luna," con tal expresión de ansiedad en sus ojos que me quedé sobrecogido [. . .]. Después de un titubeo me señalé a mí mismo y dije "Amigo." No dio muestras de haber comprendido y lo repetí dos veces más. Tomás me miraba sorprendido. "¿Amigo?," preguntó. "Sí, A-M-I-G-O," dije. Sus ojos se redondearon con una mezcla de asombro y diversión. Corrió hacia el vaso de noche y me lo mostró gritando "¡Amigo!." Luego, sonriendo—o quizás un poco asustado—, se encogió de hombros. Yo no sabía qué hacer y repetí la escena sin

demasiada convicción. De pronto, Tomás se señaló a sí mismo y dijo: "Olla" [. . .]. (44)

The protagonist's confusion about the meaning of "luna" magnifies when the child reveals that "amigo" is not a friend but a night table, and that his name is not Tomás but "Olla."²¹ Bewildered by the language of this theatrical world, this neophyte cannot play his scene with conviction.

Tomás's or Olla's language does not relate in any apparently "logical" way to the protagonist's. Its radical alteration takes the discursive rupture of "arroyo," uttered by the possibly "insane" Violeta in the first story of this collection, to new extremes of dissonance:

El lenguaje que había aprendido Tomás desde los primeros años de su vida—su único lenguaje—era de imposible traducción al mío, por cuanto era EL MIO sujeto a unas reglas que me eran ajenas [. . .]. Ni siquiera se trataba de una simple inversión de valores. Bueno no significaba Malo, sino Estornudo. Enfermedad no hacía referencia a Salud, sino a un estuche de lapiceros. Tomás no se llamaba Tomás, ni José era José, ni Josefina, Josefina. Olla, Cuchara y Escoba eran los tres habitantes de aquella lejana granja en la que yo, inesperadamente, había caído. (44-45)

Olla's language might well be classified in some alternative order straight from Borges's encyclopedia. Disturbingly, it is his own language subject to a different

logical order. Considering Saussure's definition of the sign as an arbitrary relationship between the signifier (the symbol) and the signified (the meaning), Olla employs the same signifiers as the protagonist, but his signifieds are entirely disparate from the arbitrary relationship the protagonist—and readers—understand. As a result, the frustrated hero is completely thrown off the track in his detectivesque search for meaning.

The protagonist rallies, however, when he believes that he finds a common means of communication that will enable him to draw conclusions and pass judgment on José and Josefina. Bypassing language altogether, he seeks the answer through images, noises, numbers, and gestures:

Renunciando ya a entender palabras que para cada uno tenían un especial sentido, Olla y yo hablamos todavía un largo rato a través de gestos, dibujos rápidos esbozados en un papel, sonidos que no incluyesen para nada algo semejante a las palabras. Descubrimos que la numeración, aunque con nombres diferentes, respondía a los mismos signos y sistemas. Así, Olla me explicó que el día anterior había cumplido catorce años y que, cuando hacía dos, me había visto a través de aquella misma ventana, me había lanzado ya una llamada de auxilio en forma de nota. Quiso ser más explícito y llenó de nuevo mi bolsillo de escritos y dibujos. Luego,

llorando, terminó pidiendo que le alejara de allí para siempre, que lo llevara conmigo. (45)

The obvious question here is how, on the basis of numbers, pictures and nonsensical sounds, could the protagonist be sure that his complex interpretation of José and Josefina's actions is the precise one. By the end of the story, in fact, he will realize that his interpretation is wrong. The protagonist errs because he does not understand that language is ruled by an arbitrary logic; even though he abandons his language in the exchange with Olla, he still uses his own logic to interpret the events. As a result, he does not really alter the perspective of his judgmental gaze and does not see that he cannot solve the mystery, because the clues he is tracking are arranged differently than his experience dictates.

The protagonist is as yet unaware, however, that the trail he follows is merely his own fabrication; he continues to act out his farce in the hope of concealing his intention to kidnap the boy. After spending the night in "communication" with Olla, the protagonist pretends to awaken in his own room: "Regresé a mi cuarto y abrí la ventana como si acabara de despertarme. Me afeité e hice el mayor ruido posible. Mis manos derramaban frascos y mi garganta emitía marchas militares. Intenté que todos mis actos sugiriesen el despertar eufórico de un ciudadano de vacaciones en una granja" (46). As the climax of his play approaches, the protagonist becomes keenly aware of being watched: "Me sentía más y más nervioso: salí al jardín [. . .]. No sé por qué, pero

no me atrevía a mirar en dirección a la ventana del chico. Sentía, sin embargo, sus ojos puestos en mí y cualquiera de mis actos reflejos cobraba una importancia inesperada" (48). Now the dynamics of spectatorship are reversed, for the window allows Olla to observe the protagonist. The sensation of being watched makes the latter recognize the import of his actions as performance and of himself as the object of another's gaze.

Finally, the detective discerns that his own judgmental gaze has been completely misdirected. In the morning, as he waits outside for Olla to join him in the great escape, he realizes that the child is not as he had perceived him to be:

Quiso acercarse a mí y entonces reparé en algo que hasta el momento me había pasado inadvertido. Tomás andaba con dificultad, con gran esfuerzo. Sus brazos y sus piernas parecían obedecer a consignas opuestas; su rostro, a medida que iba avanzando, se me mostraba cada vez más desencajado [. . .]. Olla jadeaba. Se agarró a mis hombros y me dirigió una mirada difícil de definir. Me di cuenta entonces, por primera vez, de que estaba en presencia de un enfermo [. . .]. ¿Por qué el mismo muchacho que horas antes me pareció rebosante de salud respondía ahora a la descripción que durante todo el día de ayer me hicieran de él sus padres? (48-49)

The foiled hero had not noticed Tomás's physical illness before because he desired or expected to see something else—for the perspective of the gaze determines how the object is seen. As in “Lúnula y Violeta,” here the deceptive status of an “invalid” subverts the protagonist’s expectations. Significantly, the child's gaze is now “difícil de definir” for the visitor, who is finally aware that more than one interpretation of this “text” exists. Thus Tomás/Olla is suspended between two systems of vision, whose interpretations collide on the space of his deformed body.

Completely confused as to what his role or his lines should be in this unsettling play, the protagonist feebly grasps at the reigns of control by appropriating Olla's language: “Supliqué, gemí, grité con todas mis fuerzas. ‘¿POR QUE?’ volvía a decir y, de repente, casi sin darme cuenta, mis labios pronunciaron una palabra. ‘Luna,’ dije, ‘¡LUNA!’” (50). “Luna” was Olla's initial plea to the outsider through the garden window, yet it is now devoid—for him as well as readers—of the symbolic significance with which the moon is usually invested. Whatever meaning the word holds for the other characters is uncertain, but it is definitely not sufficient to elevate the protagonist to power in the eyes of José and Josefina: “Ambos, como una sola persona, parecieron despertar de un sueño. Se incorporaron a la vez y con gran cuidado entraron el cuerpo del pequeño Tomás en la casa. Luego, cuando cerraron la puerta, Josefina clavó en mis pupilas una mirada cruel. Corrí como enloquecido por el

sendero" (50). Objectified and tormented by this gaze, the protagonist realizes that he is the abnormal one, the insane one, the one who disrupted the established order. Consequently, the door to this other world is closed and the transgressor is banished.

The protagonist's insanity and abnormality are stressed even more by their contrast to the town driver who picks him up from the road. Nonchalantly, the driver chats about the Alberts:

–Buena gente –dijo–. Magnífica gente –y miró el reloj–. Su autobús espera. Tranquilo.

Me desabroché la camisa. Estaba sudando.

–¿Y el pequeño Tomás? ¿Se encuentra mejor?

Negué con la cabeza.

–Pobre Ollita –dijo.

Y se puso a silbar. (51)

Whether or not the driver's use of the name "Ollita" suggests his acceptance of the different logical order that the word implies, his treatment of the situation as completely normal must surely be as unsettling for the protagonist as it is for readers. For we, too, undoubtedly have been trying to "make sense" of the story, beginning with the boy's enigmatic note cited in the first paragraph and culminating with the ambiguous word "luna" that provokes the Alberts to enclose themselves in their space, hidden from the view of both the protagonist

and us. By denying the protagonist—and readers—the right of spectatorship, the Alberts wield the final power of eclipsing the gaze.

But what about the overarching perspective of the narrator of this text? At the level of narration it is possible to detect a change in the perspective of the "yo"; the narrator who recounts these events views them differently than the man who experienced them.²² The narrator repeatedly emphasizes his efforts, as a protagonist, to document and trace the truth by his own reason—hence the proliferation of phrases such as "por esta razón." At the same time, the narrator undermines and contradicts the motives of himself as a protagonist. For instance, he belies his declared intention of requesting a cab to leave immediately after his arrival at his friends' home: "Iba a hacer todo esto (sin duda iba a hacerlo) cuando reparé en un vasito con tres cepillos de dientes" (36). His parenthetical insistence makes us doubt the veracity of his assertion. Elsewhere, he admits that, as protagonist, he deliberately misrepresented his intentions to his friends from the beginning, while supposedly telling the truth to his readers: "no había coche. O sí lo había, pero, sin saber la razón una vez más, fingí un contratiempo" (39). Of course, this makes readers question the narrator's reliability; like *Lúnula* in the preceding story, readers may interpret this confession as true or false. This very uncertainty communicates the possibility of multiple interpretations of any given text. The understanding of such ambiguity

pervades the narrator's perspective as he "re-presents" the plot on the page for our observation.

In essence, the temporal difference of this story—a retrospective narration of events experienced in the present—imposes a spatial alteration on the self: seeing things from a different point in time makes the narrator see from a different perspective.²³ He has learned that, as a subject who sees, he is also an object who is seen, and that it is precisely the angle of vision that establishes the boundaries of normality and of right. It is no wonder, then, that the protagonist—when in search of a logical explanation to his friends' aberrance in their past—found them to exhibit a "normalidad alarmante" (46). He is alarmed because he begins to perceive that his notion of normality is a construct superimposed over what he considers to be abnormal, but what is Olla's, Cuchara's and Escoba's conception of "normal." With the close of the narration itself, then, the spectacle comes to an end. A replay of its scenes, in search of understanding, reveals a constant subversion of language, of logic, of the norm, and of the gaze. Everything visible through the window of this other world perpetuates and revels in the instability of power and knowledge. In a similar fashion, a young girl named Elba guides her sister and friend through a world of a different order in the next story of the collection.

"Mi hermana Elba":

Fernández Cubas manipulates strategies of power and sources of knowledge in "Mi hermana Elba," as the first-person narrator peruses her girlhood diary and recalls the events of the final two years of her baby sister's life. This narrator/protagonist yearns for the affirmation of the gaze of another and strives to establish herself as the center and subject of power in her life and in her text. "Mi hermana Elba" is the story of two young girls who are sent to a boarding school at a convent while their parents are in the process of divorce. At school, the protagonist longs for the approval of a sophisticated older girl, Fátima, who breaks all the rules without getting caught. Fátima possesses the uncanny ability to find secret spaces where one is magically invisible to everyone outside of them. The protagonist finally attracts Fátima's attention and is allowed to tag along, largely because Fátima respects young Elba, who is highly skilled at making use of these spaces and discovering secret passages that even Fátima does not understand. Together, the girls explore the forbidden zones of the convent, taking refuge in their hiding places when they need to escape detection by the nuns. Elba's particular powers impress her sister so that the two become quite close, exulting with Fátima in the freedom of their clandestine world.

When school ends and the sisters return home, the protagonist carefully records in her diary all the information that pours from Elba's ramblings,

presumably to share it with Fátima the coming fall. At the end of that summer, however, the parents explain that Elba "no es una niña normal" (74) and send her to a special school. The protagonist returns alone to school, only to find that Fátima has grown up and has no interest in her or in their old games. The protagonist cannot endure the resulting solitude, made more agonizing by Elba's haunting gaze and cries that eclipse her thoughts. Driven to desperation, she shouts for Elba to leave her in peace, whereupon the child's voice gradually fades from her mind.

Once Elba ceases to haunt her, the protagonist makes new friends and eagerly anticipates beach excursions and meeting one friend's handsome cousin, Damián, the coming summer. Elba, too, returns home that summer, but she is "distráida y ausente" (79), although her sad, piercing gaze follows her sister through the window. To the protagonist's surprise, she doesn't mind the sensation of losing a sister. One day, she is summoned home from the beach because Elba fell from the terrace and died. Amidst the ensuing mourning that the narrator recounts, she often refers to her feeling of being watched, pitied, and indulged by everyone, including the handsome boy, Damián, who kisses her cheek in condolence. To end her story, the narrator cites her diary entry for the day of Elba's death, in which she did not even note the loss of her sister:

"Damián me ha besado por primera vez.' Y, más abajo, en tinta roja y gruesas mayúsculas: 'HOY ES EL DIA MAS FELIZ DE MI VIDA'"(81).

In essence, "Mi hermana Elba" reveals how a girl discovers, revels in, and then destroys the telekinetic powers of her little sister in order to bask in the approving gaze of others. With her opening sentence the narrator immediately discloses her childhood efforts to control her family: "Durante el largo verano de 1954 sometí a mis padres a la más estricta vigilancia" (55). Like the narrator of "La ventana del jardín," she seeks to control others with her watchful eye. Perceiving that something is amiss in her household although not yet understanding that her parents are getting a divorce, she refuses to speak and thereby coerces everyone into paying special attention to her. Thus, understanding that silence can be as mighty a tool as speech, she surrenders her voice in a move calculated to make her the focus of everyone's vision. Once at school, Fátima becomes the protagonist's ideal "other," but at first this other does not deem the protagonist a worthy object of her gaze: "Tuve que aguardar, pues, al recreo del mediodía y seguirla discretamente en sus paseos solitarios por el jardín, esperando una mirada de complicidad que no llegaba o alguna indicación que me animara a conversar con tranquilidad" (69). The narrator seeks affirmation of herself in Fátima's eyes and, without it, she hesitates even to speak and express herself in discourse.

Needing to control others in order to gain more power for herself, the protagonist takes advantage of Elba's knowledge of "escondites" to attract

Fátima's attention. Little Elba is gratified at earning her sister's respect for her discoveries of secret places:

acudíamos allí regularmente para conversar de nuestras cosas y observar sin ser vistas. Elba solía unirse a nuestros juegos con un brillo especial en la mirada y una emoción incontenible al comprobar cómo yo, de pronto, había empezado a considerarla seriamente. También Fátima trataba a mi hermana con mucho respeto [. . .]. (72)

In this setting, the girls can revel in the experience of transcendent space and escape the vigilant gaze of the nuns. At the same time, each sister can bask in the approval of her respective idol.

Once the cherished Fátima "grows up" and loses interest in Elba, however, the protagonist also rejects the child. Fátima no longer needs to defy the established social system because she now enjoys being part of it. The narrator is devastated by Fátima's renewed disinterest: "Fátima, la gran Fátima que todas—y yo con mayor razón—admirábamos, había dejado de pertenecerme" (77). Following Fátima's lead in immersing herself in typical teenage preoccupations like boys and clothes, the narrator becomes convinced that Elba's "abnormality" is a liability. Although she protests when her sister is institutionalized, she finds it more comfortable to reject the traumatized girl's telepathic communication rather than console her:

Siempre Elba, con su expresión de angustia y su brazo extendido, con una mirada cada vez más exigente, sonriéndome a veces, gimoteando otras, tomando nota de todos y cada uno de mis pensamientos. Hasta que su mismo recuerdo se me hizo odioso. “¡Basta!” terminé gritando un día. “Vete de una vez para siempre.” Y progresivamente su voz fue debilitándose, haciéndose cada vez más lejana, fundiéndose con otros sonidos y, por fin, desapareciendo por completo. (78)

Elba's examining gaze and anguished groans upset her sister by positioning her in the predicament of being a judged object and a guilty subject at the same time. Like the protagonist of "La ventana," this girl is disturbed by a power paradigm that imposes such a paradoxical subjectivity. Instead of exploring and appreciating the other knowledge and freedom that Elba provides, the protagonist rejects her sister because she is no longer a useful tool in the struggle for Fátima's approval. She prefers a more familiar, unidirectional and limited power relationship. Thus the girl acquiesces to the definition of her sister as "abnormal" and contributes to her banished isolation. In the end, being the recipient of Elba's cries for help puts her in a doubly powerless position: she cannot bear being the object of her sister's telepathic vigilance, nor is she capable of taking action and changing her parents' decision about her sister's interment.

The narrator's egoism peaks when she relishes the concern focused on her after the unexplained death of her sister. The attention she receives gives her the gratification, at last, of being the object of everyone's gaze: "Siguieron las frases de condolencia y los apretones de mano. Me sentía observada. Pasaron una a una todas las familias del pueblo. Pasó Damián con los ojos enrojecidos y me besó en la mejilla." (81). Whether accidental or suicidal, Elba's death becomes a commodity traded in her sister's pursuit of power. Yet the death may possibly have been caused by the protagonist herself, though she does not openly confess. The narrator does not say exactly what she was doing when Elba "había perdido el equilibrio en la terraza" (80). Was she playing at the beach, as her account implies (but does not state), or was she pushing her sister off the terrace? In this light, Elba's death takes on the hue of a bizarre sacrifice for the comfort of her sister.

The narrative text itself, then, can be seen as a sort of confession with the guise of producing truth. While the apparent purpose of this story might be to exorcise a woman of troubling memories of an abnormal sister, the confession as fiction depends on its recipients—its readers—to interpret its truth. Thus the narrator may condemn herself inadvertently by the implications of her words. The young protagonist manipulates everyone in her life and, as an adult narrator, her words snake out to ensnare readers. However, even though they are the receiving objects of her discourse, readers have the power to extract

knowledge from this confession, and interpret their version of the truth. This is a daunting task due to the nature of narrative itself: an undertaking inherently subject to memory, to reconstruction, to fictionalization, to manipulation. As in other Fernández Cubas stories, the task of struggling with the other in order to determine the truth—as the tradition of confession has trained us to do—is proven to be a virtually impossible one, for truth is merely a construct of a particular mechanization of power.

"El provocador de imágenes":

Tracing the truth is similarly futile in "El provocador de imágenes," the last tale in this collection. In this story, the first-person narrator (who refers to himself only by the elliptical alphabetical initials H.J.K.) remembers his long friendship with José Eduardo Expedito (also known as J.E.E.). Eduardo possessed a cornucopia of knowledge of every type imaginable, was a meticulous observer of people, and prided himself on being a "provocador de imágenes," whereby he would provoke people to the limit of their tolerance. H.J.K. delights in being the object of Eduardo's gaze and gladly submits his confessions to his friend's direction.

Whereas for the protagonist of "Mi hermana Elba" the power of Fátima's gaze seemed absolute, H.J.K.'s pleasure as the object of his other's examining gaze sparks into fury when he discovers that Eduardo's prowess has been

defeated by his insipid girlfriend, Ulla Goldberg. While living with Eduardo and purportedly enduring his sadomasochistic humiliations and tortures, Ulla was actually subjecting the great J.E.E. to careful observation and examination, the results of which she duplicitously recorded in her recipe book. Eduardo tearfully confesses all this during a drunken encounter with the narrator in a bar. Stunned, the narrator meanders around several countries before returning to Strasbourg, where he intuitively finds Ulla to be. Finding the unattractive blond one night in a seedy bar, he casually asks about Eduardo and watches her normally vacant, inhuman gaze become "radiante, vencedora" (106) while she recounts tale after tale of Eduardo's spiraling alcoholism and self-destruction. Without hesitation, our narrator informs her that Eduardo's apparent alcoholism is merely a guise for his investigation into his latest passion, the brewing of beer. Intimidating Ulla with his extensive and exclusive knowledge of Eduardo's activities, and deflating her glory at having defeated the great manipulator, H.J.K. provokes the image he desires to see: "Las mejillas de Ulla Goldberg habían recobrado su habitual palidez enfermiza. Sonreí; el brillo de sus ojos estaba dejando paso a su acostumbrada transparencia inhumana" (109). Finally, the protagonist justifies the "vómito de falsedades e incongruencias" (109) that he has just spewed onto Ulla with the fact that José Eduardo E. had always been his best friend.

Of all the stories in Mi hermana Elba, "El provocador de imágenes" displays perhaps most prominently the struggle for power through the

accumulation of knowledge and the manipulation of the gaze. In the beginning, the narrator briefly examines Eduardo, then delights in being the object of Eduardo's examination. José Eduardo Expedito extensively catalogues information on everything from the mating rituals of scorpions, to the correct preparation of innumerable culinary delights, to the theory that the proliferation of different languages stems from the biblical Tower of Babel. His propensity to "provocar imágenes" enables him to observe the way others react to his astounding knowledge. As Foucault has noted, the effect of this examining gaze is to define people as objects of knowledge: "*The examination, surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a 'case': a case which at one and the same time constitutes an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power*" (DP 191). Curiously, though, the narrator basks in Eduardo's attention and goes to great lengths to assure his friend's dominance, much as Violeta finally submitted to Lúnula. This twist, one not emphasized by Foucault, frequently appears in Fernández Cubas's texts. The protagonist's desire to be the object of the other's gaze propels the enigma of the entire story and motivates his final confrontation with Ulla.

Ulla disturbs H.J.K. so violently because, to his mind, she distorts his system of power to monstrous proportions. From the moment he first meets her, the protagonist dismisses Ulla as an unsuitable object for his own gaze: "[N]o me interesaba en absoluto. Su duro acento sueco me resultaba grotesco y sus

enfermizos cabellos pálidos, cortados al estilo de cualquier institutriz de pesadilla, me parecieron de una total falta de respeto a las posibles ideas estéticas del prójimo. Reparé en los enormes zapatones que ahora movía nerviosa y mi mirada cambió al instante de dirección" (91). "Grotesco," "enfermizos," "zapatones" (not to mention "sueco")—all indicate that Ulla Goldberg exceeds the normal and qualifies, therefore, as monstrous. The protagonist meditates on the monstrosity of objects that overwhelm their parameters and take control of their creators:

Pensé entonces en el brillante doctor Victor Frankenstein y su terror incontenible ante el primer signo de vida de su criatura. Unos párpados que se abren, un suspiro. . . ¿No era eso lo deseado? Sí. . . pero demasiado grande. Una escala demasiado grande. Justo el punto que separa la hermosura de la monstruosidad. . . [. . .] Como Ulla Goldberg. Exactamente igual que Ulla Goldberg. (96)

To the narrator's calculating eye, Ulla is lacking as an object of desire precisely because she exceeds his standards of normality and falls short of his standards of femininity.

Ulla's most monstrous sedition, however, is that her appearance deviates completely from her true identity. From the beginning, the narrator complains about Ulla's "mirada transparente," suggesting that one reason he dislikes her is

that she does not play the game of the gaze: her gaze does not reflect evaluation, definition, and affirmation, which the narrator needs for his own gratification as a seen object. Eventually, he discovers that Ulla's gaze is monstrous in its duplicity: "Pero aquella mirada de una transparencia inquietante con la que acogía cualquier capricho ajeno por extraño o contra natura que pudiera parecer, ocultaba una terrible falsedad. Ulla Goldberg estaba experimentando, ensayando o probando [. . .]" (99). Fooled by her apparent ingenuousness into thinking that her gaze lacked power, the narrator is stunned and incensed to discover that she is "la más grande provocadora de imágenes que ser alguno pudiera concebir" (99).

That transparent gaze conceals a crafty woman who has inverted the play of disciplinary power in the sadomasochistic torture sessions with Eduardo, and has used her subterfuge of submission in order to subject Eduardo to extensive observation. Ulla has reversed the equation so that Eduardo becomes the object of her knowledge and power through the examination: "The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them" (DP 189). Ulla transcribes Eduardo in her medical or psychoanalytical discourse as the "paciente J.E.E." (100), not to glorify him but to reduce him, as Foucault would say, to "a document for possible use" (DP 191). This "sueca," an inexcusably unattractive and apparently submissive woman, has manipulated

her feminine status—thanks to the masquerade of her examination record as a cookbook—to take control of Eduardo and, by extension, of the narrator himself.

Sickened by this monstrous violation of subject/object relations, the narrator literally vomits on Ulla's "irritante flequillo" (95) one night in a bar, and figuratively coats her with "aquel vómito de falsedades e incongruencias" (109) the final night in another bar when he stuns her with his fabricated knowledge about Eduardo. Making Ulla the object of his verbal and gastric spew, he determines to gain control and restore his friend to glory by means of reducing the gleam of Ulla's gaze to its "acostumbrada transparencia inhumana" (109). If Ulla's gaze is transparent, then H.J.K. can *see through* her and possess all the knowledge and power in their relationship. As long as her inhumanity—her monstrosity—wields no control, it benefits the disciplinary system by accentuating the normality and right to rule of the powers that be.

While knowledge is the key to power, the narrator's authority in this story is totally limited by his questionable knowledge of exactly what occurs. His constant proclamations of control are undermined by his admissions of a temporarily faulty memory: "Aunque suelo presumir de una memoria excelente y algunos hechos de mi vida así lo atestiguan—no confío en mi secretaria y sólo uso la agenda en contadas ocasiones—, hay ciertos datos que escapan ahora a mis intentos de ordenación y emergen del pasado envueltos en una nube de sombras y murmullos" (83). He also admits to being slow to comprehend certain

situations: "Confieso, en detrimento de mi supuesta sagacidad, que tardé bastante en dar con la clave [. . .]" (97). A comical antidote to the narrator's presumptuous and anal-retentive character, this doubt about his control subsumes any expectation of stability in power relations between narrator and reader at the textual level. One suspects, however, that perhaps these frequent admissions of aberration from his normal character are deliberate attempts to keep our attention and our gaze focused on him, just the way he did with Eduardo. Like the young protagonist of "Mi hermana Elba," he understands that temporary abnormality attracts the attention of the examining gaze that watches in search of knowledge. Thus H.J.K.'s narrative unreliability is conceivably a narcissistic enticement of readers' voyeurism.

Further evidence of unreliability in this narration is the inferiority of the narrator's knowledge of foreign languages and customs in comparison with Eduardo's. The latter delivers his confession of Ulla's dominance in numerous languages, which impedes the narrator's understanding: "No puedo precisar con certeza cómo Eduardo llegó a descubrirse objeto de estudio (esa parte del discurso fue pronunciada casi enteramente en bávaro), pero me pareció entender que la científica Ulla había recopilado la mayor parte de sus impresiones en una agenda en la que simulaba anotar recetas alsacianas [. . .]" (99). Linguistic mastery affords knowledge of the other and the potential to dominate the difference of the other, as Eduardo amply demonstrates. With the proliferation

of languages, nationalities, cultural customs, and countries in this story, Fernández Cubas problematizes the issue of difference and the way it disconcerts people. This undercurrent, which resurfaces in many of her texts, divulges the need to control others by cataloguing the exact ways in which they are different, thereby defining them through discourse. In this story, however, the narrator cannot dominate because he pieces together imperfect knowledge from linguistic ramblings that he does not understand.

Subject/object relations through the examining gaze constitute the key method for establishing relations of dominance that constantly get overturned in "El provocador de imágenes." This story illustrates how knowledge generates power and power propagates knowledge; always intertwined, the two produce subjects of discourse and the gaze. However, as often happens in the Fernández Cubas fictional world, the tables are turned in this text when the "powerless" wields the very tactics of the powerful in order to wrest control. Thus the author dramatizes the way power functions based on a dual pleasure principle: the pleasure of observing and the pleasure of being observed. When being watched ceases to titillate, objects of the gaze endeavor to look objectively at their subjects and shift the balance of power in their own favor.

Conclusion:

In the stories of Mi hermana Elba, self/other power relations are mediated as one character strives to dominate the discourse imposed by another. Leaving behind the preoccupation with a single figure of power Spanish fiction proliferated in the transition years, the protagonists of these tales undergo a kind of apprenticeship of power: they are exposed to a paradigm in which power is reversible, in flux at all levels of society, and in which other modes of knowledge and logic distort what they presume to be right. Essentially, Fernández Cubas imbues the object with the agency to look "objectively" at the subject, and to manipulate the subject's own discourse to invert the power paradigm. Thus she exposes and extends the potential for opposition that is inherent, but never fully explored, in Foucault's concept of power relations as a fluctuating process. Finally, the narrative text itself enters into play with readers, provoking its own images in order to question the way they see and interpret reality. While power undeniably depends on oppositionality, Fernández Cubas underscores the importance of both sides of the boundary: not only do binaries such as subject/object, logic/illogic, and orality/writing define and deconstruct one another, but the tension between them is precisely the font of her discursive creativity. If the technologies of power displayed in this narrative discourse ultimately cause any interpretation of the texts to be as ambiguous as the identities of Violeta/Lúnula/ Victoria/ Luz, or as cryptic as Olla's language, then

at least the spectacle of power is sure to continue—ever changing and enticing. Key to this spectacle are expectations of gender and their subversion, as Ulla indicates in “El provocador de imágenes.” In the next chapter, on Los atillos de Brumal, the performance of gender occupies the spotlight in the subjective play of power.

Performing and Reforming

Gender in Los atillos de Brumal

The cover of the Tusquets joint edition of the short story collections Mi hermana Elba and Los atillos de Brumal by Cristina Fernández Cubas displays Norman Rockwell's "Girl at the Mirror." It portrays a young, barefoot girl in a petticoat, crouching on a bench in front of a looming mirror. Discarded on the floor are a pretty doll, a tube of red lipstick, a comb, a brush. On the girl's lap, a magazine is opened to a full-page spread of Jane Mansfield's haughty, flawlessly sculpted and made-up face. The girl's curled fingers timidly approach her own naked face, seeking in her reflection, perhaps, some promising germination of Jane Mansfield. This picture illustrates not only the representation of gender, in the photograph of the great Hollywood movie star, but also what Judith Butler calls the re-presentation or performance of gender. That is to say, the process of fashioning the self according to socially constructed codes of gender. As such, "Girl at the Mirror" aptly illustrates the way identity is formed, performed, and reformed through constructions of gender.

While in chapter 1 I analyzed Mi hermana Elba as an exploration of the politics of power—the way individuals define themselves through power relations with others—in this chapter the politics of gender take central stage in the performance of identity. By foregrounding the issue of gender formation, the

work of Fernández Cubas highlights a central concern of feminist theory in general, as well as the field of feminism within Spain in particular. To date, critical studies from a woman-centered perspective have read her work as privileging the feminine over the masculine as a paradigm for agency. In particular, scholars have employed the Kristevan theory of the semiotic to explore Los altillos de Brumal as proffering images of femininity in rejection of masculinity and the patriarchal order.²⁴ Nonetheless, Fernández Cubas herself has emphatically rejected the idea that her work privileges the feminine and has insisted that she strives to explore idiosyncrasies and problems in characters of both sexes. In an interview with Kathleen Glenn, Fernández Cubas stresses that “pretender que lo que yo intento al escribir es ridiculizar al elemento masculino en masa, me parece un desatino” (“Conversación” 361). The reputation in Spain of feminism as simplistic, on the one hand, and extremist, on the other, may explain Fernández Cubas’s adamant stance. Although she is reluctant to identify herself with feminism,²⁵ this author questions gender positions by deconstructing their division based on binary oppositions. Such an endeavor is fundamental to her overarching project of undermining the hierarchical nature of patriarchal thought.

This chapter seeks to disentangle the apparent contradiction between the idea of gender as a discursive construction and motifs in the author’s texts that suggest biological associations of gender. Judith Butler’s and Teresa de

Lauretis's arguments that biological associations of gender are themselves constructions that determine which bodies hold a stake in relations between the sexes help me to explain many of the subtle mechanizations with regard to gender in Los altillos de Brumal. In this light, fundamental questions propel my study of the performativity of gender in Fernández Cubas's text. Images of the feminine are evoked as sources of inspiration, creativity and agency in the texts, but which characters benefit from projecting such a discourse of essentialized femininity? How does the apparent binary opposition of masculine/feminine dictate the actions of individuals as gendered beings? If gender is an ongoing representation, as Judith Butler and other theoreticians propose, what choices are made in these texts that perpetuate or, conversely, that deconstruct the masquerade of masculine and feminine? The answers to these questions suggest that the stories of Los altillos de Brumal seek not to invert the binomial hierarchies of masculine and feminine, but to blend certainty with forgetfulness, "masculine" order with "feminine" fluidity. Furthermore, Fernández Cubas explores what is left out of such polarities, at the very limits of discursive constructions, as the foundational borderland of the subject.

In all these stories narration itself, as discourse, proves to be a crucial battleground for the alteration of discursive construction and for the confrontation with what discourse attempts to erase: its own constitutive outside. In Los altillos de Brumal, narrators who manipulate language abound,

but some manipulate discourse—and discursive constructions of gender—in order to change their subjectivity. In all her stories, Fernández Cubas demonstrates an awareness that, as Foucault points out, one can never escape the discursive power structures that condition our identities. However, her tales suggest that one can manipulate the discourses advanced by those power structures, as well as what those norms ostracize, to create agency for the self.

“El reloj de Bagdad”:

"El reloj de Bagdad," the first story of Los altillos de Brumal, foregrounds issues of gender through its marked contrast between feminine and masculine qualities and spaces. The female narrator recalls her childhood, much of which she spent in the kitchen listening to the fabulous tales of the maid, Olvido, and enjoying the company of the "ánimas" who infused even inanimate objects with a creative voice. This idyllic existence is interrupted when the young girl's father brings home a looming clock from Bagdad, and installs it on the central landing of the staircase so that it will be visible from the main areas of the house. Soon after, all the household members seem to be mysteriously plagued by mishaps, such as when the other maid, Matilde, suffers a terrible fall while dusting the clock. Fearful and sensitive, the young girl perceives the entire house to be submerged in ominous silence. The calamities culminate with the death of Olvido and, soon after, the destruction of the house in a night-time fire. The

family barely escapes the flames with a few random possessions. The clock is rescued, however, and to the child's ears its chimes are transformed into insidious laughter as the house burns to the ground. The girl's last reported memory is of her family's departure from that town, on the night of the Feast of Saint John. Amid the celebratory bonfires, the child spies the dancing figure of her beloved Olvido, accompanied by the sprites of inspiration. This was, she recounts, her last vision of the spirits.

The feminine imagery of this story centers around the kitchen and its ruler, Olvido, in direct opposition to the phallic clock and the father who purchased it. Mary Lee Bretz has observed that "the world of the kitchen is clearly the pre-Oedipal, timeless world of the semiotic" (183), in contrast to the patriarchal structure of the symbolic. The binary relation that she draws is based on Julia Kristeva's Revolution in Poetic Language (1974) and Desire in Language (1980). In these works, Kristeva develops her concept of the semiotic in an elaboration of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic model of subject development, which hinges on the Symbolic Order of patriarchy.

For Kristeva, the symbolic is characterized by the subject's perception of complete castration and submission to phallic language:

the discovery of castration. . . detaches the subject from his dependence on the mother, and the perception of this lack makes the phallic function a symbolic function—*the* symbolic function.

The subject, finding his identity in the symbolic, *separates* from his fusion with the mother [characteristic of the semiotic], *confines* his jouissance to the genitals, and transfers semiotic motility onto the symbolic order. (Revolution 47)

Kristeva theorizes that the rigidity imposed by the Symbolic Order, which is entered by initiation into language and ruled by phallic law, can be penetrated by drives of the "semiotic chora"—the rhythmic, pre-linguistic, nurturing, ungendered space in the unconscious where the drives that affect the subject are originally ordered. Kristeva associates the semiotic with the feminine, in contrast to the masculine, patriarchal structure of the symbolic. This feminine association is intensified as she develops her theory further in Desire in Language, wherein the mother is emphasized as the origin of the semiotic drives. For Kristeva, those (feminine) semiotic drives that penetrate the symbolic structure have an effect that "pulverizes unity" in the phallogocentric order (Revolution 208). As a result, they allow the subject the possibility of altering absolute patriarchal formation in language. Finally, this dynamic enables the subject to continue in process.

In Bretz's view, Olvido epitomizes the eternal mother figure, as ruler of the uninhibited space of the kitchen—where all talk flows freely and even the hearth has a voice. Significantly, in the story Olvido is associated with the fluid communication of oral narration:

Y entonces Olvido tomaba la palabra. Pausada, segura, sabedora de que a partir de aquel momento nos hacía suyos, que muy pronto la luz del quinqué se concentraría en su rostro y sus arrugas de anciana dejarían paso a la tez sonrosada de una niña, a la temible faz de un sepulturero atormentado por sus recuerdos, a un fraile visionario [. . .]. (116-7)

Like Lúnula in Mi hermana Elba, Olvido is a mesmerizing story-teller, adept at transforming herself into the characters of her tales. Yet in “El reloj de Bagdad” Olvido's nurturing, fluid, communicative vitality contrasts not with another aspiring narrator, but with the imposing, rigid silence represented by the clock: “El Reloj de Bagdad estaba ahí. Arrogante, majestuoso, midiendo con su sordo tictac cualquiera de nuestros juegos infantiles. Parecía como si se hallara en el mismo lugar desde tiempos inmemoriales [. . .]” (120). Even the seemingly eternal nature of the clock competes with Olvido's apparent agelessness.

Together with the clock, the image of the father certainly evokes the patriarchal control of the symbolic. The father has a small but significant function in the story: he brings the clock into the home, he is “[f]iel a la ley del silencio” (129), and—in an echo of the biblical Lot—he prohibits the young girl from looking back when they finally drive away from the town on the Night of Saint John. He and the upright clock, representatives of the phallic order, seem

to be in direct opposition to Olvido and the feminine. Symbolically, the father-like Olvido—is dead by the time the narrator tells her tale.

Nonetheless, while the clock may appear to be phallic, it is not an entirely negative image, for it literally depicts a representation of non-gendered people. As the narrator recalls, time seems to have erased signs of gender from the dancing figures painted on the face of the clock: "[. . .] los cuerpos festivos de un grupo de seres humanos. ¿Danzarines? ¿Invitados a un banquete? Los años habían desdibujado sus facciones, los pliegues de sus vestidos [. . .]" (119). These ungendered bodies of uncertain identity deviate from the paradigm of the feminine that Olvido imposes, as well as the ideal of the masculine that the father enforces. The clock, then, is a paradoxical, ambivalent blend of phallogentric order, on the one hand, and the transcendence of difference, on the other.

Another positive characteristic of the clock is that it inspires creativity in the children. As the young ones gaze at the clock, the sand in its weights inspires vivid imaginings of playtime on the beach:

Y ya los niños, equipados con cubos y palas, salían al Paseo,
miraban a derecha e izquierda, cruzaban la vía y se revolcaban en
la playa que ahora no era una playa sino un remoto y peligroso
desierto. Pero no hacía falta tanta arena. Un puñado, nada más, y,
sobre todo, un momento de silencio. (119)

Not only does the clock inspire creativity in the children, but silence is also transformed from a tactic of oppression into the source of imaginative invention.

This fertile silence rivals the power of Olvido's oral storytelling to inspire the children's imaginations. In effect, the figure of the clock attenuates the negative polarity of the masculine with positive qualities, which disturbs the absolute control that Olvido formerly had wielded from her position in the feminine.

In addition to representing non-gendered beings and stimulating creativity that transcends limitations of space, the clock also problematizes hierarchical concepts of subjectivity. By virtue of its origin, the clock symbolizes the crossing of the border between East and West: "era un reloj muy antiguo, fechado en 1700, en Bagdad, probable obra de artesanos iraquíes para algún cliente europeo. Sólo así podía interpretarse el hecho de que la numeración fuera arábica [. . .]" (119). The European/Iraqi relationship evoked here underscores the self/other dichotomy so prevalent in Western domination. Its power dynamic also mirrors the masculine/feminine opposition. Thus, this penetration of the West by the East—represented by the clock—is highly unsettling for Olvido, who insists on rejecting the Iraqis for their difference: "Ni siquiera deben de ser cristianos" (122). In the West/East hierarchy, Olvido is the dominant one; in the masculine/feminine relationship, Olvido strives to exert control by inverting the hierarchy of gender and wresting household control from the father.²⁶

Olvido's fear of the other and of losing control are prime motivators for her to cooperate in subjugation in order to invert its terms; nonetheless, her collusion still propagates domains of oppositional difference. Teresa de Lauretis has observed in Technologies of Gender that this polarity of thought, in and of itself, is characteristic of patriarchy: "To continue to pose the question of gender in either of these terms (the difference of woman from man, or the difference *in* man), once the critique of patriarchy has been fully outlined, keeps feminist thinking bound to the terms of Western patriarchy itself" (1). Any definition of woman based on her difference from man reproduces the oppositional relationship that binds woman to man.

This polarity is precisely the basis for one of Judith Butler's criticisms of Kristeva's opposition between the semiotic and the symbolic:

Despite her critique of Lacan, however, Kristeva's strategy of subversion proves doubtful. Her theory appears to depend upon the stability and reproduction of precisely the paternal law that she seeks to displace [. . .]. If the semiotic promotes the possibility of the subversion, displacement, or disruption of the paternal law, what meanings can those terms have if the Symbolic always reasserts its hegemony? (Gender Trouble 80)

Olvido's elevation of the feminine over the masculine similarly proliferates the patriarchal mode of thought. By causing the qualities of the masculine/feminine

binary to interpenetrate one another in "El reloj de Bagdad," Fernández Cubas problematizes the viability of such absolute divisions, in order to point to a different way of envisioning the subject.

The representation of the crossing of borders on the clock projects gender as a construct that can be manipulated, questioned and even deconstructed. Fernández Cubas's paradigm corresponds here with Teresa de Lauretis's conceptualization of gender as a discursive construct and not as biological essence: "gender is not sex, a state of nature, but the representation of each individual in terms of a particular social relation which pre-exists the individual and is predicated on the *conceptual* and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes" (5). De Lauretis further proposes that it is the discursive nature of gender that allows for agency:

To assert that the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction and that, vice versa, the subjective representation of gender—or self-representation—affects its social construction, leaves open a possibility of agency and self-determination at the subjective and even individual level of micropolitical and everyday practices [. . .]. (9)

Even if subjectivity is indelibly influenced by discourse, the very idea that gender is not innate but a construction allows for the potential to restructure the discourses that form the subject.

Judith Butler agrees with this view. In Gender Trouble, she analyzes gender representation as a stylization—an ongoing re-presentation—of the self. Drawing on Foucault's genealogical project in The History of Sexuality, Butler seeks to understand, not the politics of subversion of the masculine by the feminine, but the technologies of power that construct the very categories of masculine and feminine. If the gender binary consists merely of representations, she proposes, then the key is to understand who is served by their depiction: "How are the sex/gender and nature/culture dualisms constructed and naturalized in and through one another? What gender hierarchies do they serve, and what relations of subordination do they reify?" (Gender 37). She criticizes Kristeva for undertaking a utopian quest for gender-related origins in the semiotic without questioning who defined the origin as such: "The law that is said to repress the semiotic may well be the governing principle of the semiotic itself, with the result that what passes as 'maternal instinct' may well be a culturally constructed desire which is interpreted through a naturalistic vocabulary" (Gender 91). Privileging the feminine as the origin and as necessarily opposed to the masculine, Kristeva's schema of the semiotic does not consider which powers benefit by inventing gendered subjects and then positing them as *prior* to the existence of the law. Butler agrees with Foucault that such a temporal sleight of hand is precisely what institutes the patriarchal power structure (Gender 7).

Who, then, in "El reloj de Bagdad," profits from the institution of gender oppositions? The father does, obviously, to some extent. Nonetheless, in the dynamics of the household, Olvido clearly gains power over the children by stressing the attractive qualities of her feminine realm in contrast to the patriarchal "law of silence" imposed by the father. When the clock arrives, however, it rivals Olvido's skill at awakening the children's powers of imagination. Moreover, the suggestive erasure of gender on the body of the clock threatens Olvido's control, which is predicated on the essential difference of her gender. Thus the clock unsettles the balance of power in the home. Indeed, Olvido's final words to her young charge, before dying, are an admonishment to be on guard against the invasion of the other into their world: "Y luego, como presa de un pavor invencible, asiéndose de mis trenzas, intentando escupir algo que desde hacía tiempo ardía en su boca y empezaba ya a quemar mis oídos: 'Guárdate. Protégete. . . ¡No te descuides ni un instante!'" (126). The gender opposition of masculine and feminine foments Olvido's power; thus, whether aware of it or not, she has a vested interest in perpetuating that representation of gender.

If Olvido's power ultimately rests on a discursive construct of gender, it is a representation that the narrator—even as a child—sometimes accepts and other times rejects in order to better accommodate the self image she desires. When

Olvido asserts her intention of living with her charge even after she grows up and marries, the girl ponders this representation of her feminine obligations:

[no] veía motivo suficiente para separarme de mi familia o abandonar, algún día, la casa junto a la playa. Pero Olvido decidía siempre por mí. "El piso será soleado y pequeño, sin escaleras, sótano ni azotea." Y no me quedaba otro remedio que ensoñarlo así, con una amplia cocina en la que Olvido trajinara a gusto y una gran mesa de madera con tres sillas, tres vasos y tres platos de porcelana. . . O, mejor, dos. La compañía del extraño que las previsiones de Olvido me adjudicaban no acababa de encajar en mi nueva cocina. "El cenará más tarde," pensé. Y le saqué la silla a un hipotético comedor que mi fantasía no tenía interés alguno en representarse. (117)

This passage provides a key illustration of the way gender is represented for the girl, who subsequently re-presents the image the way she desires it to be. While she claims to be completely interpellated into Olvido's domain—"Olvido always decided for me"—the child doesn't hesitate to change the picture and humorously erase that hypothetical husband whom she has no interest in representing in her personal space. This juxtaposition of acquiescence and agency underscores the fact that, since the gender roles that Olvido projects are *constituted* by discourse, they can be *changed* by discourse.

Long after the deaths of her father and Olvido, the adult narrator draws on discursive elements of both gender poles when she textually re-presents a self-styled subjectivity. In her narration, she consciously blends forgetfulness with the "certainty" of memory, in a creative discourse that combines both sides of the gender opposition. Throughout this narration, as in many Fernández Cubas texts, there abound references to the uncertainty of recollection, such as: "No sé si la extraña desazón que iba a adueñarse pronto de la casa irrumpió de súbito, como me lo presenta ahora la memoria, o si se trata, quizá, de la deformación que entraña el recuerdo. Pero lo cierto es que [. . .]" (121). At the textual level, the narrator's continual speculation about the potential certainty or uncertainty of memory—highlighted by the constantly shifting verb tenses—incorporates the possibility of "olvido" into her creative project, together with the possibility of accurate remembrance.

In addition to the amalgam of certainty and doubt, the narrator exploits multiple meanings and contexts of "olvido" to problematize any purely "feminine" or positive interpretation of fluid forgetfulness. Thus, the seemingly feminine, creative, positive symbolism of the maid Olvido (which, in itself, is problematic) is offset by the numerous, destructive "olvidos" that culminate with the burning down of the house:

Eran tantos los *olvidos*, tan numerosos los descuidos, tan increíbles las torpezas que cometíamos de continuo, que ahora, con la

distancia de los años, contemplo la tragedia que marcó nuestras vidas como un hecho lógico e inevitable. Nunca supe si aquella noche *olvidamos* retirar los braseros, o si lo hicimos de forma apresurada [. . .]. (italics mine 127)

In addition to emphasizing the destructive nature of these “*olvidos*,” the narrator allies them with the side of logic—the latter a prime characteristic of the symbolic. Thus qualities that initially seem to be associated with one gender polarity or the other cross the border between the two and confuse the issue of difference.

As the association of forgetfulness with the positive, feminine polarity is deconstructed further, the very existence of the clock—and the truth of the story—is cast into doubt. The narrator traces the erasure of certainty and memory to the morning when the house burned down: “*Aquella misma madrugada se urdió la ingenua conspiración de la desmemoria*” (128). Soon thereafter, the antique dealer from whom the father purchased the clock in the first place rejects the timepiece because of its deterioration, denying that he had ever possessed an ungainly object of such bad taste (128). The “*forgetfulness*” of the “*olvidadizo comerciante*” infects the girl’s family: “[*mi familia*] *adquirió su pasmosa tranquilidad para negar evidencias*” (129). Now forgetfulness is depicted as a deliberate denial of truth, exercised first by a man and then adopted by the entire family. With this contagion, the motif of “*olvido*” can no longer be seen as sacred to the realm of the feminine.

Similar to the increasing ambivalence of the gendered associations of forgetfulness is the symbolism of fire. While in the beginning, the hearth is part of the feminine space of the kitchen, linked to Olvido and the spirits, fire is also the instrument—associated with the clock—that destroys the house. Then, at the end of the story, the bonfires on the Night of Saint John seem to harbor both the clock and Olvido with her spirit friends:

Y entonces lo vi. A través del humo, los vecinos, los niños
 reunidos en torno a las hogueras. Parecía más pequeño,
 desamparado, lloroso. Las llamas ocultaban las figuras de los
 danzarines, el juego de autómatas se había desprendido de la caja
 [. . .]. Recordando antiguas aficiones, entorné los ojos. Ella estaba
 allí. Riendo, danzando, revoloteando en torno a las llamas junto a
 sus viejas amigas. (129)

In this final scene of the story, the fire screens both the clock and Olvido. Associated now with both sides of the masculine/feminine opposition, the fire helps to blur the boundaries between the two. Similarly, it signals the capriciousness of power relations: whereas, at the end of her life, Olvido surrendered her power to the domination of the clock, in death she gleefully dances while the clock mourns.

Bretz has interpreted this "victory" of Olvido as the triumph of the feminine. In the context of gender unmasked as representation, however, I

interpret this final scene as a triumph of the inspiration and storytelling that Olvido and the "ánimas" represent. Significantly, the narrator's contemplation of the inspirational power of the sprites forms the frame of her story. In the opening lines of her account, she ponders the spirits' omnipresence:

Nunca las temí ni nada hicieron ellas por amedrentarme. Estaban ahí, junto a los fogones, confundidas con el crujir de la leña, el sabor a bollos recién horneados [. . .]. Nunca las temí, tal vez porque las soñaba pálidas y hermosas, pendientes como nosotros de historias sucedidas en aldeas sin nombre, aguardando el instante oportuno para dejarse oír, para susurrarnos sin palabras, "Estamos aquí, como cada noche." O bien, refugiarse en el silencio denso que anunciaba: "Todo lo que estáis escuchando es cierto. Trágica, dolorosa, dulcemente cierto." (115)

In a sense, then, this is a story about communing with the spirits that are inherently associated with the telling of stories—spirits that infuse everything, even silence, with a voice. The last fragment of "El reloj de Bagdad," after the description of the bonfires of the Saint John celebration, harks back to the image of the spirits: "Aquella fue la última vez que, entornando los ojos, supe verlas" (130). At the beginning of the tale, the girl perceives the spirits in terms of a gender stereotype of the feminine—"pale and beautiful." Their memory inspires her to write her tale, a new discursive construction that finally dismantles

stereotypes of gender while still celebrating the positive qualities typically associated with both sides of the opposition.

In many ways, the essentialist versus constructivist debate, which I have considered here in relation to "El reloj de Bagdad," is a circular one. The polemic over paradigms such as Kristeva's cannot be entirely resolved because it is impossible to return to a pre-linguistic stage to see if some formulation such as the semiotic really exists. Even if one could go back, how could one ever describe that experience except through language? It would seem, then, that language does constitute a sort of Jamesonian prisonhouse. Even in a prisonhouse, however, power is not absolute domination but—as Foucault has declared and Mi hermana Elba has demonstrated—a technology of fluctuating relations that can be mediated, subverted and changed. A fundamental tactic for change is found in understanding constructs of gender; the greatest value of conceiving of gender as a *discursive* representation lies in the play that language allows us. That is to say, representation as a noun, an already constituted absolute, can be deconstructed to unveil a verb, an action: to re-present. Similarly, the discourses that construct representations of gender need not be accepted as pre-determined formulations, but instead can be manipulated as tools of agency.

In this vein, Butler conceives of gender as performativity, a continually repeated practice:

Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds. ("Performative Acts" 282)

Thus, the subject who plays with gender assignments appropriates power to recreate herself, under the constraint of the discourses available to her. In "El reloj de Bagdad," the artistic performance as a mediation of gender roles culminates with the narrator's creation of her text. The creatively defiant young girl *cum* self-styled woman exercises agency in the act of narrating her past, as she combines elements of the "masculine" and the "feminine" in a pastiche of discourses that expresses the subjectivity she desires. In doing so, she re-writes the pre-script of gender in order to reconstruct herself as the subject of her own discourse.

"En el hemisferio sur":

While in "El reloj de Bagdad," Fernández Cubas questions the mutually exclusive nature of masculine versus feminine constructs, in "En el hemisferio sur" she explores exactly how gendered conceptions, inscribed in discourse, produce—or fail to produce—subjects. Since the masculine itself is just another discursive construct, its supremacy as the origin and locus of authority can be,

and is, displaced and deconstructed. The account of a male narrator who finds himself acting out in his life what a female novelist already wrote about him in her book, this tale humorously illustrates what Judith Butler would call making “gender trouble:” the woman, Clara, controls the male narrator with her discourse, thereby trespassing the border between the traditional gender functions of female passivity and male authorship, as well as challenging orthodox concepts of narrative authority. Having lost the power of the pen—the power of the phallus—and finding himself inscribed by narrative discourse into a position of inferiority, the narrator plunges into a crisis of subjectivity. This parallels the angst a woman conceivably suffers due to being imprinted as a passive figure by societal discourses.

Yet even before he becomes a character in her novel, the narrator finds he cannot live up to the traditional discursive ideals of an authoritative and virile man. His shortcomings and insecurities are accentuated in his nemesis’ novel, which inscribes his masculine role as one of deficiency. The very possibility that his entire identity is constituted by the already written raises the question of whether subject construction is pre-determined, such as Althusser might argue, or whether there is room for agency. With the allegory of finding oneself to be a character in another’s text—a text that prescribes one’s every move—, this story examines how discourse shapes the subject, inscribing her or him into a gendered position that finally determines, in Butler’s terms, “what counts as a

valued and valuable body” (Bodies That Matter 22); then, by questioning the very discursive terms by which those bodies come to matter, the text reveals how subjugated bodies manipulate existing discourses to alter their own construction.

The nameless narrator begins his tale describing how Clara Galván, an old college friend and a successful novelist, comes to see him in his cramped office at a publishing house. While Clara, greatly distressed and disheveled, recounts how she is hounded by a Voice that forces her to write without ceasing, the narrator muses about how he envies her current plight in comparison to his own angst-ridden inability to conquer the taunting, feminine menace of the blank page. Clara further tells how her exhaustion from overwork turned to horror one day when she realized that the Voice had a foreign accent, and how soon after she discovered a novel written by one Sonia Kraskowa, whose photo bears a disturbing resemblance to Clara.

Clara finds that the excerpts of Sonia’s first-person novel describe her trauma with the Voice in detail. She is unnerved that the text anticipates her words and actions almost exactly:

Retomé el primer párrafo con cierto temor. Mis labios murmuraron: *Tecleo a una velocidad pasmosa, me olvido de comer y de dormir, el mundo desaparece de mi vista. . .* Los objetos del establecimiento empezaron a bailar a mi alrededor. “No puede ser,” dije ahogando un chillido. El dependiente me tendió un

ejemplar: NO PUEDE SER, Sonia Kraskowa. Tuve que apoyarme en una estantería para no desplomarme. “Creo que me estoy volviendo loca,” musité en un tono apenas perceptible. “No exactamente,” intervino el hombre y, ajustándose las gafas, puntualizó: EL DIA QUE CREI VOLVERME LOCA. . . (137)

Horrified at being predicted this way, Clara begs the narrator to help her. Although he conceals the condescension he feels toward her, her friend is unable to empathize when Clara laments being nothing more than a replica of the already written: “[. . .] Algún día tenía que ocurrir. Todo lo que yo escribo, está escrito ya. Todo lo que yo pienso, lo ha pensado antes alguien por mí. Quizás yo no sea más que una simple médium. . . o peor. Una farsante. Una vil y repugnante farsante” (138). Clara goes to the bathroom to wash the streaks of make-up and tears off her face, and muses about how, in the southern hemisphere, the water disappears down the drain in the opposite direction from in the northern hemisphere. She considers going south to unwind. Although he believes his friend is crazy, the narrator can’t help being fascinated by the wonderfully literary nature of her crisis.

Later Clara calls him, sobbing that someone mysteriously put a copy of Sonia Kraskowa’s novel on her nighttable, and that when she glanced at one of its pages, it said she had moved to a hotel; in fact, at that moment she is at a hotel, where she is hiding from her mysterious stalker. The narrator demands

that his secretary, who seldom heeds his requests, obtain all of Kraskowa's novels by the following Monday for him to read. After meeting Clara for dinner that Friday evening, he gives her a file full of clippings about Kraskowa. The narrator spends that weekend at the home of his Aunt Alicia, a homemaker and gardener: "la encontré como siempre, en pie desde las primeras horas, regando el jardín con una paciencia y una dedicación exquisitas" (146). The woman's old-fashioned ways comfort him after his difficult week.

The narrator returns to the city the following Monday to learn from his secretary that his writer-friend has died. He sends a card, inscribed: "A Clara Sonia Galván Kraskowa. Los que te quieren no te olvidan" (148), along with flowers from the north and south, in tribute to the dual parental heritage of his friend. He remembers the identity crisis that Clara had suffered in college, and how she took her mother's maiden name as her penname. Bitterly, he recalls how, when they both submitted stories to a college competition, Clara and not he had won the prize (a defeat from which his wounded ego never recovered). Then the narrator reminisces about his decision the previous Friday to force Clara to confront her identity by giving her the file of newspaper clippings about her career. Inspired by Clara's trauma, he plans to transcribe it as the perfect plot for the novel that he will finally write in defiance of the taunting blank page.

Considering himself to be caught up in a "hurricane" of creative ideas for his novel, the narrator is surprised when his secretary interrupts him to deliver

Sonia's recently-submitted manuscript entitled, not Huracán, but Tornado. As he reads it, the narrator feels dizzy at the awful discovery that *her* novel transcribes *his* life, the story we have been reading, told from the sarcastic perspective of a female narrator. The novel predicts his disdain for Clara's suffering at the mercy of the Voice. Moreover, it reveals that she dreamed the whole encounter in advance, and enacted the scene with him as a challenge for life to imitate the discursive construct of her dream. The narrator is further unsettled that the book's dedication to him suggests that Clara herself had fixed the college contest so that he lost. He rushes to the bathroom to wash his face and stares at the water disappearing down the drain, in the same direction as in the southern hemisphere. That very afternoon, he takes refuge once again in the home of his Aunt Alicia.

The rivalry between the narrator and Clara sets up a clear dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine. According to Kathleen Glenn, the story ultimately privileges woman and subjugates man ("Authority and Marginality" 428). On one level, the story may appear to invert the hierarchy so that the woman exercises control. What happens, though, if we analyze the discourses that establish the polarity between "masculine" and "feminine?" Considering that the subject only comes into existence with its emergence into a sexed identity, Judith Butler examines the very norms that condition the sexed emergence of the subject.

To escape the notion that constructivism presumes an absolutely predetermined subject, Butler reaches beyond the idea of construction in Bodies that Matter to interrogate the normative process by which subjects come to matter at all: “What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (9). She redefines “matter” as more than the physical substance of the body to argue against the idea that matter is prior to construction. For Butler, matter is constantly and repeatedly “materialized” as an effect of certain norms that define who matters and is viable as a subject; this materialization necessarily marginalizes certain unviable subjects as the constitutive outside of the subject who counts. For Butler, the key questions to understanding this process are: “Through what regulatory norms is sex itself materialized? And how is it that treating the materiality of sex as a given presupposes and consolidates the normative conditions of its own emergence?” (10). In this light, “En el hemisferio sur” problematizes the discourses that establish the bodies that matter in this story; discourses of gender are not reaffirmed, then, but undermined to destabilize the system.

In the character of Clara/Sonia, Fernández Cubas questions the materiality of sex as a given and proposes ways of repeating the norms differently in order to broaden the field of what bodies matter. Traditional

discursive constructs of the feminine dominate the male narrator's attempts to define his identity in relation to women. Much of his characterization of his friend Clara, for instance, is based on the dichotomy of innocent child versus corrupt whore. In the beginning of the story, when she bursts into his office to tell him her bizarre tale, he is repulsed by her appearance:

Aquel día, además, su físico me resultó repelente. Tenía el rimmel corrido, el carmín concentrado en el labio inferior y a uno de sus zapatos de piel de serpiente le faltaba un tacón. Si no fuera porque conocía a Clara desde hacía muchos años la hubiera tomado por una prostituta de la más baja estofa. (131)

Here Clara's snakeskin shoes associate her metonymically with the biblical Eve and the serpent, who precipitated the downfall of the mighty, righteous Adam; moreover, her garish, runny make-up and slovenly attire connect her with the status of a "fallen woman," a whore. The narrator truly would like for her to "fall" from her position of power, for she has literally and figuratively displaced *him* from his seat of biblically-ordained control:

[. . .] se acomodó en el único sillón de mi despacho. Suspiré. Me disgustaba la desenvoltura de aquella mujer mimada por la fama. Irrumpía en la editorial a las horas más peregrinas, saludaba a unos y a otros con la irritante simpatía de quien se cree superior, y

me sometía a largos y tediosos discursos sobre las esclavitudes que conlleva el éxito. (131)

Later, after listening to Clara's crisis about the divergent sides of her identity, he marginalizes her still further by considering her to be a madwoman:

[Clara:] –No me tomarás por loca, ¿verdad?

[Narrator:] –No –mentí. (140)

This characterization of Clara as insane reifies the narrator as the sane one, the possessor of reason and right. Through his narrative discourse, the man attempts to encase the woman in the construct of the madwoman or whore—both women to be shunned—in order to position himself in the powerful center.

In contrast to his disgust at Clara's tawdry appearance, the narrator is pleased when she washes her face, leaving it naked and clean: “[. . .] admiré, complacido, el nuevo rostro de Clara. Parecía una niña. Iba a decirle lo bien que resultaba sin maquillar, lo alegre que me sentía ante su transformación, pero ella había vuelto a accionar el grifo” (140). The narrator vastly prefers the discursive construction of woman as clean, innocent, and childlike, not painted, disheveled, and looking like a prostitute. Humorously, even as he conceives of Clara as a child here, he still cannot quite speak to her as he would like; her actions—in this case of “drowning him out” with water that flows in an ominously reverse direction—still preempt his words, suggesting that she does not conceive of herself as a passive little girl in this passage. The narrator's feelings toward

Clara are tangled in the ambivalence of these contradictory constructs of the feminine, against which he perceives himself oppositionally as a man in control or a man who is controlled.

Constructs of sex, however, define far more than individuals in this story. The narrator draws an indelible relationship between sex and writing. The discursive constructions of “la musa” and “la Voz” figure as the feminine inspiration of creativity in a writer. Much to the narrator’s frustration, though, the inspired writer is not he but Clara. The successful novelist herself laments being totally dominated by “la imperiosa Voz” (133): “Ella es la Voz. Surge de dentro, aunque, en alguna ocasión, la he sentido cerca de mí, revoloteando por la habitación, conminándome a permanecer en la misma postura durante horas y horas. No se inmuta ante mis gestos de fatiga. Me obliga a escribir sin parar [. . .]” (132). In contrast, the narrator is obsessed by the feminine defiance of the blank page:

Pero el papel en blanco seguía ahí. Impertérrito, amenazante, lanzándome su perpetuo desafío, feminizándose por momentos y espetándome con voz saltarina: “Anda, atrévete. Estoy aquí. Hunde en mi cuerpo esas maravillosas palabras que me harán daño. Decídetes de una vez. ¿Dónde está esa famosa novela que bulle en tu cerebro? No prives al mundo de tu genio creador. ¡Qué pérdida, Dios, qué pérdida!. . .” (134-35)

Such an image personifies the blank page as the feminine receptacle, as the lack, to be filled by the masculine “instrument.”

Drawing from Irigaray, Butler discusses the trope of the feminine lack as one that excludes the “true” feminine by setting up “the feminine” as merely a specular reflection of “the masculine:”

Disavowed, the remnant of the feminine survives as the inscriptional space of that phallogocentrism, the specular surface which receives the marks of a masculine signifying act only to give back a (false) reflection and guarantee of phallogocentric self-sufficiency, without making any contribution of its own. As a topos of the metaphysical tradition, this inscriptional space makes its appearance in Plato’s *Timaeus* as the receptacle [. . .]. (Bodies 39)

Irigaray shows that the receptacle image in *Timaeus* usurps even the function of reproduction from the “true” feminine by positing her as passive: “In the place of a femininity that makes a contribution to reproduction, we have a phallic Form that reproduces only and always further versions of itself, and does this through the feminine, but with no assistance from her” (Bodies 42). Of course, any concept of the “true” feminine must also be a construct; the point is to interrogate the function and power (or lack thereof) attributed to the feminine by the discourses that construct it. Interestingly, in “En el hemisferio sur,” the blank page does not originate as feminine, but becomes feminine at times,

“feminizándose por momentos” (134). The gerund here suggests that feminization is a process or, to use Butler’s term, a materialization. Through the image of the feminine blank page, the narrator reifies the classical affiliation of men with writing and productivity, and attempts to transpose the pen onto the phallus. Yet he cannot live up to this grandiose discourse of the masculine. This feminine blank page threatens him, dares him to penetrate and violate her with his words, and taunts him for his inability to do so.

Significantly, this description of the blank page closely follows the narrator’s meditation on the way his frustrated efforts to inseminate his own creative production drain what little vitality his already less-than-desirable physique could muster:

Había probado a embriagarme, a euforizarme, a relajarme. A menudo las tres posibilidades a un tiempo. Los resultados no tardaron en reflejarse en mis ojos, en las bolsas que los contorneaban, en las arrugillas que surcaban mis párpados, en las canas que, con paso firme, iban invadiendo patillas, barba, cejas y bigote. De mi antiguo cabello apenas sí podía acordarme. Me quedaban tan sólo tres mechones que dejaba crecer y peinaba hábilmente para que disimularan el odioso brillo de mi cabeza.

(134)

Aging, balding, and professionally mediocre at best, this man cannot comply with the ideal construct of masculinity. His inability to exert control over the blank page and over Clara is echoed by the fact that the secretaries in his office take almost no notice of his requests. Pondering his performance anxiety, the narrator muses, “A mi manera, yo también había oído voces” (135). If the Voice that controls Clara is a discourse that dictates her activities and even her identity, the male narrator, too, is subject to voices, to discourses that construct and determine the way he should be as a man. Instead of merely exalting the feminine in order to subjugate the masculine, then, this story demonstrates how suffocating constructed limitations can be for any “body” who is subjugated by discourse without any hope of agency.

If the subject is shaped by discourse, does that formation indelibly, fatally determine the subject, or is it possible to modify its construction? This question may be seen as the implicit springboard of Bodies that Matter, as well as of Fernández Cubas’s texts. For Butler, subject formation implies “a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject” (95). A subject comes to be through its submission to already existing norms. It does not exist apart from or outside of those norms: “bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schemas” (Bodies

xi). In that sense, there is no such thing as a voluntary subject who can get outside of discourse in order to reconstruct its subjectivity completely apart from discourse.

Nonetheless, Butler points out that the reiterative nature of a subject's materialization through discourse implies an uncertainty that destabilizes the notion of monolithic determinism:

That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law. (Bodies 2)

Within the constraints of the norms that materialize them, subjects can alter their constitution by repeating those norms differently than the pattern that the regulations themselves impose.

In "En el hemisferio sur," Clara/Sonia manipulates the norms of gendered discourse even as she reiterates them. Aware that the very language she uses to express herself is conditioned by sex, she manages to find slippage within its gendered limitations. This comes into play in Sonia Kraskowa's

dedication of her final novel, Tornado, to the narrator: “En aquel concurso de nombre lejano, tu cuento era el mejor. Alguien (lamentablemente no existe el femenino para ciertos pronombres personales) se encargó de ocultarlo a los ojos del jurado. ¿Sabremos olvidarlo?” (152). In traditional Western discourse, the subject, the “I,” comes into being always already marked by a gendered matrix, and that matrix always prefigures the masculine as the center and the feminine supposedly as a reflection, but actually as an exclusion and erasure. However, certain personal pronouns in Castilian are not linguistically tied to gender, such as, implicitly, the “yo” that takes responsibility for sabotaging the narrator’s victory in the story competition of their college years. Here in Fernández Cubas’s text, the excluded feminine comes back to haunt the masculine identity implicitly attached to the “I,” to question its authority and to decenter it from power.²⁷

If the phallus, associated with the pen, is the emblem of this masculine power, Clara appropriates both tools for herself by being a powerful and prolific writer.²⁸ Rejecting discursive constructions of the feminine as passivity, lack, receptacle, or a blank page, Clara is active and productive: she wields the pen to express herself on the page. Significantly, her creation is not autonomous, nor totally voluntary—she is not exempt from the Voice nor from the rule of language. Yet she manages to manipulate discourse to question the mutually-exclusive nature of the gendered regulations that define both her and the

narrator. Displacing the masculine as the origin of discourse and power, she transfers the power of the phallus/pen to herself by anticipating the narrator's actions and thoughts in her text:

“... Se lo acababa de decir. Le acababa de explicar cómo la irritante Voz me mantenía en vilo durante días y noches, cómo, con contumaz precisión, iba debilitando mi deteriorado juicio. Y él, dando vueltas en torno a la mesa, simulaba comprender. Pero yo le sabía sutilmente interesado. Su cabeza bullía de ideas contradictorias, de sueños, de frustraciones, de conmiseración hacia sí mismo, acaso, en aquel momento, hacia mi persona.. Se asomó a la ventana, y yo me fijé en su cogote. Era un hombrecillo ridículo, preocupado por aparentar una juventud que nunca conoció, obsesionado por disfrazar sus escasos mechones de pelo ralo. A punto estuve de echarme a reír y desbaratar mi desesperada apuesta. Pero no lo hice. La campanilla del despertador me devolvió a la insulsa cotidianeidad de mis días. Fue entonces cuando decidí poner en práctica mi sueño. Hasta aquel momento no había hecho otra cosa que escribir la vida; ahora, iba a ser la vida quien se encargara de contradecir, destruir o confirmar mis sueños. . . (151-2)

If this story is about the anxiety of being entirely predetermined by discursive constructs, Clara learns to modify them by manipulating established discourses for her own constructive ends. Instead of writing in imitation of life, she alters life to imitate her dreams, which themselves can be seen as constructs of her mind.

If Clara gains so much agency, however, then how do readers interpret her death in the story? If readers believe that Clara killed herself because she could not resolve the opposing terms of her identity, then it would seem that her expression of agency was short-lived and—from a fatalistic point of view—perhaps even futile. On the other hand, this conclusion can only be surmised by interpreting a lack in the text, since the narrator never describes exactly how she died. Furthermore, he is markedly silent—and seemingly unsurprised—when the secretary informs him of the writer's death:

—¿Sabe ya la noticia?

Me limité a colocar el libro sobre los otros.

—Aquí tiene el diario. Dicen que, en los últimos tiempos, se encontraba muy deprimida. . . Usted la conoció mucho, ¿verdad?

Mi cabeza asintió. La mujer permanecía a mi lado, esperando pacientemente una opinión personal que no tenía la menor intención de proporcionarle. (147)

One could conjecture that the narrator killed Clara/Sonia in order to steal her story. After all, whereas initially he plans to tell Clara to write it, after her death he plots to tell the tale himself. In any case, the story dramatizes the suffocation of the subject—whether male or female—that believes itself to be entirely determined by discourse.

While Clara appears to recognize and redeploy discourse, the narrator blindly accepts its effects. Taking refuge in the hackneyed images with which he represents both Clara (whore, young innocent, madwoman) and his Tía Alicia (patient, delicate, longsuffering mother-figure) the narrator never learns to critique, evaluate and manipulate the discourses that determine his world. He needs the comfort of phallogocentrism, where he perceives himself as the center of matronly care and where his word is the authority in the narrative text. Yet who is really the author, the originator of the work? Although the text we read would seem to consist of the narrator's words, we never know if those words were already written or not in Tornado because he, and thus readers, never peruse Clara's entire novel.

Ultimately, any attempt to trace the origin of the text we read becomes a dizzying array of possible placements and displacements of authority. If Clara dreamed the opening scene of this story, then woke up and decided to enact the story to replicate the scene constructed in her dream (the scene we read on the first page), lived out the rest of the events and wrote them in her novel, which

the narrator opens midway and reads, only to find his own actions transcribed in it, at what point does he narrate the text we read? Does he become the narrator after he reads Tornado, thus placing his narration at a level superior to Clara/Sonia's and making his the "definitive" version? Or is it possible that Sonia's novel dictates his narration—and perhaps even intercalates his narration within itself? One might even wildly speculate that the narrator dreamed up the whole plot on his own. In the end, the locus of narrative control hardly seems to matter at all since the text obliterates any notion of inviolate authority.

Sonia Kraskowa's novel calls into question the power of masculine origination within the very discourse—narrative—that the phallus/pen has used to establish itself as the first and only authority.²⁹ The discourse she uses to condemn herself as a mere replica, "una farsante. Una vil y repugnante farsante" (138), is ultimately aimed at the narrator who, once displaced from being the origin to being the product of discourse, must recognize himself constructed in those words. The whole dichotomy of man versus woman hinges on a discourse that creates the boundaries of one subject by excluding others. Clara is most terrified when she realizes that the Voice possesses a foreign accent—which suggests that the very discourse that shapes her is "other" than herself. The difference of the other as the constitutive element of the self is expressed metaphorically by the dichotomy of the northern versus the southern hemispheres. North is defined by south, man by woman, the familiar by the

foreign, each excluding the other to form itself.³⁰ The next story, “Los altillos de Brumal,” questions such exclusions to investigate how the constitutive outside relates to the center and thus forms an essential part of identity.

“Los altillos de Brumal”:

As the title story of the collection, “Los altillos de Brumal” may be seen to epitomize the focus on discursive subjectivity that dominates the other stories. While “El reloj de Bagdad” problematizes the privileging of one gender over another and undermines the traditional view of genders as mutually exclusive constructs, “En el hemisferio sur” shows that discursive constructs, despite their tendency to privilege one gender while marginalizing another, determine subjects and yet enable subjects to manipulate, to some extent, their own construction. “Los altillos de Brumal” continues the dialogue on discursive constructs of gender by foregrounding the relationship between subjects that matter and those bodies that do not matter in and of themselves, but that serve the vital function of defining, by contrast, the ones that do. If the first two stories of the collection deal with the construction of intelligible bodies, conventionally conceived of as masculine or feminine, then “Los altillos de Brumal” explores how gender constraints also produce unintelligible bodies that haunt the nether-regions of acceptability and thereby question the integrity of that system.

Those “unthinkable” bodies that occupy the outside of normality are a fundamental preoccupation of Judith Butler’s Bodies That Matter. Butler wrote this text partially in response to criticism that her previous work, Gender Trouble, ignored the concrete materiality of the body and portrayed gender as a completely voluntary and changeable condition. Bodies That Matter clarifies that, while the body is indeed “real” and material, it operates within gendered constructions that determine the way it is perceived. Butler points to the fundamental link between the process of “assuming” a sex and the concept of identification. Furthermore, she highlights the discursive means by which the gendered matrix permits some sexed identifications while foreclosing others. For Butler, everyone functions within highly gendered discursive systems “without which we would not be able to think, to live, to make sense at all, [. . .] [and] which have acquired for us a kind of necessity” (xi). In this light, she reformulates constructions of the body not as capricious and disposable, but as foundational and constitutive.

The constraints that dictate which bodies matter—which ones bear the mark of a viable gender—necessarily delineate a border that marks off other bodies that do not matter:

This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet ‘subjects,’ but who form the constitutive

outside to the domain of the subject [. . .]. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation. (Bodies 3)

It is precisely this domain of the "object," the "foreclosed" or the "excluded" that precludes gender constructions from being absolutely deterministic, for the existence of the outside ordains the possibility of questioning the right and supremacy of the center. Drawing from Derrida and Irigaray, Butler builds her case on the idea that a binary opposition spawns its own destruction—or *deconstruction*—by producing an exclusion that questions the inviolate authority of that binary: "A constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless *internal* to that system as its own nonthematisable necessity. It emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to its own systematicity" (Bodies 39—italics are Butler's). In other words, if the beings outside the system should penetrate the borders that exclude them, they could call into question the viability of the system itself.

Through the depiction of the narrator's home village of Brumal as an unrepresentable place that is rendered unworthy by those at the center, this story emphasizes the discourses that construct the subject, the narrator/protagonist. Key to that formation are the influences that shape her as a woman. While on the

surface, Brumal appears to have archetypically feminine qualities, it blurs the borders between the feminine and masculine and thus questions the validity of their differences. The protagonist's exploration of Brumal unmasks those discourses as constructs that can be manipulated and invested with different meanings. Thus the practices of gender and propriety that shape the narrator/protagonist confront the threat of what lurks at the limits of their definition. Despite being rejected and nearly erased, Brumal haunts the discourses that foreclose it to question their supremacy. In "Los altillos de Brumal," the town of Brumal represents the abandoned and rejected outside of discourse, which the adult narrator, Adriana, eventually recognizes as integral to the construction of her identity.

The narrator begins her story by recalling her childhood discovery of all the ways that she was marked by difference—and thus inferiority—to the girls at her new school after she leaves Brumal: a bout with scarlet fever left her sickly and clumsy, her paternal surname is deemed unpronounceable and her maternal surname too common, and the teacher speculates on whether Adriana's strange accent could be a congenital defect. The timid child attempts to defend the validity of her roots but is unable to find her hometown on the classroom map. At home, Adriana lies about her rejection. The mother, having invested all her hopes in her daughter once she moves them away from Brumal, saves what little money she has for Adriana's college education. A silent, angry woman, the

mother loses herself in household tasks and dreams of her daughter's future career. After Adriana graduates with a degree in history, her mother dies peacefully and happily in her sleep.

Freed of familial obligations, Adriana then devotes herself to her passion for cooking. In particular, she revels in concocting succulent dishes whose ingredients are not what they would seem: "Me gustaba combinar elementos, experimentar, adivinar los ingredientes de cualquier producto enlatado, confeccionar sopas de legumbres sin legumbres o lograr unos aparatosos filetes de pescado a base de arroz hervido y prensado" (161). Like her culinary creations, Adriana too becomes other than what she appears: she authors a cooking column in a magazine and hosts a daily show on the radio, leading her public to imagine her as a kindly, wise old woman. While trying out dishes and recipes sent by her fans for a book, she discovers a jar of luscious strawberry jam which, she detects, contains no strawberries. The faded label on the jar barely retains the imprint of the word "Brumal." The taste of this mysterious jam plunges the woman into dim memories of her childhood home, and Adriana vows to return there at once. Memories of her Aunt Rebeca's culinary delights concocted in an attic in Brumal overlay Adriana's sampling of the jam in the present and foreshadow her encounter in the near future with more Brumalian jam and another Brumalian attic.

As Adriana approaches her birthplace, what she sees does not correspond to what she remembers, and neither the town hall nor the townspeople where her mother lived can confirm that Brumal ever existed. Finally, after much searching, Adriana finds her old village quite deteriorated and all but deserted. In the decrepit church she encounters the surprisingly young, local priest who invites her to his home. Excusing the squalor of his house by saying that his housekeeper died recently, the priest repeatedly fills Adriana's glass with strawberry aguardiente as she regales him with stories from her childhood in that village. Although her head is soon spinning from the alcohol and the overwhelming scent of strawberries, she obediently follows her host up to a pristinely clean attic that is a virtual laboratory of strawberry jam. For a while Adriana delightedly loses herself in the abundance of books, notebooks, and mysterious concoctions, along with the childhood memories they all trigger. When she tries to leave, however, she overhears the priest telling someone that the new housekeeper arrived that morning; ominously, she hears a key lock her in the attic.

The narrator does not remember what happened next, except that she evoked the memory of her mother as she fought against her imprisonment in Brumal. Somehow, she eventually found herself running through the cold night. She is picked up, bleeding, incoherent, and reeking of alcohol. After she spends a month in a psychiatric hospital, her twin brothers take her home but show a

marked disinterest in her situation. Returning to the familiar disorder of her apartment, Adriana cancels all her obligations and spends weeks feverishly writing down her experiences in Brumal. Then, feeling watched by the accusing eyes of her mother's photograph as she packs for a postponed trip with her editor, Adriana finally realizes how her mother always manipulated her and forced her to reject Brumal out of her fear of difference. Embracing Brumal as an integral part of herself, Adriana heads to the train station at the end of the story and loses herself in dreams of Brumal, the haven of her past and the locus of her future.

Everything about Brumal contrasts sharply with the self-image that Adriana's mother and school fashioned for her, as she recalls her post-Brumal experiences in childhood. The young Adriana's attempt to connect her identity with Brumal holds no weight in the realm of her new school; symbolically, Brumal is not even represented—or representable—on the school's map, and the child's searching fingers flounder in the abyss of the blue ocean beyond the borderline of land. Marginalized as the different and undesirable outsider, the young girl quickly learns the ways of the world:

A aquellas burlas, sin embargo, debo un precoz despertar a las leyes de la vida. Con una sabiduría que, casi treinta años después, me deja aún perpleja, comprendí muy pronto que [. . .] [I]a diferencia estaba en mí y, si quería librarme de futuras y terribles

afrentas, debería esforzarme por aprender el código de aquel mundo del que nadie me había hablado y que se me aparecía por primera vez cerrado como una nuez, inexpugnable como los abismos marítimos en los que mis dedos acababan de extraviarme.

(157)

Adriana must learn the discourse of that world if she is to survive it. The code of behavior she endeavors to learn at school is mirrored by the performance of her mother at home: “me resguardé en el silencio y, en el recreo, me mantuve al margen, observando juegos, intentando memorizar canciones. Al llegar a casa mentí. –Ha sido estupendo–dije. Madre no levantó los ojos del bastidor y siguió bordando con exquisita delicadeza” (158). Silence, subterfuge, and keeping one’s eye on the task at hand are the hallmarks of the identity that Adriana must adopt when she leaves Brumal.

Adriana is enormously influenced by her “Madre,” whose power of enforcing discourse is signaled by the capitalization of her name, which also denotes her role. A combination of silence and rage, anguish and resentment, and tradition and progress, her mother was, above all, unhappy:

Madre no era una mujer alegre. La recuerdo a menudo silenciosa, enfrascada en oscuros pensamientos que nunca quiso compartir, santiguándose a la menor ocasión, gimiendo sola en su alcoba hasta que las luces del alba terminaran por vencer su persistente

incapacidad de conciliar el sueño [. . .]. Todo en ella era
privacidad y secreto. (158)

In many ways, Mother represents a key discourse of the traditional feminine for Adriana. Not only does she spend her time sewing with “exquisita delicadeza” (158) (evocative of the “paciencia y dedicación exquisitas” of Aunt Alicia in “En el hemisferio sur” [146]), but she and her daughter can communicate only by performing traditional womanly tasks:

Sabía que me quería y, aunque nunca pude cruzar el umbral de su atormentado mundo, intenté en todo momento corresponderle con mi cariño. La ayudaba en los trabajos de la casa, devanaba madejas, o bordaba, con la mejor voluntad, una esquina cualquiera de las labores en las que ocupaba su tiempo. Otra demostración de afecto no hubiera sido comprendida. Desde la muerte de mi padre, Madre se había encerrado en ese extraño universo que le negaba el reposo. Parecía como si hubiese sellado un pacto con el silencio y la melancolía [. . .]. (158-59)

The death of Adriana’s father, who was from Brumal, made it that much easier for the mother to deny the village’s impact on their lives. Yet her erasure of the outside heralds her imprisonment in a place of imbalance and unrest, “ese extraño universo que le negaba el reposo.” Perhaps, as Butler suggests, the formation of identity founded on the rejection of the abjected other truly is

unnatural. Yet, as Adriana struggles to learn the discourses of this strange world, she acts out her role without overly questioning what is excluded by the imposed silence. Again and again, she reiterates her feminine role to please her mother, complying—we might argue—with the dictates of the gender matrix. As Butler indicates, it is in the performance, in the repetition of the dictates of discursive constructs that those constructs become reified as right and natural.

The mother abhors Brumal because, within its realm, she has no hope of usurping power for herself. While at one time she may have been attracted by the difference she saw in Adriana's father, her marriage tied her to Brumal, which caused her to be rejected by her own family. The mother's family was from a larger, more socially acceptable town by the sea, where the people of Brumal would go for festivities once a year: "Pero aquellos peregrinajes anuales me dejaban siempre un amargo sabor de boca. Las gentes del mar nos miraban con recelo, los niños de piel tostada nos escudriñaban sin recato y, en las noches de playa, no contábamos con la compañía de un solo lugareño ni de una barcaza rezagada" (166-67). The mother hated her family and the people of the seaside town for rejecting her. Yet she also hated Brumal, the cold, dark, undesirable zone, even as (or, perhaps, because) she was connected to it by marriage.

As a consequence, she constantly tried to erase Brumal from their past by admonishing her daughter: "*Huimos de la miseria, hija. . . Recordarla es sumergirse en ella*" (157). Indeed, when the mother left Brumal she attempted to

symbolically exorcise herself of its power by wearing her coat inside-out.

Associating Brumal and her marriage with imprisoning power, she tried to give her daughter a more autonomous future that would preclude her dependence on a man who might diminish her status and her freedom. Her lifelong devotion to her daughter and nonchalance toward her twin sons culminates in an inversion of their gender roles: when she manages to sell the last bit of land her family had owned, the mother sends Adriana to college and gives the boys the house.

While the mother seems conventional, on the one hand, and liberal on the other, both of her approaches depend upon a binary structure that opposes genders as mutually exclusive domains of power in contention with each other. Just as she wore her coat inside out, she inverts the sides in the gender game to appropriate more power for woman, but does not question the validity of the boundary that separates woman from man.

If the mother and the school represent the discourses that construct Adriana, how is Brumal constructed as the excluded? Key to this dynamic of inside/outside, for Butler, is that the center, in order to believe itself to be independent and inviolate, cannot afford to recognize that its constitutive outside even exists: "an intensification of identification [. . .] cannot afford to acknowledge the exclusions on which it is dependent, exclusions that must be refused, identifications that must remain as refuse, as abjected, in order for that intensified identification to exist" (*Bodies* 116). Correspondingly, in the

Fernández Cubas story the forces of the center deny and expunge the very existence of Brumal. As already noted, Brumal is not represented on the map of Adriana's new school. Moreover, Adriana's mother repeatedly intones the need to forget Brumal: "*Huimos de la miseria, hija. . .*" (157). In fact, she erases the name Brumal from her discourse and embodies it in the term "miseria."

Other discourses of the center contain similar lacunae. Adriana can find no record of Brumal in the townhall of her mother's birthplace, nor in the bishopric's list of parishes or dioceses that she searches when she returns to the city after her journey. Not only is Brumal nonexistent in the official discourse of the center, it scarcely survives in her mother's town even in the memory of one resident, who implies that "Brumal" is a less-than-acceptable name for a place of unremarkable importance: "Al salir, un anciano agitó su bastón. 'Sí,' dijo, 'algunos lo conocían por este nombre.' Y, luego, calándose unas gafas y observándome con un punto de desconfianza, añadió: 'Antes, le hablo de años, vivían allí unas cuantas familias. Ahora no sé si queda nadie. . .'" (169-70). Desiring to go to this place—to cross over into foreclosure—Adriana is regarded with distrust.

Once Adriana does enter the abject zone of Brumal, she discovers that that the discourse of Brumal is radically different than that of the center. Whereas the schoolteacher refused to use Adriana's paternal surname because she considered it to be foreign and insignificant, that name figures prominently in the Brumalian

church's book of records: "Sobre el altar mayor había un libro abierto [. . .]. Una serie de nombres, provistos de numerosas consonantes y escritos en temblorosas redondillas, oscilaron ante mis ojos. Algunos no me resultaron del todo desconocidos. Busqué el apellido de mi padre. Estaba marcado con tres aspas" (172-73). Exactly why the surname is specially marked is never explained; perhaps it is because Adriana has been mysteriously summoned to come to the town. Far from being insignificant or defective, in any case, this surname has importance in Brumal. Other written sources abound in the priest's attic, but their messages are blurred: "Intenté leer algunas inscripciones que, sin orden ni concierto, aparecían sobre algunos de los tarros. Abrí un cuaderno que yacía junto al infiernillo. La letra era temblorosa y el trazo del lápiz se confundía a ratos con las arrugas del macilento papel. 'Me llevaría tiempo,' pensé, 'mucho tiempo'" (177). These emblems of written discourse are mysterious, imprecise, and difficult to define, and at times they cede to something beyond the confines of language itself, just as Brumal itself proves to do.

In addition to the vast chasm between the absence of Brumal from the written documents of the center and its representation in the faded inscriptions and unmarked labels inside the attic, Adriana finds herself suspended between the oral renditions of Brumal in voices from the center and in others from the abject zone itself. About to lose herself in the written texts and culinary delights

—which are the most alluring texts of all—the woman pauses at the sound of voices:

Me ajusté el mandil y por un momento me pareció oír un lamento, una súplica, aquellos suspiros que acompañaron toda mi infancia . . . La miseria, recordé, la miseria de la que siempre hablaba Madre. Pero el pomo que sostenía en las manos pedía a gritos ser abierto y el infiernillo que acababa de encender me prometía apasionantes e inesperadas aventuras. ‘Brumal,’ dije en alta voz, ‘Brumal. . .’ Y un eco burlón me devolvió el sonido de mis palabras. ¿O era otra vez el incómodo recuerdo de una maestra irascible en un aciago primer día de clase?. . . No. No tenía más que acercar el oído al cristal de la ventana para darme cuenta de que yo conocía aquellas voces. Antes de la enfermedad que me postró en el lecho, antes que aprendiera a situar Brumal sobre un mapa de colores, yo había conocido aquellas voces. Niñas jugando [. . .]. (178)

In defiance of her mother’s rejection and suppression of Brumal, Adriana allies herself with the outside by uttering its name aloud. Her words release the voices of her childhood playmates, which remind her of all the pleasure and playfulness of their world.

The little girls' secret language that the narrator remembers expresses their exultation and epitomizes the different nature of Brumal:

Sí; no tenía más que pegar los ojos al cristal para verlas y oírlas:

Otnas Sen reiv se yo-h

Sotream sol ed a-íd

Y yo, de pronto conocía la respuesta. Sin ningún esfuerzo podía replicar:

Sabmut sal neib arre-ic

Ort ned nedeuq es e-uq

No necesitaba implorar *¿raguj siajed em? ¿raguj siajed em? . . .*

porque formaba parte de sus juegos. Me estaban esperando y me

llamaban: *Anairda. . . Anairda. . . Anairda. . .* (178-79)

When read in the traditional Western manner, from left to right, this language looks exotic and mysterious, its meaning unbounded. However, the code turns out to be Castilian written in reverse, with modifications in the division of syllables and in the capitalization. In Saussurian terms, where the sign consists of the signifier (the marks or symbols) plus the signified (the meaning), these changes in the order of the signifiers completely defamiliarize the signifieds and radically transform the signs. Read in reverse, the text is a common poem about Good Friday, but it takes on infinite possibilities of meaning when the expected order of the letters is altered. Thus, like “La ventana del jardín” in Mi hermana

Elba, “Los altillos de Brumal” underscores another of Saussure’s semiotic tenets: signs are arbitrary constructs. Any language, as an expression of a given logic and view of the world, is an arbitrary construct. If we only change the way we see our language, our logic, ourselves—in reverse, for instance, with a few twists added here and there—we can learn so much more about the hidden possibilities of what we include, and about the possibilities that abound in what we leave out. This defamiliarization heralds the fact that discourse is, finally, a creation that can be metamorphosed into something vastly “other.”

Despite what the children’s playful language would suggest, though, Brumal is not simply an inversion of the “normal” world. As Adriana studies the texts in the attic, she realizes that this place is not simply a mirror image, a binary opposite, but the effect of a radically different paradigm:

Alcancé un libro de las estanterías y lo abrí sobre mis rodillas. El corazón me palpitaba con fuerza. El altillo se había convertido en un arcón de recuerdos, el desván en el que se amontonan objetos entrañables y obsoletos, el álbum de fotos amarillentas decidido a enfrentarme a un pasado deseado y desconocido. Pero en el libro no hallé sonos infantiles, ni canciones de rueda, ni me bastó, para captar el sentido, invertir el orden de los párrafos o leer, como en nuestros juegos, de derecha a izquierda. Aquellas palabras no pertenecían a ningún idioma conocido. Y, sin embargo, resultaban

sonoras, poderosas. . . No me atreví a pronunciarlas en voz alta.

(179-80)

Adriana does not know how to interpret the discourse of this book, but she is reverently drawn to it.

She has observed other phenomena in Brumal that defy her expectations as well. In the church, when she tried to blow the dust off the book, nothing happened. And while the priest seems oblivious to his filthy home, he apologizes for the disorder in the impeccably kept attic. Does dirt, then, not respond in direct opposition to cleanliness in this realm? Also unexplained is the fact that the totally barren land of Brumal is used for the production of strawberry jam, which seems to contain no strawberries. Operating under such divergent rules, Brumal becomes a space that entices the protagonist in, to play with all the differences that abound there.

“Los altillos de Brumal,” then, is the story of Adriana’s realization that what she has left out of her self-concept in order to form herself is a vital part of who she is. The more Adriana writes, the more she comes to accept the differences of Brumal as an enriching part of her own identity. As in other Fernández Cubas stories, recovering one’s memory by way of telling one’s own story is a process of reconstructing the self, of changing and amplifying one’s perspective in order to achieve greater understanding of the self.

It is possible that the text we read is the narrative that Adriana constructs once she returns to her apartment after her adventure in Brumal and her month in the mental hospital. In this light, we can see Adriana's understanding and acceptance of Brumal and herself deepen as the narrative progresses. Adriana's opening lines illustrate her initial fixation with imposing order on the riotous events of her past: "No podría ordenar los principales acontecimientos de mi vida sin hacer antes una breve referencia a la enfermedad que me postró en el lecho [. . .]" (155). Gradually, however, the speaker increasingly acknowledges and accepts the memory lapses, the inconsistencies and the unexplainable events that pervade her narrative, culminating with her total lack of explanation of how she escaped from Brumal. Finally, Adriana realizes that "reason" will only impede her process of reconstructing her past, of reconstructing herself:

La necesidad de contrastar los escasos recuerdos con mi reciente experiencia, la urgencia de hallar una explicación lógica a una serie de hechos aparentemente inverosímiles, me llenaban de una fortaleza y un vigor insospechados. Pero. . . ¿se trataba realmente de hechos *inverosímiles*, de explicaciones *lógicas*? Los días de internamiento me habían aleccionado: no debía hacer partícipe a nadie de mis dudas, intuiciones o pesquisas. Por eso tenía que seguir escribiendo, anotando todo cuanto se me ocurriese, dejando volar la pluma a su placer, silenciando las voces de la razón; esa

rémora, censura, obstáculo, que se interponía de continuo entre mi vida y la verdad. . . (183-84)

Adriana has come to question the supremacy, the centrality, of the discourse that designates what is realistic and what is logical. Not only does she embrace the liberating possibilities of uncertainty and forgetfulness in her narrative, but she writes it deliriously unaware of the constraints of time, just as when she was in the attic of Brumal.

When interpreting this tale, it is impossible to ignore the familiar Fernández Cubas motif of the protagonist's inebriation and possible insanity, which provide a "rational" explanation for the mysterious and illogical events of the story.³¹ Nonetheless, the ramifications of all these stories exceed the literal level of such explanations: these complex narratives disclose the human tendency to dismiss, marginalize, and subjugate someone who perceives a reality that is radically different than the prevalent one. Adriana herself finally recognizes the two opposing sides of herself and condemns her mother for trying to exclude a vital part of her identity:

De poco te sirvió eliminar un sutil personaje de las historias de hadas y prodigios que me contabas de pequeña, porque ese personaje maldito estaba en mí, en tu querida y adorada Adriana, arrancada vilmente de su mundo, obligada a compartir tu mediocridad, privada de una de las caras de la vida a la que tenía

acceso por derecho propio. La cara más sabrosa, la incomparable.

Sin la cual no existiría gente miserable como tú [. . .]. (186)

Adriana's journey has taken her beyond the limits of her former identity, and she recognizes herself even more in what was foreclosed than in what was included in her discursive subjectivity.

If the discursive borders that define the center become blurred, then those that delineate the abject zone of Brumal are no less imprecise. In many ways, Brumal is a contradictory and uncertain place, appropriate for a town whose name evokes "fog." It appears to be a positive place, yet Adriana is literally imprisoned in the attic there, just as her mother felt metaphorically imprisoned there. The question arises, then, of whether enclosure is a purely negative phenomenon. While Adriana is within the closed attic walls, she discovers infinite passageways of knowledge and entertainment within the covers of the books and within the mysterious vials and vases, much like the young girls of "Mi hermana Elba" discovered invisible spaces of freedom within their convent. In some ways, Brumal evokes an enclosure that implodes to virtually infinite openness, reminiscent of Borges's "El aleph" and Fernández Cubas's own image of a trunk within the convent of "Mundo" in Con Agatha en Estambul.³² Yet it would be precipitous to construct Brumal as a utopic fountain of freedom; after all, the priest intended to confine Adriana there, against her will, as his housekeeper. To label Brumal as a site of "the feminine" is also problematic, for

it is the hometown of Adriana's father, while it is despised by Adriana's mother and ridiculed by Adriana's female schoolteacher and female classmates.

Obviously, one cannot draw a simplistic connection between the "biological female" and the "constructed feminine;" I would suggest that this story seeks to define something even beyond such categories as those.

Brumal may be seen as a place that is excluded from discursive categories since it defies the logic that defines those categories. It is neither "masculine" nor "feminine," neither completely open nor fully enclosed, neither order incarnate nor chaos unleashed, neither run solely by scientific laws nor ruled purely by instinct. Instead, Brumal may be seen as a combination of all these forces and, as a result, it is precisely none of them. More aptly still, Brumal is a construction of a logic, or illogic, that reaches beyond simple binary definitions. This may be why Adriana's mother associated it with "misery": it prohibited her from wielding power according to the only rules—binary rules—that she knew.

Above all, "Los altillos de Brumal" illustrates that the borders of identity are never completely defined, but always drawn and redrawn, including and excluding, constructing the subject only in relation to what she or he or it cannot—or will not—comprehend. This zone of the foreclosed and forbidden must be explored as a space of empowerment:

The task is to refigure this necessary "outside" as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process

of being overcome. But of equal importance is the preservation of the outside, the site where discourse meets its limits, where the opacity of what is not included in a given regime of truth acts as a disruptive site of linguistic impropriety and unrepresentability, illuminating the violent and contingent boundaries of that normative regime precisely through the inability of that regime to represent that which might pose a fundamental threat to its continuity. (Bodies 53)

It is as vital to preserve the outside as a challenge to discursive constructs, then, as it is to question what unjust exclusions are banished there and what possibilities are harbored there. A story about coming to understand the exclusions that constitute one's own identity, "Los altillos de Brumal" makes evident that, while the object may well be the subject's undoing, without it the subject could not exist at all.

"La noche de Jezabel":

"La noche de Jezabel," as the final story of Los altillos de Brumal, culminates the work's exploration of the formation and mediation of gender through discursive practices. Already I have demonstrated how, in Fernández Cubas's work, binomial categories of gender are deconstructed by the revelation that the masculine and the feminine are not mutually exclusive

and that both operate by excluding other bodies who do not perform according to the accepted discursive model. In “El reloj de Bagdad,” “En el hemisferio sur,” and “Los altillos de Brumal,” the characters who alter the limitations of their gendered subjectivity do so by interpreting the discourse of their gender differently than what regulatory norms would impose. This act of interpretation is highlighted as the key to agency in “La noche de Jezabel.”

If “agency” can be seen as the ability to maneuver among the constraints of the socio-political and cultural norms that construct humans, it does not mean overcoming or escaping the system of discursive control within which all operate. On the contrary, as Butler points out, individuals come into being as “subjects” only when they come into existence in the discursive paradigm; subjects cannot exist outside of discourse and, correspondingly, agency can occur only within the discursive system:

In this sense, the agency denoted by the performativity of ‘sex’ will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes. The paradox of subjectivation (*assujétissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of

agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power. (15)

So the law issues a performative, a call for compliance by obedient subjects.

If roles are pre-written by discourse, by a system that demands to be repeated and propagated in that iteration, then the hope for agency lies in performing roles to question the authority and supremacy of that discourse, and in encouraging others over time to do likewise: "It is this constitutive failure of the performative, this slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect, which provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience" (122). "A consequential disobedience," "gender trouble," "making other bodies matter," all are manifestations of agency that depend on how individuals perform their roles within the constraints of the discourse that ordained them. This practice of agency is Butler's ultimate goal and, in many ways, Fernández Cubas's as well.

The key to this project, which is accentuated in "La noche de Jezabel," is found in the interpretation of discourse, with a play on the dual meaning of "interpretation" as *reading* and as *performance*. If presented with a given discourse that they must then interpret--whose dictates they must read or understand, and then enact--the manner in which subjects interpret it determines whether they simply comply with and conform to the proffered

text presented to us, or whether they appropriate it in their performance for their own ends. "La noche de Jezabel" displays the way discourse, specifically narrative discourse, is constructed and the way it is repeated and thus consolidated as true and right. Centering on a stormy winter evening when a group of people gathers to tell scary stories around the fire, the tale highlights the narrative webs spun to encircle various characters in their discursive limits, particularly the limits that define gender. All the narrations are subsumed into the discourse of the main narrator, a nameless woman who repeats other characters' tales along with her own interpretation of their discourse. Finally, although her narrative discourse--the text we read--follows the dictates of the discourse of a ghost story, it interprets and enacts the script slightly differently, complying with and yet defying the discourses of gender and genre.

The discourse of gender emerges in the opening tale that the narrator relates. She reiterates the true story that her best friend and lover, an older doctor named Arganza, loves to tell, while she comments on the deletions that Arganza has made from the tale over the years. When Arganza had just graduated, after partying his way through medical school, he was called by a guard in the middle of the night. Hoping that the case would prove to be nothing, or that the patient would have already died, the poorly trained doctor goes to the scene and finds a young man lifeless on the ground. After

checking his pulse and eyes, the neophyte pronounces the man dead and goes for a walk.

Ten minutes later, the doctor returns to find that the body has disappeared and that the trembling guards, who also had briefly left the scene, do not know what happened. They discover a track of blood, however, that leads them to the closed door of the mayor's house. The cadaver lies on the threshold, exactly as before, except that now it wears an expensive jacket and smells of an intense, sweet perfume. This corpse is literally a body excluded from the center (the mayor's house), a dead body that the guards and the doctor do not know how to explain. Unable to interpret what lies on the outside, and eager to conceal their delinquency from their assigned duty that evening, the men report the second death, outside the mayor's house, as the original one. The youth's status as a reject is further inscribed when, because of his sin of suicide, he is buried outside the holy cemetery of the church--representative of the zone of the abject who define, by contrast, the periphery of Christianity. Upon his grave appear scattered rose petals, which the townspeople decide are from the old mayor's lovely young wife, whom they believe to be the lover of the youth (despite the fact that many of the graves are adorned with rose petals).

As the townspeople comment on what happened, basing their interpretation on a version of events that was radically altered in the first

place by the doctor and the guards, they magnify the story into the discourse of the fallen woman who tries to corrupt man. The narrating voice takes a sarcastic view of the people's eagerness to impose such a paradigm even in defiance of other logical explanations:

¿por qué no pensar en una ráfaga de viento capaz de transportar, por encima del muro de cementerio, frágiles pétalos de rosa procedentes de cualquiera de las tumbas de los afortunados que habían recibido cristiana sepultura? Pero los ánimos se hallaban demasiado enardecidos para rendirse ante una explicación tan simple, y la imagen de la virtuosa veinteañera, a quien, hasta hacía muy poco, todos compadecían, fue cobrando con irremisible rapidez los rasgos de una bíblica adúltera, de una castiza malcasada, de una perversa devoradora de hombres a los que seducía con los encantos de su cuerpo para abandonarlos tras saciar sus inconfesables apetitos. (194)

The woman herself, who is never seen nor heard directly in the story, receives her characterization from the discursive construction of others in the tale. That characterization expands as the town re-constructs her as the violator of several discursive codes: as a "bíblica adúltera," she sins against the mores of Christian fidelity; as a "castiza malcasada," she breaches

structures of class and race, and as a “*perversa devoradora de hombres*,” she violates the proprieties of gender.

Such multiple identities cannot be completely separated. On the contrary, as Butler notes, they intermingle with and inform one another: “these identifications are invariably imbricated in one another, the vehicle for one another: a gender identification can be made in order to repudiate or participate in a race identification; what counts as ‘ethnicity’ frames and eroticizes sexuality, or can itself be a sexual marking” (*Bodies* 116). Of course, the danger of the “*perversa devoradora de hombres*” is that, by violating the gender construction of the passive woman, she implicitly threatens every category of identity that is based on binary opposition, whether it be race, class, religion or innumerable others. That is to say, by violating the polarity of masculine/feminine, the devourer menaces the sanctity of all binary oppositions. Whereas the feminine permeates the woman’s identities of “*adúltera*” and “*castiza*,” the perversity of the feminine in the Fernández Cubas passage is precisely that it refuses to obey any boundary it encounters. By reversing the presupposition of cause-effect, a tactic that typifies many insights of Butler as well as Michel Foucault, we might see that the specter of the perverse devourer of men may be, then, not the catalyst for the construction of borders that confine and control women,

but a figment contrived after-the-fact to justify those borders that were drawn long ago.

It is unclear whether the critical commentary in the passage on the “alcaldesa” comes from Arganza’s voice or the main narrator’s that overlays it, although one suspects that it is the latter since it is she who is critical of all she observes. Here the narrating voice condemns the people’s eagerness to construct the mayor’s wife as the evil seductress, a ghostly *Sucubus* figure who takes what she wants from men. The discourse that subjugates the mayor’s wife is not original, for it clearly draws from various mythologies, but here it applies to the wife for the first time, and obliterates the townspeople’s prior construction--no less discursive--of her as a virtuous innocent.

The evidence that confirmed the “truth” of the woman’s malevolence for the townspeople humorously underlines that the creation and propagation of this discursive subject position is a blind act:

El día, en fin, en que una vieja, parapetada tras sus gruesas gafas de carey, aseguró haber distinguido, en la noche sin luna, la figura de una mujer envuelta en una capa negra merodeando por las cercanías del camposanto, todos, hasta los más prudentes, identificaron aquella loca fantasía con los remordimientos de la malmaridada, negaron a los vientos la

capacidad de manifestarse por ráfagas y, con el plácet del párroco, sufragaron una serie de misas por el alma del desdichado, con la firme convicción de que, en el umbral de la muerte, la fe había retornado a su espíritu afligido consiguiendo pronunciar--aunque sólo fuera con el corazón--el Dulce Nombre de Jesús. (194)

This passage is an entertaining example of what Bakhtin calls the effect of “double-voicing” from indirect discourse. By recounting indirectly the people’s words, and Arganza’s words, but subjugating their voices to her own sarcastic perspective, the main narrator gives a humorous and yet caustic interpretation of their fabrications of women. Moreover, the phrase “el Dulce Nombre de Jesús” evokes the ironic intonation of the chorus of women at the end of García Lorca’s Bodas de sangre (“Dulces clavos, dulce cruz, dulce nombre de Jesús” [122]), which criticizes the glorification of suffering and death in society. The main narrator’s irony in the Fernández Cubas passage also accentuates the possibility that the people embrace the dead youth into the zone of Christian acceptability only as a ploy in their expulsion of the mayor’s wife to the outside: their archetypal gender construction persecutes the mayor’s wife so much that she flees the town.

The narrator’s criticism of Arganza becomes direct when she includes in her version the details that her friend chooses to leave out of his. She adds

that the doctor, too, left the town on the same train as the mayor's wife, but was snubbed disdainfully by that lady when he tried to kiss her hand.

Reeling from this rejection, all Arganza can think of is his erroneous and ill-fated pronouncement of death when he first saw the young man's body. Yet Arganza no longer recounts his guilt-ridden encounter on the train, for he renders his discourse to serve his own ends:

Su pequeña historia había experimentado, con el tiempo, ciertas y significativas variaciones, de las que la omisión del encuentro final en el tren no era más que una previsible consecuencia. Mi amigo sabía dónde marcar el acento, cómo enfatizar, cuándo debía detenerse, encender la pipa y tomarse un respiro. Y así, la figura de aquel joven, inexperto y asustado médico iba adquiriendo, día a día, mayor juventud, inexperiencia y miedo [. . .]; y la desgraciada e indefensa alcaldesa, cuya hermosura se acrecentaba por momentos, terminaba erigiéndose en la víctima-protagonista de odios ancestrales, envidias soterradas y latentes anhelos de pasionales y escandalosos acontecimientos. Arganza había conseguido arrinconar lo inexplicable en favor de un simple, común y cotidiano drama rural. (195-96)

Needing to project himself as the guileless witness of a scandal, instead of as a bumbler and the object of a persecuted woman's disdain, Arganza converts

a fascinating story about the prohibited outside into a boring repetition of an old discursive code of literature that denigrates woman and, consequently, man. The main narrator's account of Arganza's tale shows the process by which a discourse is constructed and reified as true and originary. Moreover, by relegating his story to her own interpreting voice, the narrator illustrates the power of repeating a discourse in order to alter the ends for which it was originally intended.

The power of "interpreting" by performing a part as well as by analyzing a script comes into play as other characters' stories are introduced into the overall narrative text. When the narrator and Arganza bump into Jezabel, a highschool friend of the main narrator's, the latter presumptuously invites herself and her cousin to the narrator's dilapidated beach house to tell stories. The designated evening turns out to be a violently stormy one, and as the guests arrive, the narrator is forced to find them dry clothes to wear. This changing of costumes invites the metaphor of a performance, an idea that occurs to the narrator herself: "Constaté que existía más de un pequeño error en la precipitada elección de vestuario" (202). The "unsuitable" attire of the cast accentuates that these characters are not quite what the narrator expected.

As the character of each guest unfolds, the narrator increasingly questions her own role in the performance. The evening's events seem

dominated by the others: Arganza starts it off with his sole story and, during the rest of the “show” he becomes an admirer of Jezabel’s wiles; Mortimer, a fastidious Englishman invited by Arganza, tells the story of how, when he was a small boy, his mother told him how to recognize ghosts on first sight; the ghostly pale young man invited by Jezabel bores them all with a pedantic, rational explanation of seemingly inexplicable phenomena; and Laura, whom the narrator assumes to be Jezabel’s cousin, breaks the somber mood by greeting Arganza’s and every other tragic and ghostly tale with boisterous laughter. Since the storm has knocked out the phone lines and the lights, and the stove has suddenly broken, the narrator feels she cannot perform her expected role of hostess: “La velada estaba transcurriendo de acuerdo con mis primeras previsiones. Arganza y Jezabel. O Jezabel y Arganza. Me pregunté por mi verdadero papel en aquella cena sin cena en la que los invitados se permitían prescindir olímpicamente de la figura del anfitrión” (204). Indeed, the narrator feels she has no role at all in this play and that, to all appearances, Jezabel is running the show.

As indicated by the story’s title, Jezabel attempts to establish herself as the center of attention on this night; to do so, she slips into the role of seductress. She thus corresponds to the legend of her biblical namesake, the Israeli queen of Phoenician origin who was associated with seducing the Israelis away from their God with witchcraft; in essence, Queen Jezabel was

the “other” who menaced man and God. While, on a personal level, Fernández Cubas’s Jezabel plots to seduce Arganza (who seems to fall easily to her charms), she also performs as Scheherezade, seducing the rest of the audience with her story-telling powers. The only tale that truly captivates everyone’s interest, Jezabel’s story is about her great-grandfather, a painter who revels in the ecstasy of capturing his wife’s stunning beauty on canvas. In the supreme moment when he finishes the painting and pronounces it to be life itself, he turns to his beloved wife and finds that she is dead. The narrator wryly observes that Jezabel’s detailed description of her great-grandmother underscores the seductress’ own remarkable beauty:

Escuché una pormenorizada relación acerca de ojos color violeta, cabellos azabache, pómulos prominentes y labios delicados y sensuales. Bajé la vista. Las coincidencias entre la desaparecida dama y la presente Jezabel se me antojaron demasiado precisas para achacarlas al azar o a los caprichos de las leyes genéticas. Cuando terminó con su descripción, supe que la totalidad del auditorio se hallaba profundamente convencido de la radiante belleza de la bisabuela, pero, sobre todo, de los fascinante atributos físicos de su digna descendiente. (203)

Weaving her words like a Spanish Scheherezade, Jezabel beguiles her listeners into believing that the ideal discursive construct of beauty is made manifest before them in her own persona.

Jezabel's "performance" takes on new meaning when considered in light of Judith Butler's analysis. For Butler, performativity is never a unique occurrence, but instead an ongoing repetition of a discursive model: "Performativity is thus not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (Bodies 12). Jezabel's narrative seduction is indeed a repetition of a very specific discourse, but the main narrator is the only one who recognizes it as such: "Una bonita historia. Edgar Allan Poe la tituló, hace más de cien años, 'El retrato oval'" (204).³³ In her co-optation and masquerade of Poe's story as her own original creation, Jezabel highlights the fact that discursive repetition is never completely original. Butler holds that discourse derives its authority from the concealment of itself as the reproduction of a discursive norm. Counterpoised to speech act theory's notion of a performative as "that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (13), performativity is thus unmasked and reformulated as the citation of a norm instead of an original event. Far from being inceptive, performativity cites, repeats, and refers to a discourse in order to

derive its authority.³⁴ At best, then, Jezebel only functions as a palimpsest, superimposing her rendition over the discursive model whose lines direct her performance.

It is within the seemingly repressive paradigm of performance as citationality, however, that Bodies that Matter and “La noche de Jezebel” trace out the path of agency. Butler ponders the potential of performance in this guise: “What would it mean to ‘cite’ the law to produce it differently, to ‘cite’ the law in order to reiterate and coopt its power, to expose the heterosexual matrix and to displace the effect of its necessity?” (15). Jezebel’s story highlights the fact that “originality,” if it exists at all, occurs only to the extent that one reiterates discursive norms differently. The stories of all the characters are just variations on a theme, or on a discourse--an Edgar Allan Poe story (Jezebel’s appropriation), a “drama rural” (Arganza’s tale), a metaphysical treatise (the pale young man’s lecture), or a ghost story (Mortimer’s account). “La noche de Jezebel” itself includes all the elements of a good ghost story: a dark and stormy night, the ominous setting of a remote, dilapidated house, mysterious events (the black-out could be “explained” by the storm, but the broken stove that spontaneously starts working again at the end of the evening is certainly enigmatic), and, most importantly, the ghost itself--not the pale young man, as the narrator supposes at one point, but Laura.

It turns out that Laura is not any relation to Jezabel, who had disdainfully assumed that the obnoxious woman was the narrator's cleaning lady. Laura is the first to leave the party, but the total silence of her unseen departure alarms the guests. Everyone troops out to the porch to search for her, but they only find the empty kimono she had worn and a mysterious inscription:

Algo, que en un principio creí un pájaro nocturno, acababa de batir contra los cristales de una ventana. [. . .] [P]udimos observar una inscripción garabateada sobre las enfangadas baldosas del porche: 'GRACIAS POR TAN MAGNIFICA NOCHE. NUNCA LA OLVIDARE.' Una racha de viento y arena sepultó, en un abrir y cerrar de ojos, las primeras y últimas palabras. Por unos instantes, en los que el tiempo parecía haberse detenido, sólo quedó NUNCA. (220)

The wind, which in Arganza's story heightened the mystery of the dead youth's status in relation to the "alcaldesa," now intensifies the enigma of Laura's ghostly presence by forever sweeping her words into the domain of erasure, of nonexistence. At the end of the story, after the narrator explains what happens to each of the characters except Laura, whom she never sees or hears of again, the narrator decides to convince herself that the events of that evening never happened at all. She especially hopes to obliterate the

memory of the letters disappearing into the air: “[. . .] nunca, en fin, asistí a la lenta desaparición de las cinco letras que configuran la palabra NUNCA” (222).

All the stories told that evening rely on and “cite” a discursive norm for their authority, as does “La noche de Jezabel” itself. Mortimer’s tale might be seen as an example of the marvelous, wherein supernatural beings are accepted as playing a role. The pale young man’s discourse might be conceived of as the uncanny, for he explains how seemingly mysterious happenings such as the broken stove and telephone are simply natural, logical occurrences. Tzvetan Todorov distinguishes the genres of the marvelous and the uncanny from the fantastic in this way:

The fantastic, we have seen, lasts only as long as a certain hesitation: a hesitation common to reader and character, who must decide whether or not what they perceive derives from ‘reality’ as it exists in the common opinion. At the story’s end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be

entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous. (41)

As several critics have noted, “La noche de Jezabel” itself embraces the genre of the fantastic, for readers cannot really be sure if the occurrences were supernatural or not.³⁵ By replicating the genre of the fantastic, then, “La noche de Jezabel,” too, cites a discursive norm for its authority. In contrast to the other discourses cited in this text, however, “La noche de Jezabel” questions the very norms it repeats.

Fernández Cubas’s tale also reiterates the discourse of a ghost story, but Laura hardly complies with Mortimer’s or any other conventional constructions of a ghost. Interestingly, Mortimer’s story is the only one that the narrator directly quotes at length; one might say that she “cites” his discourse directly in order “cite” it, or repeat it, differently. Mortimer’s constructs of ghosts are divided between masculine and feminine genders, both of which incarnate archetypal characterizations:

--[Se caracterizan por] Una palidez excesiva que no puede provenir de causas naturales y una expresión en la mirada, si me permiten la ocurrencia, de tristeza *infinita*. . . Suelen mostrar una preferencia excluyente por dos colores, el blanco y el negro, con cierta ventaja a favor de este último. Si la aparición, en cuestión, es masculina, vestirá seguramente de

negro, un traje de buen corte aunque un tanto pasado de moda.

Si la aparición es mujer, tenemos muchas probabilidades de encontrarnos frente a un traje vaporoso, un tejido liviano de color blanco, que se agite con el viento y deje entrever, discretamente, los encantos de un cuerpo del que ya no queda constancia. He dicho ‘muchas probabilidades.’ Lo habitual es que las aparecidas gusten también del negro, de la oscuridad que acentúa su indescriptible palidez y las hace, a decir algunos, misteriosamente bellas. (210-11)

Laura breaks this mold of a ghost, for she is chubby instead of sensual, rosy-pink instead of pallid-white, raucous instead of mournful, ordinary-looking instead of ethereal. She even breaches the dress-code: instead of enveloping her in vaporous and revealing billows of white or black, Laura’s choice of a colorful kimono precludes associations with binary oppositions of black and white, even as its layers evoke depth and concealed mystery rather than transparency.

The motif of seduction provides central ground for transgression in “La noche de Jezabel.” Mortimer depicts the female ghost as elusively seductive, always tempting the defilement of the boundary between life and death despite the fact that consummation would only bring disillusionment. Mortimer’s description of this seductress’ “encantos de un cuerpo del que ya

no queda constancia" evoke the same archetypal connotations as the "perversa devoradora de hombres a los que seducía con los encantos de su cuerpo para abandonarlos tras saciar sus inconfesables apetitos" (194) in Arganza's story. As for Laura's physical "encantos," her companions do indeed glimpse her flesh through the gaps of her borrowed and ill-fitting kimono, but instead of being aroused, they are disgusted: "El kimono acababa de abrirsele y dejaba al descubierto un par de muslos orondos y sonrosados. Me pareció que el joven de cera y Jezabel intercambiaban una breve mirada de repulsa" (207). Notably, it is both man and woman who are repulsed--and thus might be attracted--by this ghost. As a failed physical seductress, Laura inadvertently demonstrates that sexuality is no respecter of gender.

Even as Jezabel used both physical and narrative powers to spin her seductive web, Laura, too, may be seen on both levels as a would-be seductress. Essentially, Laura is the physically non-seductive woman who then seduces everyone into living and believing a ghost story, if only for a while. In doing so, she transforms each character--though only momentarily--into his or her own opposite. After seeing the inscription on the porch disappear, the dry, aged Mortimer, whom the narrator earlier could not imagine as a child who saw a ghost, "temblaba como una hoja y había adquirido el aspecto de un niño asustado" (220). The pasty-white young

man, too, seems more human: “Un saludable rubor campesino había teñido de púrpura las lívidas mejillas del joven de mirada profunda” (220). The ravishing Jezabel, intent on vanquishing the narrator in any way possible, suddenly loses some of her strength and beauty: “Jezabel, súbitamente demacrada, se apoyó en mi hombro” (220-21). And the narrator herself, who had earlier been spooked by the shadows on the wall, now perceives in them a friendlier apparition: “Me fijé en las sombras oscilantes de la pared y, por un extraño efecto que no me detuve en analizar, me pareció como si mi amiga y yo peináramos trenzas y ambas nos halláramos inclinadas sobre un pupitre en una de las largas y lejanas tardes de estudio” (221). The seductive anomaly of Laura as a ghost has lulled them all and tempered the boundaries that characterize them.

In function, then, if not in appearance, Laura complies with the discourse of the seductress. Indeed, her physique and her manner of performing her role are the very elements that undermine the validity of this discourse of woman, even as she iterates it. Laura’s performance as a different kind of seductress, and as a different kind of ghost, radically alters the script and encourages a different interpretation of seduction. As Butler argues, we must interpret the discourses that shape us alternatively, in order to alter our own construction:

[P]recisely because such terms have been produced and constrained within such regimes, they ought to be repeated in directions that reverse and displace their originating aims [. . .]. Occupied by such terms and yet occupying them oneself risks a complicity, a repetition, a relapse into injury, but it is also the occasion to work the mobilizing power of injury, of an interpellation one never chose. (Bodies 123)

Thus Laura serves as a foil for the discourse of seduction represented by Jezabel and described by Arganza and Mortimer. Laura envelops herself in that discourse, much as she dons the narrator's kimono; the ways in which both coverings fit poorly serve to question their suitability. In the end, Laura disappears, leaving behind only the kimono and the discourse she inscribes on the ground. Although her words finally disappear, one can't help but suspect that they leave their mark on the narrator, just as they seduce readers--as acting subjects--into interpreting discourse differently.

Conclusions/Exclusions:

These readings of Los altillos de Brumal, while designed to be cohesive, do not pretend to stand as the only viable interpretation of Fernández Cubas's texts. In some cases, my arguments cite and respond to the analyses of critics who have preceded me; their discourse has been

invaluable to the definition and interrogation of my own ideas on gender representation in Fernández Cubas in particular, and on subjectivity and difference in general. In this way, my reading is one more repetition with a difference of the discourse of literary criticism. Hopefully, this process will continue long after my ink has blurred with the wrinkles on the page, as one more text to be interpreted in an archival attic like Brumal.

As I ponder my analyses of the stories of this collection, I cannot help but be haunted by the exclusions I have made, knowingly or not, in order to construct a conclusive argument. Part of me wonders, for instance, if Clara's death at the end of "En el hemisferio sur" might be interpreted as a suicidal renunciation of her efforts to defy the narrator and others who define woman as an inferior reflection of man. When I think of "Los atillos de Brumal," I wonder if Adriana simply chooses to embrace the outside (Brumal) and reject the center completely; if so, she would not be interrogating borders that separate and denigrate people, but simply reifying those borders, albeit redefining Brumal as the center in her new paradigm. Even if this were so, I would argue that the lessons of discursive formation and exclusion are the same. If Fernández Cubas's texts teach us anything, it is to question the terms of the borders that define our construction; for only by performing our subjectivity--in the sense of interpreting it while repeating it--can we hope to reform the roles that dictate who we are to be.

As “La noche de Jezabel” demonstrated, the subjective limitations that inform gender roles invariably mark the contours of other discourses as well. The next chapter examines the way Fernández Cubas re-situates the centers of literary and historical depictions of subjectivity in her two novels, El año de Gracia and El columpio, in order to re-cite those orthodox discourses differently.

Re-Citing and Re-Siting the Story of the Subject

in El año de Gracia and El columpio

The concept of the abject or excluded other, which I examined as the masquerade of the construct of gender in chapter 2, also underlies historical and literary constructions of political power relations. Fernández Cubas's two novels, El año de Gracia (1985) and El columpio (1995), repeat discourses of history and canonical Western literature to question their representation of the power relations of self/other and center/periphery. Reciting a discourse ostensibly serves to reify it as authoritative and originary. Yet, as Judith Butler argues, repetition also haunts such claims to unique difference with multiple manifestations of "the same." With her two novels, Fernández Cubas underscores and furthers this process: she subverts and interrogates the original, inviolate discourses of history and Western literature by significantly altering them in her repetition. In doing so, the author foregrounds the notion that history and literature are constructed according to a given perspective, the perspective of the powerful. As she re-cites a given history--a mother's account of her life in El Columpio--and a given story--the tale of Robinson Crusoe in El año de Gracia--Fernández Cubas re-sites the perspective from which those stories are told in order to unveil them as constructs that are erected for the propagation of power.

El año de Gracia:

El año de Gracia is the first-person account of Daniel, a Spaniard who abandons seminary life and his study of dead languages at the age of twenty-four when his father's death seems to dissolve the target of his pious opposition. Then Daniel's older sister, Gracia, grants him a year of financial freedom--a year of "grace"--to travel and explore life as he sees fit. The protagonist embarks on his adventures in Paris, where he becomes involved with Yasmine, a photographer who manages to communicate in many languages without speaking any of them well. Afraid that he is missing out on life, Daniel abandons Yasmine to go to Saint-Malo, where he sets sail on a boat called "Providence" with Tío Jean, a captain he meets at the wharf, and Naguib, Tío Jean's surly and sinister boat hand. Eventually Daniel suspects that the two men accepted him not for his questionable skills as a mariner but as a hostage to blackmail Gracia for money. During a frightful storm, Daniel's two captors argue and Naguib "falls overboard," according to Tío Jean.

Soon the ship wrecks and Daniel finds himself washed up on a barbed wire-enclosed island that is deserted except for the presence of a primitive old shepherd, Grock, and some extremely violent sheep, all of whom are mysteriously covered with infected pustules. Since Grock nurses him through a raging fever and teaches him how to survive on the island, Daniel

must submit to learn the shepherd's language and obey his orders. One evening, the protagonist spies a Bible in the man's hovel and begins to read it out loud. Enthralled by Daniel's power of language, Grock acquiesces to Daniel's demands for more freedom on the island in exchange for weekly sessions when Daniel intones the Scriptures for him. Daniel is highly dependent on Grock's knowledge of the island, until the ever-present fog dissipates and he sees that the shepherd deceived him as to the size and complexity of the land. The newly empowered protagonist also discovers, floating in the waves by the beach, a sign that warns of contamination on the "Island of Gruinard."

One day, a plane arrives with scientists who drop off liquor for the shepherd, take Daniel's picture and interrogate him as to his presence there. Leaving behind medicine to prevent Daniel's contamination and warning him to steer clear of the old shepherd, the scientists promise to return in a week to rescue him after the medicine has taken effect. The protagonist marks his gratitude to Grock on their last evening together by giving the old man Tío Jean's red jacket, which Daniel had rescued from the sinking ship and worn ever since. On the appointed day, Grock tries to prevent his only friend's departure by hitting him with the huge Bible, and then running onto the beach to divert the plane. Seeing the figure in the red coat, the men shoot and kill him. Then, descending from the plane, they search for the shepherd.

When Daniel finally reveals himself, dressed in Grock's sheepskins, they believe him to be the shepherd and, assured that the subject of their study of the effects of chemical waste on humans remains intact, they abandon him again.

Later, a group of ecologists arrives in secret to document the chemical waste and they return Daniel to civilization as proof of the island's contamination. Since they believe Daniel's manuscript about his experiences to be tainted as well, they burn it but supply him with a photocopy of the document. Eventually, Daniel meets a woman named Gruda McEnrich, who bothers him because she laughs at everything, but he marries her anyway. However, in order to fall into peaceful sleep at night Daniel often ponders his experiences on the island, which he is loathe to share with anyone.

Of all of Fernández Cubas's texts, El año de Gracia has elicited the most response from literary critics thus far. Catherine Bellver studies Fernández Cubas's re-writing of the travel account as a rite of initiation in this novel. In addition, she examines the literary intertexts, which Fernández Cubas uses as metafictional targets of parody. Concha Alborg also points to the importance of the metafictional elements, and sees this novel as a return to the typical happy ending of the nineteenth-century sentimental novel. In addition, John B. Margenot III draws on intertextuality as a fundamental technique of parody and self-consciousness in El año de Gracia. Casting the

metafictional elements in a different light, Phyllis Zatlin studies the novel as part of the genre of the fantastic. In another article, Zatlin notes the work's contribution to Spanish literature by women in its defamiliarization of the intertext of the male quest. Julie Gleue also points to the various literary models that El año de Gracia draws on and subverts, while studying the tension of the epistemological and ontological perspectives in the novel. Robert Spires views the novel as a process of *desaprendizaje* that unravels the way Western logic shapes identity. Moreover, in his Post-Totalitarian Spanish Fiction, Spires situates the work as a fundamental text of post-Franco literature for its exploration of the impact of knowledge on the formation of the gendered human subject. These critics highlight key techniques that Fernández Cubas employs--particularly those of intertextuality and metafiction--in order to subvert the literary tradition that has shaped the Western subject. I take their analyses a step farther by examining Fernández Cubas's use of these and other tactics in her representation of colonial power as a cornerstone of Spanish subjectivity.

The political dialectics of self/other found in the European's discovery and conquest of an unknown island in this novel evoke Robinson Crusoe, a fundamental literary expression of Western imperialism, and echo the chronicles of the *conquistadores* of the "New World." Moreover, with this intertextuality El año de Gracia presents a postcolonial theme in its story of a

Spaniard shipwrecked on an island off the British coast. While El año de Gracia clearly foregrounds Robinson Crusoe as its model text, it also problematizes the binary relationships of power and polarization that underlie the foundational texts of Western subjectivity. The author's first novel examines the ramifications of power in a context different from Mi hermana Elba, which features power as constantly mediated between individuals in their negotiation of identity, or from Los altillos de Brumal, which posits gender as the performance of a discourse invested with power. Combining the personal with the political, El año de Gracia underlines the way master texts discursively inscribe the powerful as the center of subjectivity in the cultural consciousness.

In Fernández Cubas's literary depiction of the European subject, however, she situates him--and he is male, like his canonical predecessor--on the margins of power in order to view the dynamic from a different angle. Observing that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (89), Edward Said asserts that Europe has traditionally dominated the other in order to aggrandize itself: "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (89). Here the "Orient" may be extended to encompass the various empires of Western nations. If in "Orientalism" the West designates

the other as a mirror of the self--a technique that has arguably shaped the novelistic Subject of the West since Robinson Crusoe--then Fernández Cubas's first novel subverts this paradigm of the Western novel. Her European castaway is at first overpowered by the other and then, in his struggle for control, comes to appreciate and learn from the qualities of the other instead of subsuming them beneath his personal dominance.

The complexity of Fernández Cubas's subversion of colonial power in literature materializes when examined from a postcolonial perspective. Such an approach considers how the imperial center has marginalized the other and how that other appropriates the center's language and culture in order to cultivate its own identity and interests under the guise of colonial domination. Homi K. Bhabha has studied this process in terms of *hybridization*, which "reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority and enables a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention" ("Signs" 154). Hybridization hinges on the ambivalence of colonial power that establishes itself as originary and yet is only "confirmed" as such when it is viewed retrospectively from the margins of empire, where the image of the central subject has been repeated and proliferated. Such repetition is the only means of securing colonial power, yet at the same time it discloses the arbitrary nature of that power as origin.

Bhabha holds that the power of colonial discourse disavows the ambivalent character of its own foundation. As the center's discourse reproduces itself in different (colonial) contexts, it transmutes into something that is the same yet which is discriminated against for being notably other:

Produced through the strategy of disavowal, the reference of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different*—a mutation, a hybrid. (“Signs” 153)

The hybrid, then, is the re-citing of the colonizing discourse at the site of the colonized, which necessarily imposes a new perspective and an “other” interpretation of that discourse. As Bhabha stresses, hybridity “is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures” (“Signs” 156), but instead intensifies and propagates their tension.

Hybridization permeates El año de Gracia, for the entire novel can be seen as the repetition of colonial discourse that is so necessary to the institution of colonial authority and power. Part of Bhabha's postcolonial theorization poses colonial mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (“Of Mimicry” 86). Thus, while mimicry applies to the colonized who

repeats the image of the colonizer almost completely, it also encompasses the never total resemblance to that origin that can harbor a mockery of the origin's constructed and imposed norms. Mimicry as mockery questions the authority of colonial discourse by stressing the *difference* which that discourse prohibits:

Mimicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire. It is the process of the fixation of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse, and therefore necessarily raises the question of the *authorization* of colonial representations. ("Of Mimicry" 90)

By manipulating colonial language and repeating the image of the colonial origin from the contextualized perspective of the dominated other, Fernández Cubas's text supersedes the boundaries of colonial discourse and challenges the validity of the borders themselves, as well as the hierarchies they impose.

The motif of the repetition and subversion of an authoritative origin emerges most prominently in El año de Gracia with the referent of Robinson Crusoe,³⁶ an intertext whose pattern Fernández Cubas reverses. As Catherine Bellver observes, "To subvert the validity of literary models, the author patterns her novel on the underlying structure of the very stories and

archetypes she is trying to debunk" ("Robinson Crusoe Revisited" 107).

While the Spanish protagonist is shipwrecked on a virtually deserted island, instead of the founder and ruler of his domain, he figures as the subservient "Friday," attending Grock's every whim:

Grock parecía decidido a extraer la mayor utilidad de mi compañía, a encomendarme tarea tras tarea, aunque nada necesitara, fuera del placer de sentirse obedecido. Le seguí a distancia, de mala gana. Aquel viejo simple no se parecía en nada al fiel Viernes de la única novela que, ironías de la vida, me había olvidado de evocar ante la visión del "Providence" en aquel día, en Saint-Malo [. . .]. (124)

For Fernández Cubas's *Crusoe*, "Providence" is not what delivers him from the island, but the vehicle that carries him to it. The name of the port from which the boat sets sail only increases this irony. The ex-seminary student, who has spent most of his life mired in books, expects his life to mirror the fanciful tales he has read. Yet he resists the idea that this experience could be a macabre version of the classic story: "Pero en la segunda mitad del siglo veinte, en Europa, no quedaba espacio para tierras ignotas, islas misteriosas o anacrónicas aventuras robinsonianas" (72-73). Not only does Daniel fail miserably to live up to the standards of those literary constructs, his own

adventures digress markedly from the neat paradigms that those constructs establish, for Fernández Cubas seeks to undermine them.

Similar enough to the power paradigm of Robinson Crusoe/Friday to mimic it, the dialectical relationship between Grock and Daniel mocks the originary text with an inversion of power. Daniel's attempts to master his domain and rule his other are repeatedly stymied. He must depend on Grock's physical knowledge of the island, as fog submerges the entire place for much of the novel and distorts Daniel's sense of perspective. With his vision--the dominant sensory mode for the "rational man" in traditional Western literature--so inhibited, the protagonist comes to depend, like an animal, on his inexplicably heightened sense of smell. Nonetheless, whereas Robinson Crusoe had a good sense of direction, Daniel's is quite poor. He would be hard put to find food without the shepherd to subdue the violent sheep and to teach him to make cheese. Moreover, the castaway is unable to cultivate corn or any other crop like the agriculturally adept Crusoe did, for the island is rocky and infertile except for a forest that ominously harbors a sense of death and destruction. Far from being the resourceful power that enslaves the ingenuous and acquiescent Friday, Daniel is dominated by and dependent upon Grock for his own education and survival.

The manipulation of language figures prominently in the opposition of power between Daniel and Grock, a repetition of the historical colonial

preoccupation with language as a tool of control (Empire 7). Indeed, this is a key strategy of power in virtually every Fernández Cubas tale. Instead of imposing his language on the other, the castaway of El año de Gracia must master Grock's verbal signs. Daniel's erudite knowledge of dead languages ill serves him with Grock, who speaks a combination of English and Gaelic. This allusion to the English imperial domination of Ireland evokes the dialectic of colonial power; Grock's use of "abundantes expresiones en gaélico" (107) indicates that the "dominated" is not defeated. In his turn, Daniel tries to belittle Grock's language by calling it primitive and childlike-- a classic tactic of the West towards its others. The two men eventually manage to communicate by reducing language to the essential act of naming. In fact, the first word Daniel hears Grock speak is "Grock," an act that establishes the Name of the Father and the law of patriarchy on the island. The shepherd thus establishes himself as the origin, which must be repeated in order to be verified. Thereafter, Grock repeats his name to encompass his property: the island is the Island of Grock and his beloved deceased dog is Grock. Of course, Daniel comes to contest Grock's status as the originary power on the island; gradually, the two become duplicate links within a chain of repetition, when the their identities are confused and Daniel, too, becomes Grock.

Besides establishing a hierarchy of power, Defoe's Robinson Crusoe foregrounds a faith in instinct and technological innovation as fundamental to civilization, which Fernández Cubas's text mockingly repeats. Like Crusoe, Daniel believed that his technological acumen would save him from the repetitious cycle that seemed to damn his fate: "me invadió la certeza de hallarme cerrando un círculo de penalidades al que, dentro de muy poco, ni yo mismo podría dar crédito" (145). In contrast to Defoe's hero, who constructed boats with great skill, Daniel's numerous attempts to build a simple raft culminate in comical disaster, as he is capsized into the sea and dashed against the rocks, just like his original, calamitous arrival on the beach: "terminé dando con los huesos contra el saliente de una roca, en una posición curiosamente idéntica a la que recordaba del día de mi despertar en la isla. El círculo, que tan ingenuamente creía cerrar, estaba dejando paso a un remolino" (145). The repetition of the motif of the shipwreck introduces an intratextual irony that mocks Daniel's belief in his own intuition and ingenuity, just as it presents an intertextual parody of his literary forebear.³⁷

Two other central targets of mimicry and mockery in El año de Gracia are the measurement of time and faith in God, central constructions by which humans guide their existence. While Robinson Crusoe modulated his life on the island with an almost exact record of the passing of time, Daniel loses all temporal bearing, which for him becomes "esa presencia inaprehensible que

me sentía incapaz de medir" (87). Ironically, after his worldview and even his identity have been radically altered, he returns home to find that all these transformations happened in the mere span of exactly one year, "el año de Gracia."³⁸ Similarly, Daniel's experiences, culminating with his discovery of the sign that says his island is contaminated, defy his faith in God:

Alcé la vista al cielo para descargar mi ira en el Todopoderoso y, a la vez, suplicar desesperadamente un milagro. Por un instante los ojos se me nublaron y el deseo me hizo creer que alguien muy semejante a Dios Padre se había compadecido de mi suerte y hacía acto de presencia en el mismo infierno. Pero, cuando me enjuagué las lágrimas, la ilusión se desvaneció. Ahí estábamos sólo él y yo. Yo, con el puño alzado contra el cielo, y Grock, en lo alto del acantilado, saltando y riendo como un niño. (147-48)

The moment when Daniel lifts his gaze in search of God and sees only his master Grock, laughing and jumping like a child, ironically repeats, re-sites and redefines the discourse of the "Supreme Being." The God/man dichotomy, which is both a justification for and a parallel to the relation of colonizer/colonized, is undermined here by Daniel's gaze directed from a position of inferiority to Grock. This asymmetry exemplifies what Bhabha terms "this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming,

civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" ("Of Mimicry" 86). Albeit unwittingly, Daniel's gaze deconstructs any faith he might have had in a Superior Being. Both God and time are unveiled as useless or irrelevant constructs, when seen from the colonized perspective on the Island of Grock.

Fundamental to mockery is its mimicry of discourse with the consciousness of its own *otherness*, its own *difference* from that discourse. In one highly amusing difference from the original discourse of Robinson Crusoe, Daniel's confrontation with the "sanguinarias ovejas" on the island before he ever meets Grock mimics Crusoe's masterful dominion of his island's placid goats. Finding a ewe caught between some rocks near her lamb, Daniel follows his instinct of pursuit instead of being daunted by the eczema and oozing sores bared in the patches on his prey's astonishingly hirsute coat:

Pero no era yo el que decidía, sino el instinto. Y fue él, sin consultarme, el que con maravillosa pericia logró sujetarlas, reducir la furia de la madre herida y convencerlas, a golpes de sogas o a pedradas, de que ahora se encontraban bajo mi dominio y no les quedaba otra opción que dejarse conducir dócilmente a mi cabaña. (90)

The mother's resistance to Daniel's efforts to milk her cause the supposedly rational man to launch into an insane fit of bloodthirsty revenge: "Despellejé el cordero con la saña de un loco; lancé la cabeza a los ojos de su madre, sorbí la sangre aún caliente con ardorosa fruición y, con más rapidez que conocimiento, descuarticé una de sus piernas y ensarté los pedazos en el asador" (91). Daniel is immediately distracted from his sacrifice by the clamoring of other ewes outside as they watch a violent and bloody battle for power between two of their rams: "El corro de ovejas, siguiendo las incidencias de la lucha, me pareció todavía más aterrador que los ardides de los combatientes" (92-93). This scene, humorously juxtaposed with the scene of Daniel's own power play with the sheep, increases the would-be *conquistador's* consternation at the ovine thirst for power:

las ovejas , hasta entonces inquietas espectadoras, comenzaron a bregar entre sí, a lanzar gemidos estremecedores, a revolcarse a su vez por entre las piedras. Parecían presas de una agitación incontenible. Las más audaces lograron hacerse camino entre aquel hediondo rebaño y aproximarse al carnero herido. Nunca pude haber imaginado que las pezuñas de un cordero fueran capaces de rasgar la piel de un moribundo, arrancarle los ojos o despojarle en poco tiempo de sus entrañas, acaso porque nunca,

hasta aquel día, había tenido ocasión de contemplar semejantes
pezuñas ni parecidos corderos. (93)

Unnerved by this gory display of female exultation at the defeat of their male counterpart, Daniel futilely fantasizes that his own female captive will have escaped by the time he returns to his shelter.

To his consternation, he finds his sheep bucking and kicking, eager to join her cohorts in their ritualistic disembowelment of their overthrown leader, and his terror whips into a frenzy: “El miedo se transformó en cólera, el desaliento en barbarie. Ejecuté a mi prisionera con la servicia del desesperado. Apedreé, pataleé, apaleé, hasta que mi propia furia se volvió contra mí y, chorreando sangre, golpeé con la cabeza las paredes del refugio” (94-95). Provoked by the prospective loss of dominion into a brutally animalistic confrontation, Daniel effectively crosses the borderline between self-control and savagery. With the distinction of civilization and barbarism--the essential marker that serves as the dividing line between man/beast, self/other and Occident/Orient--thrown into hazardous question, it can only be a matter of time before the other fragile binaries collapse as well. Of course, Fernández Cubas is hardly the first to question this construct; among other critics both real and fictional, Crusoe himself referred to the inhuman violence of the Spanish civilizing mission in the “New World.”

Shortly thereafter even Daniel cannot miss the irony of the supposed distance between civilization and barbarity when he learns that the Island of Grock is actually quite close to the Scottish coast--the nearest border of the British empire:

fue precisamente esa evidencia--la de hallarme a tan corta distancia de la civilización--la que me sobresaltó en el extremo. Había estado a punto de transformarme en un salvaje, y lo que en otros momentos me pudo haber parecido dramático se me antojaba ahora una perversa burla del Destino. ¿No buscaba aventuras? ¿No había intuido, en aquellos lejanos días de Saint-Malo, que la hora de la acción había llegado para mí; que los cientos de libros que alegraron mi infancia se iban a convertir de repente en retazos de mi propia vida? (103-04)

Unable to appreciate the drama of the situation when it does not follow the literary script he expects, nonetheless Daniel begins to recognize that the geographical borders that delineate one empire from another are just as illusory and mutable as the moral judgments that separate the "enlightened man" from the "savage beast."

As Daniel observes Grock's dexterity on the island, he comes to realize that the distinction between culture/nature, refigured as the normal/the monstrous, can be inverted. The context of the island shapes Daniel's view of

this discourse: “no pude dejar de admirarme y comprender que quien realmente resultaba inapropiado y grotesco en aquel medio inhóspito era yo, y todo lo que antes me pudo parecer monstruoso adquirió los visos de la naturalidad más tranquilizadora” (106). By the end of the novel, when the scientists kill the red-clad Grock because they believe he is Daniel, and mistake Daniel for the old shepherd, the narrator recognizes that from the perspective of the true colonizers of that island *he* is the monster: “significaba que mi aspecto apenas difería del salvaje y viejo Grock. No tenía espejo en el que mirarme. [. . .] [P]or primera vez, me reconocí deforme y monstruoso” (167). Daniel is definitively the colonized, the ostracized and monstrous other. The re-siting of the discourse of normality/monstrosity within Grock’s empire radically affects its re-citing by inverting the terms of domination.

The inversion of power as a repetitious and potentially cyclical process profoundly disturbs Daniel. This is evidenced by his reaction to the rebellious sheep and his dislike of Grock’s favorite Biblical passage, the prophet Daniel’s vision of a mighty ram that dominates all the others and that is finally conquered by an even mightier buck goat: “La lectura de aquel pasaje me llenó de inquietud” (135). If the dominator is just one link in a successive chain of command, then he loses his status as uniquely powerful, as originary. Notably, while Daniel is perturbed by this biblical passage, Grock finds it hilarious. Within the text of El año de Gracia, the biblical text

itself is a repetition of sorts, since it reflects the earlier confrontation between the sheep that Fernández Cubas's Daniel witnessed, and even the struggle between Daniel and Grock.

Finally, Grock's death at the hands of the scientists signals that the two islanders' very identities are switched, so that they come to repeat one another. Longing to pray over the new grave he prepares for Grock, Daniel finds himself heralding this biblical passage that signals repetition, instead of appealing to the original power of God:

Pero no pude o no supe rezar. [. . .] Me oí a mí mismo pronunciar: *"Y he aquí un carnero que estaba delante del río. . ."*. Y seguí escuchándome embelesado, imaginando que, bajo tierra, aquellos ojos cerrados habían vuelto a cobrar vida y me sonreían ahora, entre cansados y felices, por repetirle una vez más su historia predilecta, el enfrentamiento del macho cabrío con el carnero, la postración del pobre y espantado Daniel. . . ¿Yo mismo? ¿El profeta?. . . No, Daniel yacía bajo tierra, a mis pies. Vestía el mismo zamarra roja del capitán, la misma con la que me conocieron los hombres del helicóptero [. . .]. (166)

The repetition of this story effects a transfer of power similar to the one it treats thematically, for Grock's desire for Daniel to read it to him each week caused him to surrender his position of absolute power over the castaway.

The *zamarra roja* becomes the metonymy that signals this type of power, as it is passed from the captain to Daniel to Grock, bringing an ephemeral and transient authority in its tide.

The image of the Bible as a tool of colonizing power is a key strategy of subversive repetition in Fernández Cubas's novel. The Bible is, after all, the archetypal Western text of origins. Bhabha notes that the discovery of the English book--with the Bible being the Good Book, the greatest Book of all--inaugurates the literature of empire: "The discovery of the book installs the sign of appropriate representation: the word of God, truth, art creates the conditions for a beginning, a practice of history and narrative. But the institution of the Word in the wilds is also an *Entstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition [. . .]" ("Signs" 147). As Fernández Cubas has suggested in stories like "Lúnula y Violeta," "La ventana del jardín," and "Los altillos de Brumal," within the word hovers the potential displacement and deconstruction of the Word. Spires has pointed out the imperialistic implications of Daniel's use of the Bible as a tool of power over Grock (Post-Totalitarian Fiction 171-72, footnote 15). Yet Fernández Cubas dislocates the Bible from the hands of the colonizing European: Daniel finds the Word already in place upon his arrival to the island. He merely appropriates it from Grock to gain power over the tyrannical shepherd.

When the power paradigm is thus inverted Grock, too, re-appropriates the Bible as a tool literally to beat his dominator into submission so that he will stay on the island. This certainly qualifies as a displacement of the intended purpose of the Word. When the attack fails, Grock himself becomes a Christ figure:

Tres de los seis hombres acababan de desenfundar sus armas y apuntaban en dirección al pastor. [. . .] Al sonido de los disparos siguió enseguida un grito de dolor. Grock alzó los brazos, avanzó aún algunos pasos, de nuevo sonaron varias detonaciones, y el viejo cayó de bruces sobre las piedras para no levantarse jamás. (158-59)

With his arms outstretched, the Good Shepherd cries out and is sacrificed in Daniel's stead. This post-colonial version of deliverance thus re-writes the inscription of savior and saved, center and margin.

The protagonist Daniel, like the prophet whose name he bears, is horrified by the transmutational, cyclical, repetitious nature of power like that embodied in the vision of the battling rams. Nonetheless, Fernández Cubas's prophet comes to suspect that this might be a more accurate vision of reality than the notion of an inviolate originary power. Imagining himself as Grock, alone and awaiting the biannual arrival of the plane to deliver his liquor, Daniel contemplates the cyclical nature of existence:

Dos años era mucho tiempo. Algún barco podía estrellarse contra el acantilado en pleno invierno, un náufrago internarse por entre las brumas y repetir mi ciclo de esperanzas y sufrimientos. Y yo entonces, en un acto ritual, decidiría sacrificarme en aras de un nuevo Grock. Porque tal vez [. . .] mi antecesor no fuera más que un simple eslabón en una larga cadena de Grocks cuya historia, ahora, no tenía más remedio que hacer mía. (169)

As one more link in the chain of Grocks, Daniel is not the colonizer but a repetition of the colonized. When the ecologists discover him and take him away in their boat, back to “civilization,” he is afraid to look back at the disappearing island: “me entregué [. . .] evitando en todo momento mirar hacia atrás. No sé aún si en recuerdo de ciertas maldiciones bíblicas, o por el simple e irracional temor de verme a mí mismo, en lo alto del acantilado, agitando esperanzado una deteriorada zamarra roja” (174). Like the biblical Lot who was forbidden to gaze back upon the conflagration of the wicked city of Sodom for fear he would repeat that wickedness, Daniel is afraid to look back upon the island for fear of seeing himself repeated there, as the victimized, contaminated by-product of civilization’s technological quest for knowledge and power. His siting on the Island of Grock has given him new insight into the working of power.

In keeping with the technological overtones to the power paradigm in El año de Gracia, the images of photographs or photocopies capture the idea of identity as non-originary but repetitious. Grock laughingly shows Daniel an instamatic photo of a man, but does not recognize that the image that so highly amuses him is a replica of himself. The snapshot that the men in the helicopter take of Daniel in his red coat eventually leads them to identify Grock in the red coat as Daniel, furthering the chain of repeated and replaceable identities. When the ecologists finally take Daniel to the hospital his photo is taken, revealing the ravages that the contaminated island wrought on him. Upon viewing it, he is unable to laugh, Grock-like, at the identity repeated there. Denying that the permanent changes in his sight and hearing were caused by the illegal contamination of the island, the medical establishment tries to erase the imprint of the pustules on Daniel's appearance. They create a replica of his former self, with the significant modification that he now must wear a mustache to cover some of the persistent scars on his upper lip--in Bhabha's words, it is a difference that makes him "*almost the same, but not quite*" ("Of Mimicry" 86).

Daniel's body bears the physical imprint of empire, whose dominion, disregard and contamination of Gruinard has changed him irrevocably. Although Daniel returns to the site of "civilization," his tenure in the excluded zone of the Island affects his vision, both literally and

metaphorically. Spires has characterized Daniel as “a myopic prophet incapable of foreseeing a future order with no central base of knowledge and authority. His year of (G)race has been in vain. He has thrown away the opportunity provided by his sister to be ‘otherwise’” (Post-Totalitarian 167). While the ending of the novel is ambiguous and defiant of any absolute interpretation (as Fernández Cubas’s texts usually are), I am inclined to argue that Daniel, like the blind prophets of lore, comes to see the de-centered authority of his civilization. This new “vision,” while it might terrify him, also attenuates his identification with the colonizers, although he is unable to outwardly alter his life in any radical way once he returns to the center of that civilization.

Daniel’s attraction to Gruda may be read as subtle evidence of his unrealized desire to embrace the change and difference inherent in the other, instead of staying enclosed on only one side of the self/other binarism. On yet another boat, the protagonist meets Gruda, whose constant, inane laughter unsettles him and evokes Grock’s raucous reaction to the biblical story of the ram’s struggle for power (much as the harsh sound of her name echoes the shepherd’s). Significantly, Gruda is Scottish, thus part of a colonized country; hers is a perspective that Daniel now shares. Nonetheless, her only reason for crossing the borders of historical centers of European civilization, about which she knows nothing, is that she won a supermarket

lottery. In this light, Gruda's tittering supplies only a vacuous repetition of Grock's laughter in the face of the loss of power to an other. Critics have argued that Daniel's marriage to Gruda confirms his lack of growth (Gleue, "Epistemological and Ontological" 153) or represents the typical happy ending of the nineteenth-century sentimental novel (Alborg 7). Indeed, Gruda is a mundane, flighty character. Although her laughter metonymically associates her as a repetition of Grock, she is an inferior copy with whom Daniel cannot communicate his experiences on the island: "Había una parte de mi vida que no podía ni quería compartir" (183). At night, while Gruda jabbars out loud in her sleep, Daniel mentally separates himself to relive his other experience on the island. In the end, he is unable to express to her his altered vision of the world.

The entire Appendix of the novel, which deals with Daniel's experiences after leaving the island, is like a sequence of chain links that explain the story just told--repeating parts of it, while adding significant additional bits of information. As such, the intratextual borders of El año de Gracia emphasize the distinctions between colonial and postcolonial representations of the story of the subject. Having returned to the "civilized" center and observing its depiction of the island, the narrator remarks that "La historia de la Isla de Gruinard no difiere demasiado de la de la Isla de Grock" (177). The versions are the same, except that the historical rendition

of the events on the Island of Gruinard includes (or excludes) one difference: “no había una sola referencia a la existencia de Grock ni al trágico fin que, quién sabe desde qué secreto despacho, se me había destinado días atrás” (177-78). Herein is another “difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (“Of Mimicry” 86), except of course that this divergence changes everything-- it silences the victim sacrificed to power in order to ensure the propagation of power.

Like the cycle of history that Daniel cursed when he repeatedly failed at building his raft, Daniel’s story spirals back on itself when he discovers it has been retold and distorted from still another perspective. Daniel enters a café in Saint-Malo called “Providence” and a customer informs him that the owner, Naguib, was rescued from a sinking ship by another boat and that he started his restaurant, called “Providence,” with money that the captain, Tío Jean, had beneficently “given” him as his dying act. The protagonist’s reaction to the news is revealing:

Me quité las gafas y, por unos segundos, mi tambaleante interlocutor se difuminó entre brumas y sombras.

--Sí. Una historia increíble--me limité a decir.

Pero en mis palabras no se ocultaba ironía alguna. (182)

Naguib’s story is a reconstruction, a markedly altered repetition of the “original” tale that readers hold in their hands. Yet even El año de Gracia

itself is a repetition, presumably at least a printed copy of the photocopy that the ecologists made of Daniel's manuscript, which he wrote and re-wrote by hand during his stay on the island. At last, however, Daniel seems unperturbed when faced with disturbing repetition. There is no irony in his observation that the boat hand's story is "increíble," perhaps because he finally understands that history, which is constructed by those with the power to make us believe, must be seen as unbelievable.

Like any good *bildungsroman*, El año de Gracia is the story of how the protagonist confronts his fear. His is a fear of repetition, a fear of not being the origin but being an other that is the same and yet different, re-cited in a different site. This need for dominance is exactly what postcolonialism undermines:

Such a reading of colonialist authority profoundly unsettles the demand that figures at the centre of the originary myth of colonialist power. It is the demand that *the space it occupies be unbounded*, its reality *coincident* with the emergence of the imperialist narrative and history, its discourse *nondialogic*, its enunciation *unitary*, unmarked by the trace of difference [. . .]."

("Signs" 157)

El año de Gracia, like the postcolonial perspective, undermines the myth of origins by mimicking and mocking those origins, by repeating them

differently. This endeavor foregrounds the way imperial attempts to occupy *everyplace* inevitably establish hierarchical boundaries between the center (*someplace*) and the periphery (*no place*); it then challenges the validity of those power associations by shifting the sites of power. By setting up repetitious chains of power, the postcolonial project of El año de Gracia undermines any notion that power begins with imperialist narrative and history. Finally, it sets conflicting discursive constructions of power in dialogue with one another, to interrogate the borders that define them according to the differences they exclude, and thereby proliferate the dynamic, ongoing process of power itself.

El columpio:

While subversive reiteration in El año de Gracia culminates with a re-writing of canonical literature, in Cristina Fernández Cubas's most recent work, El columpio (1995), the multiple images of repetition converge in history as a repetition and alteration of the past.³⁹ In its preoccupation with recounting the past, El columpio lays bare the nature of history as change wrought over time. The account of a woman who repeats her mother's past in her own present as she writes "la historia" of her family, this novel highlights the intrinsic relationship between the connotations of the Spanish word *historia* as "history" and "story." Thus Fernández Cubas foregrounds

the inevitable difference that present experience imposes on the narrative repetition of the past in the construction of history.

The first-person narrator reconstructs her late mother's--and thus her own--history by visiting her mother's childhood home in Spain. Her experiences there recast her mother's account in a markedly different light, even as the narrator senses a haunting repetition of her mother in herself. A twenty-five year-old woman raised in France, the nameless narrator commences her account by recalling her parent's frequent assertion that, while still a child, she encountered her adult daughter in a dimly remembered but seemingly felicitous dream. The mother, Eloísa, would tell how she was found inexplicably shaken and soaked in the garden soon after the anachronistic encounter with her own daughter, and then fell into a prolonged, feverish illness. Longing to come to know her deceased mother's beloved brothers and cousin who peopled the woman's many tales of her idyllic childhood, the protagonist travels to the House of the Tower where they still live in a tiny Spanish town near the Pyrenees mountains.

Although unprepared for her visit, since they never received the letter announcing her arrival, the reclusive uncles Tomás, Lucas and Bebo welcome her as their beloved Eloísa's daughter. In this place where the three men strive to freeze time at the point of Eloísa's childhood, the young woman learns more of her mother's personality, particularly her predilection for an

ancient toy called the *diábolo*, which included two sticks and a whip-like cord that Eloísa always manipulated with stunning dexterity--to the point of being accused once of using it to slay a dog.

Puzzled and hurt by her uncles' efforts to hasten her departure before that Friday evening, when they would hold their weekly meeting to discuss family matters over dinner, the protagonist determines to stay and make the most of the time she allocated for her visit. She pretends to go to bed early that night but, after circumventing their deceitful attempt to drug her to sleep, she stealthily escapes the house. Pausing for a final look back at her uncles through the dining room window, she discovers that their ritualistic dinner focuses on an apparently unoccupied place setting, which the three address as Eloísa. The protagonist, baffled by their apparent ability to speak with one another's voices, is further stunned then to hear the petulant, angry voice of a little girl, demanding to know if the unwanted guest has departed.

Astonished at the specter of her uncles' insanity, the woman flees into the rainy night, only to halt when hit by a sharp object--an old-fashioned "diábolo."

Suddenly, she finds herself face to face with the young Eloísa. The irate child whips the "diábolo" cord around the intruding woman's neck, as a thud and a splash are heard, but stops short of strangulation when her victim cries out, "¡Mamá! Por favor. . . , mamá!" (124). Suspended time moves

forward then, as the young girl's hair and clothes, picture-perfect until that moment, suddenly become drenched by the pouring rain. About to faint, the protagonist hears the splash and thud once again and realizes that she is standing at the edge of a well.

After running to the nearby town, the protagonist obtains a room at an inn for the rest of the night. Before she catches the bus the next morning, Lucila, the innkeeper, gives her a letter from the uncles delivered earlier along with her soaking wet suitcase that "parece que salga de un pozo" (128). The letter affectionately reproaches the niece for worrying them with her impetuous departure in the middle of the night and includes a check as a token of what her mother Eloísa would have inherited had she not abandoned the land to go to France. Realizing that the letter depicts her uncles as only concerned for her well-being, and her own departure as irrational, the protagonist rips up both the letter and the check. On her journey back to France, the narrator mulls over her experiences and the way that her mother, from within her dream, saved her daughter's life.

The motif of repetition in El columpio --intrinsic to the project of pondering the past from the standpoint of the present--is an essential characteristic of the post-modern context in which all of Fernández Cubas's works are written. In The End of Modernity, Gianni Vattimo notes that post-modernity is resigned to the impossibility of overcoming or escaping the

basic metaphysical tenets of modernity. As the end phase of modernity, post-modernity re-collects the same ideas, but erodes their validity by underscoring their limitations. The translator Jon R. Snyder explains in his introduction to Vattimo's work,

post-modernity is a repetition of modernity which yet does not accept modernity as it is or fully acknowledge its legitimacy.

[. . .] It is a repetition with an ironic difference, then, for although post-modernity inevitably prolongs the categories of modernity and must resign itself to them, it also tries to twist them in another direction and to turn them against themselves.

(1)

To attempt to 'overcome' and get beyond modernity would mean to remain within one of modernity's characteristic modes, so post-modernity has no recourse but to subvert those modes from within their own discourse. Thus post-modernity critically rethinks modernity even as it repeats it.

A fundamental aspect of post-modernity's replication of modernity is the representation of history, or "post-history." The post-historical perspective rejects the modern idea of history as an organic, inviolate process; rather, history "is now perceived as having broken down into an infinity of 'histories' that can no longer be (re)combined into a single

narrative" (xviii). Indeed, the narrative, "fictional" nature of history itself cancels out any notion of a sole, absolute version of the truth.

In addition, a crisis in the notion of progress invalidates a linear view of history for post-modernity. "Progress" no longer advances modernity, but serves only as the prerequisite for modernity to exist at all, as Vattimo stresses: "In a consumer society continual renewal (of clothes, tools, buildings) is already required physiologically for the system simply to survive. What is new is not in the least 'revolutionary' or subversive; it is what allows things to stay the same" (7). Thus metaphysics, foundations, the teleological view of history and modernity itself all "may be lived as an opportunity or as the possibility of a change by virtue of which [they] are twisted in a direction which is not foreseen by their own essence, and yet is connected to it" (173). As in El año de Gracia, Fernández Cubas's second novel conjures up the haunting prospect of infinite repetition as the postmodern quandary, yet its numerous repetitions of images, of events, and of history itself include subtle differences that ultimately suggest "the possibility of a change." This repetition with a difference in El columpio engages the construction of history, truth and identity themselves as an open and dynamic process to be continually re-explored, expanded and re-written.

The overlay of distinct versions of history in El columpio is similar to the diverse versions of fiction in the author's first novel. In El año de Gracia, Naguib's reconstruction of the shipwreck story is just one of the many metafictional aspects, which constitute another kind of repetition, as they reflect back upon and yet alter and augment the novel.⁴⁰ For example, the narrator states that his manuscript was entitled El Año de Gracia and cites his manuscript's opening lines, which repeat exactly the opening lines of the novel we read (84-85). There is at least one slight difference between the two texts, however, besides one being a copy of a copy of the other. At one point in the novel, the narrator cites a fragment that he wrote earlier in his manuscript, a fragment which does not appear anywhere else in the text we read (140-41). With the "original" fragment inexplicably erased, all that remains is the replica--which casts the very existence of an "original" manuscript into doubt. This omission invites speculation that the narrator might be only a double after all, a hybrid of the implicit author herself, who in turn is a hybrid of the "original" Fernández Cubas, and so forth. One could continue thus indefinitely, circling in the spiral of metafictional reflections that has so delightfully characterized the novel since its very inception (another questionable "origin," since the novel itself is a hybrid of other genres). In this, too, El Año de Gracia is another repetition--almost the same, but not quite. The juxtaposition of Fernández Cubas's two novels as

repetitions of history and fiction blurs the distinctions between the two and unmasks them both as discursive modes of cultural knowledge, carefully constructed according to perspectives of power.

In El columpio, history is depicted as the tension between the repetition of the past and the inevitable alteration--the different perspective--imposed by the passage of time into the present. When the protagonist returns to the site of her mother's past in order to experience her history, she finds a tension between the haunting repetitions that proliferate there and her uncles' efforts to defy repetition and the passage of time. Thanks to the rents they collect from the nearby urban development, the uncles "podían permitirse el lujo de vivir como siempre, como si nada hubiese ocurrido, como si el mundo pudiera detenerse con sólo que alguien [. . .] olvidara la existencia del reloj y se negara a arrancar las hojas del calendario" (39). They strive to freeze time and preserve everything in the house exactly as it was during Eloísa's childhood.

The narrator, as a replica of Eloísa, is potentially the most significant repetition to transgress the boundaries of the House of the Tower. During her first dinner there she notes that the uncles seat her "de espaldas a la consola, al retrato de mi madre" (32) so that, as they conceivably gaze at her, they also gaze at the childhood portrait of her mother. At first the protagonist is unsettled when the men raise their glasses in a toast after

dinner and “quietos como estatuas, me miraron transformados” (37-38).

Soon the guest realizes it is not she but another who wields such fixating power:

pronto reparé en la verdadera dirección de sus ojos, en sus copas ligeramente más alzadas de lo que hubiera resultado normal. Y entonces comprendí. Sin necesidad de darme vuelta comprendí que el brindis emocionado no me iba destinado a mí, sino a alguien que nos observaba a todos desde su posición inmóvil sobre la consola. Aquella criatura mal sentada, con un mohín de disgusto, una cuerda borrosa entre las manos y un diábolo desdibujado en el suelo. (38)

The portrait suspends time and action, not only by immortalizing Eloísa’s past image as the reigning icon in the House of the Tower, but by immobilizing the uncles in their worshipful, unchanging submission to her in the present. Nonetheless, even the whimsical creature in the portrait is only a repetition of Eloísa, much like the faded family photographs that the mother would use to evoke the memory of her happy childhood long ago. In this novel, like in El año de Gracia, representation foregrounds the problematic of sameness/difference inherent in reiteration. Paradoxically, in their attempt to preserve the young Eloísa’s presence, the portrait and photographs--as mere copies of the original--also underscore her absence.

Moreover, even as it seems to paralyze time, the portrait of Eloísa with her “diábolo” points to the passage of time by highlighting the anachronistic contradiction that someone of Eloísa’s generation should have played with such an out-dated gadget. The narrator calculates that a child her mother’s age would not have owned such a toy: “Si mamá viviese, tendría poco más de cincuenta años. Ninguna mujer de esa edad recuerda el diábolo como un juego de infancia” (69). This mention of age points extratextually to a different history, the history of Spain itself. If we speculate that the moment of narration takes place sometime in the early 1990s (since the novel is published in 1995), then the mother would have been born in the 1940s (not unlike Fernández Cubas herself). The narrator notes that the child in the portrait seems to be between nine and twelve years old, situating the suspended time of the uncles’ House of the Tower in the 1950s--the period, not so coincidentally, of Franco’s strongest control over Spain. Thus the portrait itself harbors clues that defeat its ostensible timelessness, by contextualizing the story in the concrete historical period of the Spanish postwar.

Many writers and historians have characterized Francoism as a deliberate reversion to Spain’s past in an attempt to impede the country’s progress into the future--a progression that would have required change. Carmen Martín Gaité, in an essay ironically entitled “Bendito atraso,” refers

to the regime's depiction of the ancient as modern, particularly with regard to women: "Dotar de novedad, es decir vender como moderno, aquel tipo de mujer tradicional antigua y siempre nueva es tarea a la que se dedicó incansablemente la propaganda de la época [de la postguerra española]" (27). With the allusion to the context of Francoist Spain, then, Eloísa's characterization by a metonymical object inappropriate to her own time ("Eloísa sin su diábolito no es Eloísa" [31]) parallels the regime's depiction of the ideal post-civil war Spanish woman as a paragon of medieval piety.

In Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Postwar Spain,

David Herzberger holds that such superimposition of the past over the present is effected by Francoism's transmutation of history into myth. For Herzberger, Francoist historiography deliberately weaves a narrative of history that is larger than life and that propounds a single version of truth:

The consequences of this intentionality are twofold: (1) Francoist historians assert and subsequently sustain their dominion over time and narration, so that history systematically emerges as myth; (2) historians of the Regime draw forth meaning in history that stands resolutely as the equal of truth, hence historiography assumes the secondary but no less important function of disallowing dissent. (16-17)

This absolutist project of Francoism is echoed by Lucas's affirmation to his niece of the way things are in his constructed world in El columpio: "Esta es, querida niña--concluyó--la única verdad. No hay otra" (39).

The masculine triumvirate in El columpio, like Franco himself, reverts time to an epoch that is depicted nostalgically, mythically, as ideal: "By resorting to myth, Francoist historiographers imprison both time and discourse and thereby cut at the very heart of discovery and change that impel history to begin with" (Herzberger 36). Since they cannot allow the progression of time that history records, the uncles resort to repetition in order to reify the validity and authority of what, according to them, *is* and always *will be*. The abundant images and tactics of repetition in El columpio, then, reflect the Francoist view of history:

Francoist historiography is resolutely shaped by a conception of truth and temporality in which history is viewed less as a complex web of diachronic and synchronic relationships, both formed and revealed through narration, than as an unfolding of time that is *repetitive*, deterministic and radically unchangeable [italics mine]." (Herzberger 22)

The uncles try to freeze time and, through repetition, preserve everything as the same. In doing so, they mythologize the past into archetypal intranscendence.

Like the childhood pictures that Eloísa gazed at to remember her past, the portrait of Eloísa represents the uncles' effort to stave off the decaying effects of time. Yet the portrait reveals a side to the young Eloísa that undermines the Edenic image of her past that she always depicted in her stories to her daughter:

pude reconocer a mi madre de niña [. . .] vestida con un traje vaporoso muy parecido al de las fotografías. Tenía una expresión entre angelical y enfurruñada, y estaba mal sentada, se diría que mal sentada a propósito, como si más que un cuadro aquello fuera una instantánea tomada sin su consentimiento, o como si el autor la hubiera querido precisamente así. [. . .] --Es un diábolito--dijo de pronto Bebo señalando la parte más oscura del lienzo--. Está desapareciendo por momentos. ¡Qué le vamos a hacer! (30-31)

The "diábolito" itself, along with Eloísa's adroit and sometimes dastardly tricks with it, evoke another repetition, this one linguistic: the "diábolito" repeats and transmutes into the "diablo." Eloísa's photographic, painted and narrative portraits of herself depict her as fundamentally angelical; yet, as the daughter discovers, her actions and her emblematic toy belie these repetitions of piety and suggest a significant, diabolical difference. This work of art, then, reveals the other reality beyond the regime's official image

of the ideal Spanish woman as pious, gentle and obedient.⁴¹ In Eloísa's portrait, the face of the manipulator of devilish power lurks behind the countenance of the passive, devout angel whose image the three men propagate. Recalling the subversively written subject of another artistic work, García Lorca's La Casa de Bernarda Alba, Eloísa's feminine tyranny structures the affairs of the house and furiously castigates any male who would violate her order.

Indeed, Bebo's body bears the mark of Eloísa's rage at his physical advances on her person. Much to Lucas's and Tomás' irritation, Bebo admits to the protagonist that Eloísa scarred his neck with her "diábolo" once when he gave her a kiss. The adult Eloísa's version of that kiss, recounted to her daughter, never disclosed such violence:

"Una vez yo era una princesa cristiana y ellos, tus tíos, unos terribles sarracenos que me tenían presa. Me habían encerrado en lo alto de la torre y querían hacerme renegar de mi fe. Por un momento llegué a asustarme de verdad. Pero entonces Bebo, sin avisar a mis hermanos, cambió el argumento de la obra. Les envió a guardar las puertas de la mazmorra, se quitó los ropajes de moro, se puso una cruz y, allí mismo, en el desván, cuando nadie nos veía, me dio un beso." (21)

By altering the script and re-writing the “historia” of their playful enactment, Bebo also violated the balance of power wherein Eloísa was set apart, untouched up in the tower, elevated from the men.

Similarly, outside of their imaginary games, Bebo longed to break the prohibition of blood-ties against his ardor for Eloísa. As with the passage above, the narrator directly cites this story just as it was told by her mother:

“Bebo y yo queríamos casarnos de mayores. El primo me decía que era muy sencillo; bastaba con pedir permiso al Papa. Pero mis hermanos se molestaban muchísimo. Antes de hablar con el Papa se les tenía que pedir consentimiento a ellos. Entonces yo me columpiaba con rabia, como si estuviera enfadada, y decía que era inútil, porque, si seguían así, discutiendo tontamente, cruzaría los Pirineos, me casaría con un francés y no volverían a verme.” (16-17)

Again, Bebo transgresses and incites the anger of the patriarchal powers that be: Lucas and Tomás. Eloísa’s reaction of protest, however, is feigned—she only *acts* “como si estuviera enfadada” and threatens to topple the whole balance by leaving the center of power altogether. In fact, she herself is the one who dominates the center of power, where she deliberately invites dissension in order to display her control. As Bebo’s scar attests, the young

Eloísa seemed quick to whip all into submission when the games went too far.

Yet Eloísa fulfilled her facetious threat: she grew up and left the sanctified confines of the House of the Tower, and the men never saw her again. She married a man who lived in France, even if he wasn't really French. Fernández Cubas's portrait of this tale, the history behind the protagonist's story, is sketched with the faintest of strokes, but it allows for the possibility that Eloísa's husband, like many of Franco's dissenters, may have been exiled in France. As the jagged geographical border of the Pyrenees accentuates, France is the definitive outside to Spain. Eloísa, as the true representative of power in the House of the Tower, undermined its validity as the center by crossing the border to the periphery of France. Unable to accept the alterations that time has imposed, the men sustain their accustomed order in the space of the House of the Tower by denying chronological time and by indulging their illusion in a realm where time does not move and power does not shift.

Fernández Cubas's fictional history of the dynamics of the 1950s poses an interesting deconstruction of the religious and political rhetoric advanced by the regime's account of what was happening in Spain during that time. If Eloísa figures as the devil incarnate, then the three inseparable men evoke the Christian trinity, three in one. Yet Fernández Cubas's version contradicts the

divine dialectical opposition: in El columpio the devil is the one who rules, with the acquiescent cooperation of the trinity. Unlike the biblical devil (who really was a devilish angel, banished because he believed he was as great as God), this angelic devil leaves the heavenly center of power when she relinquishes her dominion over the trinity by apparently choosing to inhabit the outside, France. This contradiction deconstructs the binary oppositions such as good/evil and center/periphery that undergird the master narratives of mankind (I choose this word deliberately), Christianity, Spain, and Eloísa herself.

This archetypal structure of dichotomies is founded on the assumption of the existence of difference as the factor that divides the subject from its object. Drawing on Heidegger, Vattimo argues that the distinction between subject and object is obsolete, since the notion of *their* difference is preceded by an *ontological* difference between Being (reductively speaking, existence itself) and beings (those who exist): “both subject and object equally *are*, and therefore there is no longer any ontological difference between them: the real ontological difference is between Being itself and the realm of subjects and objects--that is, beings” (xiv). Similarly, Fernández Cubas seems to point to the collapsibility of the difference that beings construct between subject and object in order to secure and wield power.

Perhaps this, then, was Bebo’s cardinal sin, for which he was branded

by Eloísa's whip in their childhood game: instead of playing the Moor in opposition to her Christian princess (a difference that forbade the transgression of amorous union as stridently as the blood relationship between the two cousins prohibited their marriage), Bebo donned the robes of a Christian and kissed her. This act of easily exchanging one identity for another points to the replaceability, repeatability and sameness that inheres within constructions of difference. In effect, *the same* can be found on both "sides" of the constructed border of difference. This sameness is potentially devastating, for it threatens the play of power that difference affords.

In El columpio the House of the Tower and the surrounding town serve as the metaphorical boundary of Franco's control over Spain, for the repetition of the same within the designated borders of both worlds is the key to securing and proliferating monolithic power. Furnished just as it was during Eloísa's childhood, the men's home is an enclosed, static environment that only Tomás ever ventures to leave with any regularity in order to purchase the household necessities. Symbolically, Bebo is permanently confined to their land, and in the winter to the House of the Tower, just as Eloísa "playfully" was imprisoned in the enactment of the Christian/Moor struggle that Bebo betrayed. The house is the center of fascination for the townspeople, who treat the protagonist with respect and great interest for what she might reveal to them about the reclusive goings on there. The

urban development itself, owned by the uncles, is a site of stagnation where “casi todos son viejos y niños” (82) and ““El aburrimiento se contagia. . .’ Pero no sólo el aburrimiento. Todo en el valle, hasta mi propia voz, me devolvía a la Casa de la Torre” (85). The house, like Franco himself, occupies the center of everyone’s consciousness. Within the house, the uncles tolerate no alteration of their established routine; all the protagonist’s efforts to infuse new life into the place with expensive sherry, brighter lightbulbs, or a special dinner are rebuffed (86). Even the architecture induces the repetition of the same: the dining room boasts a vaulted roof, which causes every word spoken there to echo.

Indeed, this echo transmutes into vacuous repetitions that are exchangeable from one uncle to the other, as the protagonist discovers just before she flees their home at the end of the novel. Standing outside, gazing in at the men having dinner in the vaulted dining room, she is confused when Tomás’ typical words seem to emanate from Lucas’s mouth: “En un momento escuché: ‘Bien, bien, bien. . .,’ pero Tomás, que sonreía fascinado, no había movido los labios, no había pronunciado palabra alguna. Lucas repitió: ‘Bien, bien.’ Y Tomás, enseguida, se puso a hablar con voz de Bebo. Luego Bebo dijo algo en el tono ceremonioso de Lucas” (116-17). Hence each man only appears to be the author of his words.

In reality, the uncles' words are interchangeable because all merely parrot the same discourse, a discourse that originates with none of them. Brad Epps calls this phenomenon "ventriloquism": "It refers, that is, to the slipperiness of reference, to the mystifying ability to take one thing for another, one's words for another's. Ventriloquism, in other words, is an act of speech that hides its sources and throws itself, disembodied, into the bodies of others" (55). While Francoism pretended to be the original authority on its projected image of Spain, and the uncles strive to author a unified vision of their world with Eloísa, in fact these patriarchal figures merely parrot discursive constructions of history converted into myth. Observing all this in secret, from outside the house, the protagonist realizes that the words of the great men are only slippery constructs that are passed along and repeated from one patriarchal figure to another. Who, then, is the head of power? Like Daniel and Grock in El año de Gracia, each uncle ultimately turns out to be the opposite of what he appears to be. Although it presumes to reify the origin of authority, repetition, when seen from a different perspective, ends up undermining authority and power by rendering it infinitely replaceable by an "other."

The tension of repetition as a tactic that both enforces and erodes authoritative power continues with the dual image of the attic as the privileged site of knowledge at the top of the tower and as a metaphor of

Lucas's mind, the supposed locus of power and knowledge in the home. The protagonist herself observes that the central function of attics is to halt time: "Los desvanes son como inmensos arcones en los que el tiempo se ha detenido" (70). In addition to being a repository for objects from the family's past, the attic of the tower serves as the protagonist's hiding place where she reads Eloísa's--and her own--letters in secret. As in Los atillos de Brumal, this space abounds with texts that open up the past to the present. If the tower is the phallic symbol of power for the house, then Lucas, whose mind harbors the family's textual knowledge, appears to be the patriarchal head of the household.

Just as the protagonist violates the sanctity of the attic, two cleaning women menace the order of Lucas's mental domain by moving his papers around. When his niece mentions her visit up there, Lucas complains that the cleaning women have reduced his mind to a similar jumble: "Han logrado convertir mi cabeza en un auténtico desván" (65). The two Rachels are figured as intruders on the masculine space: "La irrupción puntual de las raqueles era contemplada por los tíos como una invasión, una fatalidad ineludible de la que cada cual se defendía a su manera" (48). As they come from the outside, the women introduce a different perspective that dialectically opposes Lucas's fragile system of "order": "Y de pronto las raqueles le atacaban por donde menos esperaba. Su orden. Porque aquellas

mujeres, con sus absurdas tentativas de orden, no hacían más que entorpecer su ordenado intento de desorden, demasiado reciente aún para tenerlo asentado, firme" (67). (Dis)order, then, is not an absolute but an artifice whose construction is threatened by a different vision of the way things should be. Despite the repetition that they embody, the two Rachels threaten Lucas's established order by slightly changing it: "Pero entonces aparecían ellas, las raqueles. ¿Podía existir algo más perturbador para sus elucubraciones que encontrarse la cotidianeidad sutilmente alterada?" (67). Repetition that introduces a subtle alteration holds the potential to puncture the closed system of power. As the phallic symbolism of its name suggests, the House of the Tower is a patriarchal space where oppositional feminine presence constitutes a violation.

As metonymies of other women who transgressed the unchanging realm of the House of the Tower, the unopened letters of the adult Eloísa and her daughter symbolize the uncles' efforts to negate any alterations wrought by time and history in their home. Letters epitomize the effect that the passage of time and an altered perspective have on the interpretation of a message or an event, by their nature as texts that are written in one moment and then read, at a point later in time, by someone else. When the protagonist arrives at the inn near her uncles' home, she finds the undelivered letter that she herself had sent them two weeks previously,

announcing her impending arrival. She later discovers, while secretly exploring her mother's childhood bedroom, all the letters Eloísa had sent home since leaving there: "¿Cómo contestar unas cartas que ni siquiera habían sido leídas? Porque, aunque no supiera explicármelo, entre mis manos sólo había una evidencia. Unos sobres cerrados. Tan cerrados como los santuarios de Lucas o Bebo [. . .]" (54). By refusing to collude in the inherently temporal contract of sender/receiver, Lucas, Bebo and Tomás attempt to preserve the sacred closure of their atemporal space.

Their niece, on the other hand, determines to rescue her mother's words from oblivion "en las sombras de un cajón olvidado" (55), and violates the male prohibition against reading, learning and change.⁴² Upon closer examination, she realizes that, just like the letter that she herself had sent announcing her arrival, her mothers letters have been opened and re-sealed, and she suspects the nosy Lucila at the inn as the culprit in both cases. However, the niece repeats Lucila's female subversion of male-imposed silence by reading her mother's letter and re-closing it: "no me paré a pensar que acababa de sucumbir a la costumbre local: abrir y cerrar cartas" (63). Later, she suspects that Tomás might have read and re-sealed the letters, in an effective gesture of censorship and silencing denial. The protagonist also discovers the letter that she herself had sent informing her uncles of her mother's death, bound up along with Eloísa's letters in the secret

compartment “como si jamás hubiera sido recibida, como si no existiera. O tal vez--se me ocurrió de pronto--como si mi madre no hubiera muerto nunca” (60). If a letter necessarily imposes the passing of time on the communication of knowledge, the uncles prevent time from altering their world--and their image of Eloísa--by refusing to acknowledge the letters and sequestering them away in the secret archive of Eloísa’s desk.

Just like the letters left unopened and thus unread and repeated by another (or letters opened and suppressed, which seek the same effect), Lucas’s project is to write a book of recipes that can never be read by another. Lucas manipulates recipes in order to block any transmission of knowledge via the act of reading:

Nunca en el mundo se había escrito un libro como aquél, ni--y ahí radicaba su originalidad--jamás nadie podría leerlo. Obra y autor iban permanentemente unidos, formando un algo indisoluble, y a no ser que la ciencia avanzara prodigiosamente --o algo peor: las artes adivinatorias--, jamás ser humano alguno podría penetrar en ese archivo perfecto que tenía en mente y en el que las fichas aparecían ordenadas de acuerdo con diversos sistemas: alfabético, asociativo, por materias. . . Y otro, el más importante, que destruía y anulaba los anteriores. (65-66)

As with the unread letters, Lucas hopes to stonewall the passage of knowledge and power by blocking the message from any receiver. Evocative of the Derridian dictum that reading is writing, Lucas tries to preserve his own authority by preventing any reader from intruding and re-writing his text through repetition in the form of reading and interpretation. Of course, such an endeavor prevents communication itself; it produces an “algo indisoluble” in static suspension within the mind that can never be repeated or altered by another.

Although one function of repetition is to reinforce the original text, repetition also undermines the validity of the origin by copying it and replacing it, as Derrida, Irigaray, Foucault, Butler and a host of other postmodern thinkers have signaled. Lucas’s greatest fear is that he might lose his authority, both in the sense of authorship and of power, over his book:

le había llevado, a veces, a sufrir terribles pesadillas en las que aparecía su libro impreso, perfectamente encuadernado, pulcramente editado. . . y firmado por otro. Por todo ello, para prevenir el robo, el fraude, el plagio indemostrable, estaba ideando un nuevo sistema--el mismo al que antes había calificado como “el más importante”--, una puerta falsa para despistar al enemigo. Y en eso había estado toda la tarde.

Creando fichas apócrifas que invalidaran las verdaderas; caminos, atajos, pistas en fin, de una aparatosa lógica que, sin embargo, no conducían a otro lugar más que a un laberinto. (66)

This image of the labyrinth of books reiterates Borges's "La biblioteca de Babel," in which every possible book has already been written. And both recall Jameson's "prisonhouse of language" from which no one can escape (these anachronistically ordered influences are not entirely inappropriate, since Lucas's and Fernández Cubas's books suggest the coexistence and cross-pollination of different texts and periods of time).

Of course, Fernández Cubas repeats Borges's and Jameson's conviction that any hope for totalizing communication is doomed:

Y ahora era él quien temía perderse por las pistas falsas que acababa de diseñar para extraños. Caer en sus mismas redes y chocar con el espejo--porque en el laberinto había tenido la ocurrencia de colocar además algunos espejos--, y sólo después, cuando fuera ya demasiado tarde, comprender que había sido la primera víctima de su propia estrategia. (67)

If successful, Lucas's attempt to defy interpretation would result in the collapse of any communication at all; his pursuit of unrepeatable linguistic power threatens to consume him in the confusion of nonsensical codes. The interjected aside, "--porque en el laberinto había tenido la ocurrencia de

colocar además algunos espejos--" (67), suggests an ironic view (if not by the narrator then by the implicit author) of Lucas's hope to avoid repetition. For the use of mirrors and labyrinths is itself a technique that echoes the textual imagery of a host of authors who have preceded Lucas. Inevitably, Lucas's textual labyrinth of mirrors, like El columpio itself, constantly reflects and refers back to other linguistic codes whose influence he can never escape, for such is the nature of language.⁴³

Although it is impossible to get outside the recurrence of language, El columpio and the concept of history itself demonstrate that repetition is always an act, subject to the passage of time, that alters one's perspective and experience. As Brad Epps observes, "difference inheres in repetition: [. . .] the reiteration of texts, entailing as it does the reiteration of contexts, is always an alteration" (25). Perhaps the most telling repetitions in El columpio are those that illustrate this shift of perspective, of context, which brings about knowledge, understanding, and change. Having learned from her mother's unopened letters to her uncles that their relationship was not as ideal as her mother depicted, the protagonist gazes out the attic window from high in the tower and remembers her nascent arrival, with her own unread letter, two days earlier:

avanzaba observando la progresiva cercanía de un torreón que,
acudiendo a recuerdos ajenos, me empeñaba en poblar de

princesas, sarracenos y cristianos. Pero ahora, aquí, en lo alto, sólo estaba yo. Tan acalorada como hacía dos días, encaramada a la aspillera, viéndome a mí misma avanzar por el sendero polvoriento, mirando hacia el torreón [. . .]. Hubiera deseado lo imposible. Gritar desde arriba: “¡Vete! Aún estás a tiempo,” y que aquella que fui yo, hacía dos días, acatando la orden, sudando, con todo el calor del verano cayéndole a plomo sobre la cabeza, se agachara, recogiera el maletín y desandara camino. Pero la fuerza del deseo no bastaba para detener el reloj, mover las manecillas a mi antojo y engañar al tiempo. (57)

Re-living the same incident from the altered perspective imposed by time, the protagonist longs to apply her newly acquired knowledge to her past and save herself from the experience. It is a futile wish, for without the experience of time she never would have gained the knowledge that the stories told by her mother were not the only view of history; “aquella que fui yo” was different from the “yo” in the present. Understanding the power of time distinguishes the protagonist from her uncles, who persist in detaining time and thus relinquish their chance to learn and change.

As the novel’s title highlights, the image of the swing epitomizes how movement over time changes the perspective. The swing, another of Eloísa’s favorite childhood diversions, at times seems to be almost a personified force

in the novel: “Algo acababa de moverse entre los árboles [. . .]. Algo o alguien que se asomaba y se ocultaba enseguida” (43). One day, on a picnic with her uncles, the protagonist climbs on Eloísa’s swing and experiences a change of perspective:

Y de pronto fue como si reviviera una de las fotografías de mi madre. Desde el otro lado. Porque allí estaban ellos, los hermanos y el primo, y yo, de pie sobre un columpio de madera, con un traje de organdí por el que asomaban unas enaguas almidonadas, jugaba a irritarlos, a enfadarlos, a hacer valer mi condición de reina absoluta. (43-44)

The woman re-experiences the photograph that she had viewed so often, except now from the point of view of the little girl on the swing inside the picture instead of from the outside gazing inward.

Of course, a change in perspective affords distinct knowledge. The protagonist’s magical transposition indelibly alters her understanding of the scene:

Y entonces no sé cómo ocurrió. Fue como si el sol me cegara de repente, el viento me balanceara con furia y del fondo de la arboleda surgiera una voz:

Me casaré con un francés

Con un francés me casaré

Y nunca, nunca, nunca

Nunca volveré. . .

Pero no era el tono de mi madre, la dulce entonación de mi madre recordando su infancia. Sino el grito de una niña malcriada, caprichosa, tiránica. . . “Siempre serás un bruto,” oí. Y, volviendo en mí, me di cuenta de que estaba de rodillas en el suelo [. . .]. (44)

The daughter experiences her mother’s perspective in the past and realizes that her mother was not as sweet as she had recounted in her “historias.” In this scene, time is duplicitous as well as capricious, allowing for at least two possible interpretations of this incident. The uncles claim that Tomás accidentally pushed the swing too hard and his niece fell off. Alternatively, Eloísa, the transcendent child, may resent having her position on the swing usurped, so she shoves the interloper off of the swing, off of her seat of power--much the way the narrator of “En el hemisferio sur,” in a power struggle rampant with prejudices of gender, tries to devalue Clara/Sonia’s textual authority.

The latter reading of the incident with the swing posits two intersecting planes of time: the realm of the present, when the protagonist visits her uncles, and the suspended, unchanging plane of the past, wherein the child Eloísa still reigns supreme over her brothers and cousin. This

intersection of temporal planes is repeated when, at the end of the novel, Eloísa's tale of her childhood encounter with her grown-up daughter is experienced firsthand by the protagonist herself when she flees her uncles' house in the pouring rain:

[Eloísa] Vestía el traje blando de organdí y llevaba el cabello recién peinado, en tirabuzones ordenados que le caían sobre los hombros [. . .] nos encontramos frente , en el centro mismo del jardín. Muy pronto me di cuenta de que su aspecto angelical era desmentido por una mirada fuerte, impropia de una niña, y que lo que en un principio me había parecido una expresión de enfado no era más que una sonrisa desafiante, engreída. Agitaba en la mano una de aquellas cuerdas sobre las que ejercía el más absoluto dominio. Y ahora se ponía a silbar [. . .]. Un dolor agudo en la garganta, el silbido de un látigo agitado con destreza en el aire; un chapoteo, un golpe; mis manos, repentinamente vigorosas, luchando por zafarse de un terrible reptil enrollado a mi cuello; la sensación de asfixia [. . .]. (124)

This encounter, imprinted in Eloísa's narrative version as a happy dream, is seen from the daughter's perspective as something more akin to a nightmare.

On the verge of death, the daughter calls out to her mother for mercy, and the spell of suspended time seems to break:

como si hasta aquel momento me hubiera encontrado en una zona indefinible, fuera del espacio y del tiempo, de pronto mis palabras habían llenado el jardín de una extraña claridad. Sentí la garganta liberada de la presión de la cuerda y todo, al instante, se convirtió en real. Ella seguía allí, a sólo un par de metros de distancia. Pero la lluvia se deslizaba ahora por su rostro, deshacía los rizos, caía a borbotones sobre el traje vaporoso que se pegaba a su cuerpo de niña. Y ya la sonrisa, la patente arrogancia, habían dejado paso a una expresión de estupor, de sobresalto [. . .] me contemplaba como a una aparición, como a alguien venido de otro mundo. (124-25)

As usual, Fernández Cubas does not allow a clear-cut interpretation of exactly what takes place here. It is conceivable that the young Eloísa was not a tyrant at all, but “únicamente una niña” (124), and that the tyrant is the figure preserved on the anachronistic plane that interacts with the adult Lucas, Bebo and Tomás. As such, the domineering little girl could be only a male fabrication that parallels the hidden side of the Spanish woman during the Franco years. On the other hand, it is quite possible that Eloísa was a manipulative little girl whose jealous drive for control almost obliterated her own daughter. Although they may well be unreliable “narrators,” the men do divulge unsavory aspects of Eloísa’s personality. Like the biblical Eden,

this garden is the site of a betrayal that produces transformative knowledge, a knowledge that Eloísa and her brothers and cousin repressed but that her daughter cannot deny: “el olvido disfrazó con los años algo que su mente de adulta se negaba a aceptar, pero que, sin embargo, necesitaba repetir compulsivamente” (135). It is quite possible, then, that Eloísa’s “historias” reconstructed her past in a manner that was more comfortable for her to re-collect from the distance of the present.

Thus the act of narration emerges as the ultimate re-collection of past events that weaves an order and design into the fabric of history. In a duplication of her mother’s love of story-telling, the narrator re-tells and supplements her mother’s history within the context of her own story:

ahora comprendía la razón por la que [. . .] nunca pudo contarme con exactitud aquellas imágenes que tanto le habían impresionado y de las que a nadie, únicamente a mí, se había atrevido a hablar. [. . .] Pero de pronto era yo, tan reticente a escucharla, quien podía contarle paso a paso aquella terrible pesadilla que sólo el tiempo, ayudado por la desmemoria, transformaría en un hermoso, impreciso recuerdo. (135)

The narrator finds that the collision of her mother’s past with her present wrought the greatest transformation of all: the communication of

knowledge. For Eloísa, the experience brought a horrific understanding of the power she chose to wield:

Sí, ella me había reconocido en sueños. Y a través de sus ojos sorprendidos asomaba el horror ante mi grito, ante el castigo que había estado a punto de infligirme, ante lo que posiblemente podía ocurrir aún. Y, exhausta, dejaba caer la cuerda [. . .]. Intencionadamente. Previniéndome, avisándome, indicándome el peligro. (135-36)

By repeating the experience, the daughter receives the message communicated by her mother in a way that Eloísa was never able to express with her construction of history. The protagonist's story reiterates her mother's yet also tells it from a different point of view, altered by time.

Time modifies the vision of things, sometimes bringing clarity and other times confusion, according to how people bring the experience into focus. History, as the narration of time, invariably privileges certain perspectives; in doing so, it advances some stories while silencing others: "Narrative history is, then, also a narrative against narration, a narrative of restriction, silence, illiteracy, and illegibility, a narrative where some invariably narrate (for) others" (Epps 46). While exploring the influence of time on one's perspective within space, El columpio oscillates in its perspective from the present to the past and back again, to illustrate the value

of history, of change, of knowledge gained through experience. Juxtaposed with this paradigm of growth over time is the plane of frozen time, emblematic of Franco's mythification of Spain, which inhibits the forward motion through time and space that alters perspective in order to promote understanding and change. The overlapping of the past with the present may be seen, on the one hand, as a technique of the marvelous or, on the other, as a trick of the fantastic genre, wherein we cannot be sure what really happens. The protagonist herself is uncertain of the events: "¿O no había sido ella? Porque lo que sucedió a continuación fue al tiempo muy rápido y muy lento, muy claro y muy confuso" (123). Whatever "truth" we attempt to interpret from this situation is ultimately irrelevant, however, because what the protagonist experiences from this perspective radically changes *her*. Thus El columpio, like El año de Gracia, validates the necessity of a change in point of view, for all the challenges to subjectivity that any quest for change must pose.

In the end, the daughter's altered view of her mother's history transforms her view of her own history. Upon seeing the stagnation effected by her uncles' efforts to stop history, the narrator refuses to manipulate the world according to her whim, the way they and her mother created "aquel mundo imposible en que se había detenido el reloj" (133). On the bus, enroute to the train station that will take her back to France at the end of the

novel, she reads her uncles' letter to her then rips it up, exorcising herself of "otras muchas cartas, de recuerdos ajenos, de un desván con olor a cerrado [. . .]" (133). In contrast to her uncles, she has read and interpreted the letter she received, although she interpreted much more than the discourse they attempted to impose through it: "Aquellas líneas cumplían una astuta función. La de eximirles a ellos de su locura e ingresarme a mí en una categoría difusa[. . .]. Una caprichosa y temeraria sobrina que bien pudiera hallarse ahora en el fondo de un pozo" (132). Rejecting the image of her that they attempt to construct with their written discourse, she also rips up the check they sent to her:

Después miré fríamente el cheque. Podría ser simbólico, pero también tentador. Con mayor frialdad repetí la sentencia de Lucas: "El dinero te permite diseñar el mundo a tu antojo." Lo destrocé lentamente, sintiendo un placer desconocido, lanzando al campo los papeles minúsculos que una brisa terca se empeñaba en devolver al interior del coche. Y entonces sí me sentí libre. (133)

She repeats Lucas's words, but with the significant difference of altered intention, brought about by an altered perspective. Of course, repetition is inescapable, as the return of the shreds of the check into the bus whimsically suggests, but in that repetition lies the potential for liberation.

The story ends with a final repetition, when the protagonist awakens to hear the busdriver call out “;Lucila!” (136) and sees the sign for an inn outside her window. Her fear at being imprisoned in an eternal return is alleviated, however, when she sees the subtle alteration of a different surname on the inn, accompanied by the sign, “*On parle français*” (137). Symbolically, this repetition incorporates another perspective and another discourse--those of the outside, represented by France--that modify the experience of the same. The *same* does return eternally but, like Vattimo’s truth and Being, it repeats only as “what is constantly being reinterpreted, rewritten, and remade--rather than as objects endowed with permanence and stability” (xx). Since Being itself can never be accurately expressed, history is the act of reinterpreting, rewriting and remaking “being,” the identity of the people whose story it tells. This narration is always subject to the vagaries of time and perspective, always subject to change.

Post-modernity has deconstructed truth and Being as absolute metaphysical values, and as a result its only remaining recourse to them, for Vattimo, lies in “what is handed down through ‘linguistic messages from one generation to another’, as a series of texts and traces from the tradition that must always be interpreted once again” (xxxix). Hence, the need for history, the need to reconstruct Being, to answer the ontological question of who we are. If the modern view of history hinges on “progress” and “overcoming”

(Vattimo xvi), then Fernández Cubas's post-modern text repeats this idea by suggesting that time alters the perspective and thus permits learning and change. In her fictional world, however, progress and overcoming are not the product solely of linear time. For the central catalyst of the protagonist's development is her interaction with another realm that defies temporal limits, to where she regresses and repeats her mother's experience in order to achieve progress and change for herself. Linear time, then, is not overcome as much as it is undermined through reiteration. Like the swing, she moves forward only to move backward and cover the same space again, albeit always with a new perspective that is imposed by the passage of time. This oscillation, the act of repeating, is synthesized with the narrator's re-interpretation and re-writing of her mother's history. History, then, becomes a palimpsest, in which the text is re-written even as the imprint of previous versions still endure in the new, differentiated repetition. As a post-modern text, El columpio recasts the modern view of progressive and transformational history as a regression and repetition whose greatest innovation might be the deconstruction of time as a singular experience.

Conclusion:

While Fernández Cubas plunders Spain's distant past as she considers the impact of colonialism on the construction of subjectivity in her first novel,

in her second she meditates on the nature of history in general, and postwar Spanish history in particular, as the need to find difference in the repetition and re-collection of the past. Iain Chambers has noted that "Representation involves repression: some things are shown, others are hidden; some things said, others unsaid. For in every representation the object represented is initially canceled and then replaced, re-presented, in another context and language" (6). In this light, El año de Gracia repeats the literary canon, but studies what has been foreshadowed and excluded in the West's literary representation of its own centrality through its alienation of the other. El columpio, in its turn, represents a static and arcane Spain like the one depicted by Franco, yet counterposes it with a different Spain, an outside tempered by time that conveys undeniable forces of change. Thus the motif of repetition, inherent in representation, emerges as the limitation and the liberation of the contemporary subject in Fernández Cubas's two novels.

In Fernández Cubas's exploration of subjectivity, El columpio merges with the novelistic endeavor of El año de Gracia to accentuate the narrative nature of history and literature, two modes of representation that ineluctably influence identity. As constructs, her works suggest, both discourses can be *deconstructed* even as they inexorably are repeated. In these two novels the censorship and deliberate manipulation of discourse, which strive to structure "truth," underscore the edited, incomplete nature of any

representation of reality. Yet through her protagonists who are *changed* over time, Fernández Cubas ultimately stresses the importance of experience and communicating knowledge, no matter how limited, for subjective development and agency.

Crucial to both novels is the configuration of power as a central tactic in the discursive construction and subversion of subjectivity. El año de Gracia portrays the establishment of difference for the affirmation of power, as propagated in binaries such as civilization/barbarism and center/margin. El columpio then considers how authoritarian forces negate difference--of past/present, old/new--in order to uphold power and obstruct any alteration that a change in perspective might bring. Both novels suggest that power is not monolithic but mutable, repeatable, and on-going, as symbolized by the titular image of El columpio.

Implicit in the shifts of power evinced by the oscillating swing is the passing of time that alters perspective; no less significant to the transformation of identity is the change in the space of the subject, as I discuss in the next chapter in relation to Con Agatha en Estambul.

The Space of Oppositional Subjectivity

in Con Agatha en Estambul

My study in chapter 3 of Fernández Cubas's two novels explored how the subject can exercise agency, even within the tautology of re-citing the discourses that define it, by repeating those markers differently. Such difference is inherent in repetition, Fernández Cubas's works suggest, because of the altered perspective imposed on the subject by the passage of time. In the present chapter, I turn to issues of space in consideration of the process of subject formation as depicted in Con Agatha en Estambul (1994). In these stories, the characters project their identities onto their surroundings, construct their identities based on clues from their environs, or even conceive of identity itself as a space to be filled or destroyed, in accordance with the viability of the subject herself.

All the tales in Con Agatha en Estambul draw on spatial imagery as a crucial component in the oppositionality of self/other relations that shape subjectivity. In "Mundo," Fernández Cubas highlights the oppositionality between visual images of closed spaces and an open verbal text as a metaphor for self/other relations. In "La mujer de verde" the first-person narrator projects progressively decaying images of a woman dressed in green, a nemesis that she both creates and destroys; spatially, the woman in green's freedom to roam the

streets contrasts with the enclosure of the narrator in her office, first, and later in an insane asylum, to capture the tension of frustrated subjectivity. In "El lugar" the central image of space is a family burial crypt, whose dead inhabitants invert power structures and radically change the way the live narrator perceives himself. By representing chaotic difference and oppositionality, the image of place in this third story provides the opportunity for growth for the narrating subject. In the next tale, "Ausencia," the narrating subject herself represents a space of absent identity whose meaning must be (re)constructed by the narrator, for the subject's amnesia enables her to empty herself of her own identity and thus create a new self-image through language. The final story, which gives the collection its title, portrays a bored Barcelonan woman who travels to Istanbul in the hope of finding herself in an alien place. Her stay in Istanbul becomes a struggle between the logic of knowing that dominates her ordinary world and the uncertainty and curious liberty that she encounters in this "other" place. Whether restricted or open, imagined or real, the spaces of subjectivity in Con Agatha en Estambul concretize the subjects' project of constructing themselves in relation to all that surrounds them.

"Mundo":

The very title of this story focuses on the symbolic spatial image of "el mundo," a word whose standard meaning is "world" and whose antiquated

meaning is "trunk." When Carolina, the narrator, recounts her entrance into the convent as a young girl, she explains that she carried her mother's wedding dress and her own possessions in a trunk, which she calls her "mundo." This trunk is, symbolically, a closed space that serves as a metaphor for both the convent and the oppressive world at large. Despite the feminine usage associated with the trunk, its lid displays a picture composed of masculine imagery: a sailor stands with the sun on one side and a storm on the other, with his boat in the distance, waiting to embark; the picture also contains a sword and a skull, traditional symbols of the phallus and of death. Yet what most stirs Carolina is the face-to-face confrontation provoked by the sailor. This sailor positions the viewer straight ahead with his intent gaze as he holds up a picture of himself, an image that replicates exactly the very image on the lid of the trunk that Carolina sees. Thus she, as viewer, sees a sequence of infinite repetitions of the sailor, who remains enclosed in the frame and does not change (except for the shrinking size of each of his subsequent selves). By implication the viewer, positioned by the sailor's gaze, is also trapped in an imploding infinity of subjectivity to patriarchal power.

The imprisoning spaces of this picture, as well as the space within the "mundo" and the convent, reflect the controlled and subjugated status of Carolina herself. This nun, who begins the story with no voice at all, comes to

define herself within the convent by gaining and exercising her voice in relation to the other characters. Eventually, she holds a pivotal role as the key communicator amongst the nuns, and also between the nuns and the outside world. The power Carolina holds over the "other" silenced nuns parallels the privileging of text over image in the ekphrastic description of the sailor's picture. Carolina is the most powerful nun in the convent at the time she narrates her story. She attains this status by investing herself with narrative authority, through telling her narratees stories they want to hear. While Carolina has obviously advanced her own power within the system, she claims in her narration that she has no desire to leave the convent—to open it or herself up to the potential of change by outside forces. According to her own discourse, then, Carolina as abbess is not a threat to the closed nature of the status quo. At the textual level, however, Carolina's narration introduces real potential for change. Under the guise of propagating the closed structure of power in the convent, Carolina *as narrator* opens her text to permeation by other subversive voices, inviting oppositionality and potential change. Ultimately, her text is opened to the reader, the "other" who must complete the potential communication of subversion by interpreting the oppositional in her narrative.

Carolina, who has been literally "shut up" in the convent by her father and her priest because she has discovered the secret of their amorous liaisons with the maid, alters the silence of the convent as she gradually comes to find her

voice and define her identity. On her first day in the convent, Carolina is sent by the abbess, Mother Angélica, to take a last look at herself in the mirror, in order to view the self-image that will endure the rest of her life: "ladeando ligeramente el espejo, me observé con sorpresa. Era yo, claro está" (25). Since she will never be allowed to look in the mirror again, this fleeting image of a youthful self is intended to impose eternal stasis over the future *unseen* images of change in Carolina. Parallel to the mirror stage of psychoanalytic subject development, this reflection establishes the ideal image of a youthful self that will give Carolina the illusion of wholeness. This specular image highlights how representation offers, at most, a slanted and limited view of reality. By refusing to let her augment that youthful reflection with any future images, the power structure in the convent denies Carolina the opportunity to expand her vision of herself.

Shortly after seeing the image of her identity in the mirror, Carolina confirms her subjectivity verbally when she signifies herself in opposition to the priest, who brings her father's money to the convent to pay for her expenses. At this moment, she realizes that the priest's patriarchal contract has sealed her fate.

Defining herself in resistance to her religious "father" as well as to her biological father, Carolina discovers her voice: "una voz que no era mía, pero que salía de mí, empezó a hablar. Y me escuché atónita. 'Padre, yo no hice nada. . .'" (35).

When the priest rejects her pleas and condemns her to stay in the convent, Carolina is amazed to find that she possesses a "voz interior que susurra

despropósitos" (35). Eventually, she stops trying to suppress this voice and allows it free reign:

"Cerdo, cochino, puerco," murmuré. Y esta vez no fue un pensamiento de los que después deseara olvidarme. "Hueles a mierda," añadí. Y súbitamente tranquila, como si para mí empezara en aquel momento una nueva vida, cerré con toda suavidad el arca, acaricié al marino, di la vuelta a la llave y, muy despacio, muy despacio, la guardé en el bolsillo. (37)

From a psychoanalytic perspective, this description of private defiance suggests that Carolina has separated from the figure of the "father" as her "other" in order to transfer her desire onto a different object: the sailor, the keeper of the hidden secrets she whispers into the trunk. Most importantly in her development as a subject, Carolina has discovered the power of her own voice, which she can now begin to strengthen.

Once she has actively entered into the realm of language, Carolina defines her self by exercising her voice in relation to "others." With the abbess, Mother Angélica, Carolina forges a relationship based on trust, communication and a mutual passion for secret knowledge. Carolina's favored position gains her access to the mother superior's library where, in the closed space of a cabinet—a secured, compartmentalized image reminiscent of the trunk and the convent—Mother Angélica guards her books about the world under lock and key. This

relationship accords Carolina knowledge and confidence to strengthen her voice, which she will eventually use to create her own authority.

Many years later, Carolina's voice becomes even more powerful with the arrival of a mute nun named Mother Perú, who communicates by painting narrative pictures on gourds. Carolina assumes the role of interpreter of pictures and intermediary between the voiceless nun and the enclosed community of women:

Y por eso yo de nuevo tomaba la voz cantante, en mi cometido de intermediaria entre la recién llegada y la comunidad, con la autoridad que me confería el moverme a mis anchas en las estanterías del despacho de la abadesa, por mis conocimientos del país de las tres regiones, de las costumbres de ciertos conventos del mundo, de sus milagros, de sus leyendas. . . (48)

In assuming the pivotal role of interpreter, Carolina achieves a certain agency. By appropriating acceptable roles to promote forbidden and liberating communication, she finds freedom between what Paul Smith calls "the interstices of subject positions" (25). Thus Carolina is able to maneuver in the breach between the roles of submissive woman and silent nun, roles which society pre-ordained for her: "Porque lo cierto es que desde la llegada de madre Perú no parábamos de hablar. Como si su mudez irremediable nos relevara de nuestro sacrificio voluntario" (48). Carolina's voice is the key that enables

communication among the nuns. In this way, she subverts and supplants the dominant ecclesiastical discourse of silence within the convent in order to replace it with the sound of women's voices.

This subversion of silence relates to Ross Chambers's theory in Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative, which highlights narrative as a site of agency and, ultimately, as a means for extending textual agency to readers so that they can defy the limited roles that society offers them. Chambers distinguishes between acts of open resistance and of subtle oppositionality as means of reacting against oppressive power. According to his scheme, acts of overt resistance seek to invert a given power structure, but eventually propagate the same power model of oppressor and oppressed. In contrast, oppositional techniques are always carried out by the powerless, with the simple goal of surviving daily life.

The powerless employ oppositionality to gain a small measure of control in their environment, not to immediately transform the whole system of power. However, these small modifications through oppositionality can achieve gradual change, since it works "to shift desire from forms that enslave to forms that liberate, that is from the modes of desire that are produced by and in the interest of the structures of power to forms that represent a degree of release from that repression, which is simultaneously a political oppression" (Chambers xvii). Oppositionality, then, is generated *by* the system of power and works *within* that

system to effect gradual change. According to Chambers' paradigm, Carolina's subversion of the silence in the convent constitutes oppositional behavior that counters power covertly, not to change the overall system of the convent, but to survive better within it. Hence one might argue that, under the "cover" of the convent, Carolina inspires the women to change their activities so that they may better accommodate themselves. Nonetheless, I am inclined to see limitations in a totally positive, "feminist" reading of this tale, since these women do not alter the closed structure of the monolithic institution. On the contrary, Carolina's hierarchical ascent in the nunnery corresponds to her manipulation of communicative signs to reinforce the closure of power.

Within the convent, voiced and unvoiced signs coalesce in the images that Mother Perú paints on the symbolic space of the gourds. The gourd provides the space of telling stories and serves as the site of Carolina's apprenticeship as a seer of pictures and a spinner of tales. Before she can learn to tell the stories, however, Carolina must learn how to read them:

Yo fui la primera en aprender a leer. Al principio no vi más que una calabaza repleta de figuras, de dibujos. Pero la autora, paciente, muy paciente, me explicó con gestos, ayudándose ocasionalmente de la libreta, la relación entre ellos. No eran sólo dibujos, tampoco escenas aisladas, sino que allí se contaba toda una historia. (45-46)

Carolina's status as the only one who knows how to interpret the messages of the gourd endows her with even greater power as the central communicator among the nuns.

The tension between words and pictures as modes of communication provide an artistic parallel to the oppositionality between the self and other. W.J.T. Mitchell describes the ekphrastic duality of image and text as "a relation of [. . .] domination in which the 'self' is understood to be an active, speaking, seeing subject, while the 'other' is projected as a passive, seen, and (usually) silent object" (157). In its representation of an image, the verbal text privileges itself as the possessor of information necessary to explain the significance of its incomplete, visual other. The ekphrastic "overcoming of otherness" (Mitchell 156) illustrates artistically the tension between self and other that shapes the way the subject views its own identity. In "Mundo," Mother Perú is not just any other: she comes from South America, the periphery by which Spain historically defined itself as the center of power. As the author of the pictorial representations, Mother Perú confounds the convent's rites of communication and yet, paradoxically, confers greater authority upon *Carolina*, not herself. Although she is translator and not author, Carolina is the sole person with knowledge of both codes needed for communication.⁴⁴

But Carolina's authority, bolstered by her anticipation of the imminent unveiling of Mother Perú's secret gourd, which is to be a true "obra maestra" (51),

crumbles when everyone learns that both the artistic nun and her silence are a fraud. Mother Perú does have a voice, after all. The wrath of the abbess at the discovery of this deceit can rival only the fury of Carolina at her loss of power as the seer and as the privileged speaker. Significantly, this diminution of her voice—of her identity—is quickly followed by the desecration of the beautiful image of herself that she remembers from her final, youthful look in the mirror. When Carolina discovers Mother Perú secretly staring at her forbidden reflection in the looking glass, the defiant nun forces Carolina to stop observing others and confront her own true image: "Me agarró del rosario con fuerza y me obligó a inclinar la cabeza sobre el espejo. 'Mírate ya. Vieja revieja'" (63). Now it is Mother Perú who usurps power from her other by symbolizing in language the meaning of the image. The safety of the closed structure of space and identity in which Carolina operated has now been pulverized by a subversive voice from the outside that articulates the effects of the passage of time, which before had been seen by others but silenced and concealed from the self. This unsettling "other" voice of Mother Perú reveals that enclosed protection, which Carolina thought the convent offered her, is as artificial and illusory as that youthful image of herself that the mirror once reflected. Carolina is inspired to take action to improve her situation because of the shocking realization, provoked by the oppositional other, that her identity is not stable at all.

After the power of her voice has been stolen and her self image shattered, Carolina repositions herself in order to secure an angle of control. Rather than trying to change the nuns in the convent, she proposes to seize the narrative and manipulate the very people from the outside who now repress her. Carolina wrests the power first from Mother Perú by incorporating the gourd for her own use. The great "obra maestra" of Mother Perú was, in fact, a testimonial of her years of fleeing from criminals whose crime she had inadvertently witnessed. Carolina burns the gourd with Mother Perú's original images and substitutes another, of her own creation, that implicates Mother Perú as the criminal and not the innocent witness. She thus extricates herself from silence and subjugation before the angry abbess and the police who seek the impostor, by stealing Mother Perú's narrative and positioning herself as the painter of pictures and the teller of tales. In their eagerness to hear her story, the police and the abbess do not notice the switch in speaking and seeing subjects. The key to her strategy is her ability to inspire her audience's desire to hear her story: Carolina tells her tale believably using her narratee's discourse, the discourse of a police story. In this way, she recruits the power of her audience to gain power for herself. By reinvesting herself with the force of a narrative voice, Carolina establishes her own authority as the artist/narrator who can manipulate the images and unfold the tale that others desire to see and hear.

Having donned the masculine discourse of a police story as a means of satisfying the desire of her listeners and of regaining her own power, Carolina then divests herself of the limited feminine confinement of the trunk. After she acquires new authority through the telling of her tale, Carolina leaves the trunk, the former space of her self, empty and silent:

Todos los cajones estaban vacíos y abiertos, incluso los secretos, los que en otros tiempos cobijaron recuerdos y que ahora no parecían sino celdas de un convento desierto [. . .] que yo desinfectaba, fregaba, oreaba, para que no quedase nada de sus antiguos moradores. Ni tan siquiera voces, murmullos. (64-65)

She scrubs the image-inscribed trunk to expunge all traces of the subversive words she once concealed there. Indeed, her vigorous cleaning erases the mouth of the sailor on its lid, but Carolina reflects, "tal vez me gustaba más así" (64). She has no need for the that masculine image nor its designation of infinite closed spaces, for she has gained authority by manipulating patriarchal discourse for herself.

At the moment of the enunciation of her tale, Carolina is the abbess in control of the convent. All "evil" forces from the outside that threatened to penetrate the convent have been repelled or coopted. Even the menace of the cats, which one of the nuns used to kill when they invaded the convent gardens, has now been incorporated into Carolina's power structure through the

domestication of the black cat, "Nylon." Named for the postwar nylon industry that threatened to render obsolete the nuns' occupation of sewing for the community, the adopted cat Nylon symbolizes an appropriation—another form of oppositionality in Chambers's sense of the word. In short, Carolina's power seems to be secure.

As the abbess, Carolina seduces new nuns into her sequestered space with the power of her words and, apparently, seals them into the absolute, authoritative "truth" of her discourse. She dreams of attracting additional novices with her letters and of initiating them into the discursive history of the convent: "Cuando las cartas que escribo encuentren respuesta [. . .] sí podré narrar [. . .] la azarosa vida de una prófuga que se hacía llamar madre Perú, la llegada al convento de una niña con un traje de boda [. . .]. Historias y más historias. Leyendas" (71). It is significant that, once she has attained a position of power, Carolina depends on the written word instead of pictures to communicate. The written word is associated with the discourse of the law, the foundation of patriarchal structure in the Western world. Once in control, Carolina rejects communication through pictures, which she and Mother Perú once invested with a subversive function, in order to continue the patriarchal privileging of the word through the letters in which she records the history of the convent.⁴⁵ This narrative role for Carolina in relation to other characters preserves and even propagates the existing power structure: Carolina is the

abbess in charge who maintains the sequestered state of the nuns and restrains herself within the physical space of the convent.

Although Carolina has failed to open the confining walls of the convent, in fact, the space of the *text* has been opened in significant ways. This does not occur at the level of the Carolina's narratees within the story, for neither the other nuns nor the police question the authority of the stories she invents. Readers, however, can maneuver out of the position of this story's narratees, who are positioned as acquiescent objects in Carolina's gaze and only comprehend what she wants them to know. The space for such oppositional reading surfaces through the other voices and discourses that penetrate Carolina's final story—the text we read—to oppose her power by contradicting her overt message. The most forceful of these voices emerges in the closing lines of Carolina's narrative as "la voz que a veces parece surgir de las adelfas" (72), a voice that tauntingly undermines Carolina's validity. The narrator appears to assert her authority by dismissing that voice: "Pero no debemos engañarnos. La adelfa es una planta venenosa, y nada tiene de raro que el murmullo que a ratos creo apreciar también lo sea. 'Meticona, vieja, revieja. No eres más que una vieja. . .'" (72). On a narrative level, Carolina exerts her authority so that her narratee will accept her discourse, just as she convinced the police to believe her before. Nonetheless, the combined subversive voices of Mother Perú and the oleander open the textual space with the difference and opposition that they establish to Carolina's

profession of her own pious innocence. The challenge here is for readers to move out of the position of the narratee, who passively accepts Carolina's admonishments, and maneuver into the position of interpreting subject, who reads her discourse in the context of the entire text.

This story's representation of misinterpretations and "better" interpretations of texts emphasizes the power in the act of interpreting well, the power of moving out of the position of object in order to see other perspectives as an empowered subject. Both visual and verbal representations are proffered in "Mundo" as a training ground for interpretation, establishing a self-other relation that reflects the tension between Carolina and the "others" in the fictional world, as well as that of narrator/narratee, and author/reader. According to Mitchell, the key to finding meaning in the ekphrastic relation of self versus the other is to consider *why* they are given their respective functions: "*why* does it matter how words and images are juxtaposed, blended, or separated? [*italics mine*]" (91). In the case of "Mundo," Carolina as protagonist uses images to communicate when all the nuns are silenced, in order to gain the power of voice. Lest readers privilege pictures as a pure, incorruptible means of communication, however, Fernández Cubas also shows how Carolina uses images to falsely condemn Mother Perú to imprisonment and possible death, in order to elevate herself to power.

Once she dominates within the convent, Carolina relies on the written word in her letters –the logos– to disseminate her power to "other" nuns, present and future. The very narration that we read might seem to be an act of monolithic control; nonetheless, the many verbal and visual representations in this story underscore the unstable nature of the communicative act. For interpretations can be inverted, based on how the self constructs the message and how the object perceives the meaning. Such elastic constructions and deconstructions of meaning point to the interstices through which oppositionality can penetrate any discourse of power. When it is their turn to interpret, readers might see that the existence of the subversive voices of the oleander and of Mother Perú indicate that the "truth" presented by this narrator is not the only "truth" to be told. By interpreting the message of the text differently than the way the narrator attempts to impose, readers ultimately act as the seeing subject, the oppositional other that fulfills the signification of the story as an open text.

In "Mundo," ekphrasis serves as a metaphor of social practice, in order "to expose the social structure of representation as an activity and a relationship of power/knowledge/desire" (Mitchell 164). By exploring the otherness of ekphrasis and subject formation, Fernández Cubas demonstrates the importance of embracing difference and learning from the information it gives us about ourselves. Furthermore, she engages artistic representation and interpretation as

a key site where such dialectical relations can be played out, to influence readerly desire. The series of diegetic narratees who acquiesce to the discourse of power offered by their narrators presents a self-reflexive illumination of the narrative act as *discourse*. By drawing her readers into that relationship, Fernández Cubas positions artistic representations as dynamic players in the process of social change. Through her oppositionality in "Mundo," Carolina, as narrator, establishes a new textual image based not on the paradigm of the masculine sailor –one of imploding closures of the self– but one that is open to the difference and danger of opposition. To fulfill this potential for openness and change, readers must project the oppositional image that a text such as Carolina's demands for its signification. In doing so, readers convert the text into *their* object of signification, as a means of transforming themselves. Through the act of interpretation, then, images and texts can be seen as the ultimate "other" that defines, undermines, and instigates readers to change.

"La mujer de verde":

If the trunk serves as the central image of space and identity in "Mundo," then the woman in green of "La mujer de verde" becomes the depository in which the nameless, first-person narrator invests *her* identity in the second story of the collection. This tale is the autodiegetic account of a modern, professional woman who desperately fights to define her identity amid the various subject

positions which society offers her. The narrator clutches at the proffered social roles of executive, caregiver, lover, anorexic, and Cinderella figure. She fails to appropriately fulfill these roles, however, and she lashes out violently to defend herself from the menace of a perfection that she will never achieve. The "woman in green" of the title is a hallucinatory image that the narrator obsessively describes and inscribes in her text.

This story explores the various socio-cultural identities or interpellations, to use Althusser's term, that define and limit the subject—particularly woman—in contemporary Western society. The narrative also plays out the ways in which the subject projects her self onto an other as a means of shaping her own identity. Finally, Fernández Cubas continues to incite her readers to question pre-defined subject positions by stationing her readers to see through the perspective of this narrator. While the narrator appears to be more or less normal at the beginning, her focalizing view does not entirely mask the horrifying reality of her actions as they unfold in her narration. Once readers grasp the shocking "truth" behind the narrator's distorted account of her own behavior, they recognize that she is insane. Nonetheless, the multiple references to the word "locura" in the narration and the impossibility of complying with the subject positions pre-ordained for this woman introduce a subtle questioning of what "locura" really means. The realization that the narrator is insane forces readers to change their perception of the story and re-interpret it as the experience of a madwoman who eternally re-

lives it in her present-tense narrative. Ultimately, this unsettling distortion of perspectives causes readers to reconsider the adequacy of the subject positions that we in society are trained to assume and impose upon one other.

In presenting the formation of the subject, "La mujer de verde" displays the many social roles extended to the "liberated" woman in today's society. According to her own account, the narrator is an important executive who suffers from obsessions with food (78)—she forgoes food and yet desperately craves it to fill up the emptiness she feels inside her svelte physique. The narrator also depicts herself as the secret lover of Eduardo, her already married boss who recently has been transferred to Rome. However, none of the other characters views her as his lover, not even Eduardo himself:

[Eduardo] no piensa en mí como en una amante, a pesar de que ésa es la palabra que mejor define nuestra situación [. . .]. Para los comensales no soy más que la antigua compañera de estudios del jefe, su brazo derecho. Para su mujer también. Y así quiero que sigan creyéndolo. Además, tengo el papel bien aprendido. (79)

Another "role" she plays for Eduardo is that of caregiver for the office employees: she buys their personalized Christmas gifts for the boss while giving him all the credit. Ever conscious of the image that she presents to others, the narrator circumspectly tries to fit in with her designated subject positions.

As she struggles to comply with these feminine roles, the narrator increasingly obsesses with her secretary, Dina Dachs, whom she perceives as the consummate modern woman. At first the narrator describes her as average, but soon must admit that certain qualities distinguish her employee as remarkable: "Dina Dachs es una chica como tantas otras. Me lo digo por la mañana, lo repito por la tarde [. . . pero hay] una ligera ventaja a favor de Dina. Tres idiomas a la perfección, excelentes referencias, una notable habilidad a la hora de rellenar el cuestionario de casa" (80-81). In time, she imagines Dina as the exotic embodiment of a virtual star: "Pienso en un pseudónimo, en un nombre artístico, en DINA DACHS anunciado en grandes caracteres en un teatro de variedades [. . .]" (81). While Dina is capable and attractive, it seems odd—at least in the beginning—that this secretary should pose a threat to her more powerful executive boss.

The immediate stimulus for the narrator's fixation on Dina early in the story is that she believes she has seen her secretary, dressed in a green suit with a purple necklace, in the street. The woman's strange expression catches the protagonist's eye: "la mujer, la desconocida tras la que acabo de correr en la calle, mostraba en su rostro las huellas de toda una vida, el sufrimiento, una mirada enigmática y fría que ni siquiera alteró una sola vez, a pesar de mis llamadas" (76). The narrator is haunted by the woman's gaze and wants to help her, but when she confronts Dina about their encounter, the secretary insists that she is

not the woman in the street. The narrator sees the woman in green again one evening reflected in a three-sided mirror in a restaurant bathroom: "ella, una sombra verde, pasando como una exhalación por el espejo" (80). This fleeting reflection of distraught perfection confounds and disquiets the narrator because she cannot define the identity of this woman.

In the subsequent weeks, the protagonist repeatedly sees the woman in green, but none of the other characters in the story notices her. She becomes convinced that the woman, who literally crumbles and deconstructs before her eyes, summons her for help: "Allí abajo está la mujer [. . .]. Sorteando los coches como por milagro. Con el brazo alzado, siempre hacia mí. El deterioro es patético. Los restos del traje verde dejan su pecho al descubierto y, repentinamente, su forma de andar se convierte en tambaleante, insegura, grotesca" (87). Thus, even the lovely woman in green is destroyed by a life in the city that is "inhumana, cruel, despiadada" (87); exhausted by what she has glimpsed, the protagonist leaves work early and takes a pill to calm herself.

The woman in green may be seen to function as the ideal other for the narrator, embodying the impossible realization and eventual doom of the successful executive, the nurturing caregiver and the skilled lover, all facets of the "perfect woman." It is symbolic that the woman wears green, of course, evocative of youth, sexuality, and fertility. Since these are precisely the qualities of vibrant womanhood that are lacking in the narrator's own life, it is also

appropriate that green signals envy. In "La mujer de verde," the narrator struggles to conform to the specter of the social construct of woman, but discovers it to be a mythical and unattainable ideal. She convinces herself that Dina Dachs and the woman in green are one and the same person; as a result, both function simultaneously as the "other" projection of herself—the lure and the menace of the ideal woman.

Emblematic of this displacement of idealism and failure onto the other is the intertext of the Cinderella fairytale in this story. The narrator frequently mentions her frustration with not fitting into shoes: "Ninguno de los dos pares de zapatos se ajusta a mis medidas. Unos me quedan demasiado estrechos, me oprimen. Para soportarlos debo contraer los dedos en forma de piña. Con los otros me ocurre justamente lo contrario" (77). This passage recalls the ugly, wicked stepsisters who are too ungainly to squeeze into Cinderella's petite glass slipper and who are spurned by the desired prince as a result. Just as Cinderella's slipper did not fit the stepsisters, the role of the perfect woman that has been mythically constructed by society is unsuitable for the protagonist of "La mujer de verde." Frustrated by her own inferiority in contrast with her secretary's dexterity, she projects the ideal of Cinderella-like perfection onto the woman in green and then watches its destruction. This modern Cinderella's deterioration is finished off, for the narrator's perspective, when the woman in green never recovers her dainty green pump after it falls off her foot: "distingo

una mancha verde en uno de los pies, sólo en uno, y enseguida comprendo su ocasional cojera. El otro zapato ha quedado olvidado en el bordillo de la acera. Pero nadie lo recoge" (87). When this Cinderella loses her slipper, it symbolizes that the fairy tale *cannot* come true in the modern age (if indeed it ever could). Limping around with no one bothering to rescue her, the ideal woman has degenerated into a literal misfit.

Even as her psyche struggles with her shortcomings as a modern woman, the protagonist seeks to conform to the situation by taking sleeping pills. Hoping to obliterate the stress of work and the racket caused by her neighbors at home, she frequently resorts to the drugs: "Píldoras para dormir. Ahí estaba el remedio. Un sueño artificial que me ha repuesto de tantos días de agitación y cansancio. Ahora empiezo a ver las cosas de otra manera" (89). These sedatives serve as a self-regulating mechanism that reflects Althusser's assessment that "the vast majority of (good) subjects work all right 'all by themselves'" (181). Good subjects find a way to tolerate their subject positions, assuming that there are no other positions possible. The artificial sleep induced by the pills changes the narrator's way of seeing things; she can now accept that she merely suffered a temporary lapse and that she is able to fulfill the role of the accomplished, contented woman: "Pero ahora estoy contenta. Por primera vez en tantos días me siento alegre y me sorprende coreando un villancico que escape un altavoz" (90).

Thus the sleeping pills represent the subject's efforts to hold its proper place in compliance with the dictates of society.

The drug-induced euphoria is fleeting, however, for the protagonist soon glimpses and then overtakes the green-clad woman in the street, only to discover that she now looks like a walking corpse. Confronted with putrefaction as the hidden face of perfection, the speaker realizes that her ideal secretary is fated to become this decrepit phantasm: "escucho por primera vez en mi vida una voz que surge de algún lugar de mí misma. Dina, aunque tal vez no haya muerto aún, está muerta. La mujer de verde es Dina muerta" (91). Despite her struggle, via the sleeping pills, to make life look "normal" the narrator cannot veil the apparition of doom that she repeatedly confronts.

The narrator's foreboding of condemnation emerges not only in her relationships with "other" women—her secretary, the woman in green—but also in the spaces she associates with them. Early in the story, she tries to pinpoint the woman in green's reflection in the space of a mirror in order to identify her:

Yo, secándome la cara con la toalla de papel, jugando
mecánicamente con las posibilidades de un espejo de tres caras,
comprobando mi peinado, mi perfil, y ella, una sombra verde,
pasando como una exhalación por el espejo. Rectifico la posición
de las lunas, las abro, las cierro y, atónita aún, logro aprisionarla
por unos segundos. La mujer está allí. Detrás de mí, junto a mí, no

lo sé muy bien. Me vuelvo enseguida, pero sólo acierto a sorprender el vaivén de la puerta. (80)

This encounter unsettles the narrator because the woman in green eludes entrapment in a single space, just as her identity remains uncertain and undefined. As the story progresses, the woman in green comes to occupy other, more tangible spaces that evoke a sense of alienation, futility and disintegration: "He asistido a su proceso de descomposición, a sus apariciones imposibles en calles concurridas, en lunas de espejos, en callejones sin salida" (91). The woman in green is seen freely roaming the streets, yet the commotion of the traffic and the crowd becomes so menacing that it nearly kills her. Ultimately, those uncaring "calles concurridas" lead to a "callejón sin salida," a veritable dead end where the woman's face bears a grimace of death. Thus the fate of the modern woman is tied to the degenerative and increasingly restrictive places she occupies. The space of this subject, while ostensibly elusive or even unbounded, ultimately shrinks to a place of death.

If overwhelming streets and deceptive mirrors are the spaces of the woman in green, the narrator's own identity as a subject is placed within the closed spaces of her office, her apartment where she is at the mercy of noisy neighbors, or the shoestores where she futilely searches for her proper size. Even when the narrator describes herself on the street—a space potentially associated with freedom—she is only there to carry out the role of someone else as she buys

Eduardo's Christmas presents for his employees. Moreover, when the protagonist tries to exert control over her secretary, she does so by overloading her with work to keep her shut up in the office as long as possible (85). In the narrator's perception of female subjectivity, then, any and every space imposes imprisonment and eventual death for women: "Pobre Dina Dachs. Encerrada en su despacho, regresando a su piso, paseando por la calle. Porque Dina, se encuentre donde se encuentre en estos momentos, ignora todavía que está muerta desde hace mucho tiempo" (91). The spaces that invariably contain the women in this story, just like the subject positions that society ordains for them, all prove to be limiting and ultimately lethal.

Believing herself destined to warn Dina of her impending fate, the protagonist seeks out her secretary in her office on Christmas Eve. She discovers Dina dressed for a party in a green silk suit but without the purple necklace of the vision. When Dina rejects all exhortations not to go out, the narrator physically tries to force her to acquiesce:

Ignoro si enloquezco u obedezco la voz del destino. Porque la zarandeo. Y ella se resiste. . . Está asustada, no atiende a razones. Por eso yo, firmemente decidida, no tengo más remedio que inmovilizarla, revelarle la terrible verdad, decirle gimiendo: "Está usted muerta. ¿No lo comprende aún? ¡Está muerta!" Pero Dina no ofrece ya resistencia. Sus ojos me miran redondeados por el

espanto y su cuerpo se desliza junto al mío hasta caer al suelo,
impotente, aterrorizada. (96)

The narrator envisions herself as the one who must warn Dina that the nature of her subjectivity finally places her in the position of inescapable death.

The argument I have traced thus far, based on the narrator's own discourse about her life, is only one interpretation—one of several possible reflections offered by the mirror of the text. This angle can be displaced by focusing on certain contradictions and chronological inconsistencies in the story. Towards the end of this present-tense narrative, we suddenly encounter a future-tense prolepsis which suggests that, in fact, *Dina Dach*s was the lover of Eduardo and that the narrator is not in the place where she pretends to be. The narrator states,

oiré rumores, pasos, sentiré frío[. . .]. *Querido Eduardo*. . . Palabras que recuerdo bien porque son de Dina [. . .]. Frases absurdas, ridículas, obscenas. Promesas de amor entremezcladas con ruidos de los vecinos del piso de arriba arrastrando muebles, un hombre con bata blanca diciéndome: "Está usted agotada. Seréense." (96-97)

Noisy "neighbors" all around, a man in a white robe urging her to calm down, all those references to taking pills. . . At this point, textual evidence displaces the speaking subject, from her office or apartment, into an insane asylum or hospital.

What was just read as the somewhat reliable narration of a stressed-out executive now becomes a radically different tale. A re-interpretation of the entire narration, in light of the speaker's insanity, construes the text as the narrator's distorted mental experience of eternally re-living in the present the events that precipitated her incarceration in the madhouse, the ultimate closed space. The speaker can project what will happen two days in the "future" because it actually happened to her in the past. In the narrator's mind, past and future converge and collapse into a heinous and everlasting present.

This knowledge alters readers' perspectives of the tale and re-replaces the earlier interpretation. While the narrator's focalization of her Christmas Eve confrontation with her secretary depicted Dina as wide-eyed in terror, we may now surmise that, in fact, the secretary's eyes were popping out of her head from the force of strangulation. The narrator choked Dina in order to create the "purple necklace" that she saw around the neck of the woman in green: "observo un cerco amoratado en torno a su garganta y comprendo con frialdad que no le falta nada. 'Todavía es pronto,' digo en voz alta a pesar de que nadie pueda escucharme. 'Pero mañana, pasado mañana, será un collar violeta'" (98). By suturing her secretary's identity in the present to that of the woman in green in the future, the narrator would destroy the specter of unattainability that previously was the bane of her self-image.

Despite the interpretive transformation precipitated by readers' suspicion of the protagonist's insanity, the apparent "normality" of this narrator throughout much of the text implicitly questions of the very concept of insanity. Re-reading the text, they notice the changeable, slippery usage of the word "locura." For instance, before the speaker's insanity becomes apparent, she reflects at one point that "en el mes de diciembre es una auténtica locura mantener la ventana abierta" (86). Later on, after the sleeping pills have helped the narrator redeem her self-image so that she can laugh in relief to herself, she reflects, "Debo de aparecer loca" (90). Only retrospectively do readers realize that she really *may be* "crazy" when she utters these words. Such fluid supplementations of signification of the word "locura" subtly, almost playfully, question the socio-cultural structuring of meaning. Isn't it "crazy" to take pills to help one adjust to imprisoning social roles that are abhorrently inappropriate for the individual? "Locura" as a fixed concept is further undermined at the end of the story when the narrator presents insanity as Dina perceives it: "Dina, en el suelo, con los mismos ojos desorbitados por el terror, por el espanto, por lo que ella ha debido de creer la visión de la locura" (98). Seeing her own view as the "normal" one, the narrator emphasizes the superiority of her perspective to Dina's. Readers, however, have a third perspective: they realize that Dina does not see anything at all because she is dead.⁴⁶ In the end, insanity can be viewed almost quixotically as a concept that is "subjective" and changeable, according to one's point of view.

The act of murdering Dina, as a manifestation of the narrator's resistance to interpellation, is notably precipitated by the emergence of a new voice that speaks to the narrator. This voice defines itself in opposition to reason: "Me olvido de los dictados de la razón, esa razón que se ha revelado inútil y escucho por primera vez en mi vida una voz que surge de algún lugar de mí misma" (91). As opposed to reason, however, is this necessarily the voice of insanity? The narrator insists that "la razón" is "esa razón que se ha revelado inútil"—that reason that tries to define her according to a preordained, impossible subjectivity. Must a defiance of what is the inscribed rational be defined oppositionally as insanity? The narrator sees it instead as "la voz del destino" (96). This voice of resistance enables her to seek action, empowerment and an identity separate from the subject position that she associates with Dina and the woman in green. Yet the protagonist's violent attempt to radically defy the system through resistance ultimately fails in that it "repeats the methods of power in overcoming it" (Chambers xv). Just as society pre-establishes subject positions for women, the protagonist forces Dina to meld with her already envisioned image of the woman in green. Although her voice would speak otherwise, it fails to surpass the all-or-nothing power plays that structure patriarchal discourse.

Nonetheless, as in "Mundo," Fernández Cubas invokes a viable paradigm of oppositionality, not resistance, at the extradiegetic level of "La mujer de

verde." At this level of readerly interpretation, the text works oppositionally to modify readerly desire:

Oppositionality seeks, that is, to shift desire from forms that enslave to forms that liberate, that is from the modes of desire that are produced by and in the interest of the structures of power to forms that represent a degree of release from that repression, which is simultaneously a political oppression. (Chambers xvii)

By positing multiple interpretations at the textual level, "La mujer de verde" oppositionally instigates readers to change perspectives and subject positions—not so they can repress others, but so they embrace the liberation of agency. Paul Smith defines agency as a "form of subjectivity where, by virtue of the contradictions and disturbances in and among subject-positions, the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressure is allowed for" (xxxv).⁴⁷ The infinite slipping among subject positions allows the human agent to be ultimately irrepressible.

Thus, "La mujer de verde" displaces the narrating subject from a position of authority but, more importantly, it displaces the reading subject out of a single point of view and into the agency of interpreting differently. If Cinderella's slipper evokes restrictive subject positions, and sleeping pills represent acquiescence to them, then the image of the three-sided mirror in "La mujer de verde" serves as the metaphor for agency in this story. Only by playing with the

multiple perspectives provided by the three wings of the mirror could the protagonist glimpse the woman in green. Similarly, readers are placed before the mirror of the text, and must change their perspectives to capture the referent they seek. Yet each new perspective infinitely refracts off the others, so that it is never possible to definitively secure the original referent—the entire “truth” of the story. Always enticing us to search for more, Fernández Cubas’s text opens further with each perspective overlaid upon it and defies the closure of a single interpretation. Ultimately, the mirror of the text reflects multiple interpretations. Its displacement of the speaking subject ultimately created a plethora of subject positions that embody the potential of readers’ own agency.

“El lugar”:

Such a vertiginous array of subject positions, evoked by the three-way mirror in “La mujer de verde,” can produce a terrible uncertainty as to which role to embrace. This is expressed through the motif of finding one’s place in “El lugar,” the third story of Con Agatha en Estambul, which foregrounds space as what structures subject positions. Here a nameless male narrator recounts retrospectively the deep-seated anxiety of his wife, Clarisa, to find her own “place.” In her life she found her place in the subject position as his wife, a family role that she hoped to extend past death by being interred in his family pantheon. However, after the death of his wife the speaker begins to commune

with her in his dreams and discovers that she holds a new place in the pantheon, which is a world guided by structures completely different from the logic of his world. Rooted in his dreaming unconscious yet taking on a life of its own, this world of death abounds with drives and power that radically diverge from what the narrator expects.

Of all the stories in the collection, this one most prominently highlights the connection between the subject and the space that establishes its constitutive limits. As the title and the character Clarisa emphasize, the structure of space establishes the borders that constitute the subject they enclose. Nonetheless, the immersion into an “other” world drastically alters both husband and wife’s perception of absolutist power and human relations. While rigid binaries delineate subject/object relations in life, the very act of crossing the border to the other side challenges the structure by which power and the subject are conceptually defined by patriarchy. Moreover, as the protagonist and his wife discover, the excluded space of death defines its subjects according to radically different rules.

As Mary Lee Bretz has indicated in her analysis of another Fernández Cubas story, “Los altillos de Brumal,” the author’s imagery at times seems to lend itself to Julia Kristeva’s paradigm of the semiotic and the symbolic orders in psychoanalytic development. According to this model, before the subject is constituted by its entry into language and the phallic structure of the symbolic

order, it pre-exists in the fluid and dynamic drives of the semiotic. This space of the unconscious is the pre-linguistic fount of creativity that precedes gender differentiation. For Kristeva, the rigid restrictions of the symbolic can be modified by pulverizing it with influences from the semiotic. In a parallel way, the narrator of "El lugar" discovers a greater flexibility and agency as a result of his liminal experience with the world of his unconscious. Fernández Cubas's other world radically alters the narrator's perception of power, control, and human relations, and provokes him to take on "feminine" as well as "masculine" qualities in his being. Thus the text ultimately collapses absolute distinctions initially established to divide life (the symbolic order) and death (the semiotic order). In the end, the continuous flux of the self-defining process within spatial relationships in this story reveals that "nada es definitivo" (149), for to gain any insight at all into the structuring of the subject is to focus on the process of its inversion, its agency, and its *search* for a space. By interrogating the oppositional relations by which space is defined, on a textual level this story engages subjectivity as a process of ongoing spatial definition and deconstruction.

The story of the search for a space begins with Clarisa who believes she has found her place in life by being a housewife. Her husband, the narrator, recalls his consternation when he observed her newlywed ecstasy at blending her identity with the surroundings in their home: "Nunca la había visto así. Con los ojos entornadas, emitiendo aquel murmullo de complacencia. No se sabía

dónde acababa su vestido y empezaba el sillón[. . .]. Tuve la impresión de que Clarisa se había confundido con su entorno" (102). According to the narrator's representation of the events, his wife's identification with the home—her total fusion with the home—is her decision, not his. Clarisa pronounces that "Aquí está mi sitio" (103) and soon abandons her university studies to take care of her husband and home even though, the narrator reports, he did not want her to do so.

Clarisa obsesses with identifying herself according to the space that encloses her. For this woman, the word "place" becomes the discursive conjuration of a replete identity that excludes uncertainty and lack:

El *lugar*, para Clarisa, era algo semejante a un talismán, un amuleto; la palabra mágica en la que se concretaba el secreto de la felicidad en el mundo. A veces era sinónimo de "sitio"; otras no. Acudía con frecuencia a una retahíla de frases hechas que, en su boca, parecían de pronto cargadas de significado, contundentes, definitivas. Encontrar el lugar, estar en su lugar, poner en su lugar, hallarse fuera de lugar. . . No había inocencia en su voz. Lejos del lugar—en sentido espacial o en cualquier otro sentido—se hallaba el abismo, las arenas movedizas, la inconcreción, el desasosiego. (105-06)

While she is alive, Clarisa searches for her place in order to stave off the uncertainty of undefined subjectivity. She defines her place in relation to the masculine center, her husband. Indeed, the house and her husband *become* her space, so that she holds no separate identity: "Su lugar éramos la casa y yo, su marido" (106). Once she has attained her place, the narrator asserts, Clarisa does not want to alter it for anything.

Clarisa's greatest fear is that death will rupture the security of her fixed, enclosed identity, especially when she visits the space of death, the pantheon of her husband's family. After the narrator recounts the legends of his formidable Aunt Ricarda, who is buried in the pantheon, Clarisa cannot escape the haunting thought that this is an alien space: "Ayer, de repente—dijo [. . .]—, me imaginé muerta, entrando en un panteón repleto de desconocidos, como una intrusa. . . Ya sé que es una tontería. Pero me vi desarmada, sola. . . Un volver a empezar, ¿entiendes?" (124). When his wife dies suddenly of an illness, the protagonist hides in her casket special gifts and former possessions of his dead family members already encased in the pantheon as peace offerings to ensure Clarisa's acceptance in the new place.

The pantheon appears to be a closed, compartmentalized space shut off from the rest of the world. The narrator manages to transgress its border by crossing the space between this world and the next in his dreams. Immersed in his unconscious, he repeatedly meets his late wife and advises her on how to get

by in her new world. One night, when he reminds her to curry Aunt Ricarda's favor with the gifts he enclosed in her casket, Clarisa informs him that his aunt, who had been the wealthy tyrant of a Cuban plantation and of their entire family, is only the maid within the pantheon.⁴⁸ This unexpected information signals that the husband's dreams—and his wife—have spun out of his control: "Era la primera vez que el sueño se desmandaba, cobraba vida propia y lograba sorprenderme. Hasta entonces—y sólo ahora me daba cuenta—Clarisa se había limitado a pronunciar frases esperadas, plausibles, tópicas [. . .] que posiblemente sólo mi saber inconsciente ponía en su boca" (137). The narrator can no longer pretend that his nightly conversations are mere fabrications and he finds himself fascinated by the passage that his unconscious opens into a completely new world with an altered vision of life.

As a space accessed by means of the unconscious and ruled by an order completely different than that of the phallic discursive society to which the narrator is accustomed, Fernández Cubas's oppositional world of the pantheon parallels the structure of Kristeva's semiotic chora. For Kristeva, the semiotic chora occupies the unconscious prior to subjective structuration imposed by language: "The *chora* is a modality of signifiante in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object" (Revolution 26). Not obeying the laws of the symbolic order and language, the semiotic has its own regulating process to control the energy and drives that charge its space. Even after the

individual becomes constituted as a subject in the symbolic order of language, the innate drives and impulses still electrify the semiotic and mediate with the symbolic through dreams. For Kristeva, this constant flux of the unconscious keeps the "*sujet en proces*": "The theory of the subject proposed by the theory of the unconscious allows us to read in this rhythmic space of the chora, which has no thesis and no position, the process by which signifiante is constituted" (Revolution 26). The unconscious points to the continuous, dynamic formation of the subject and, as a process, it inherently enables the formation to be altered. If the forces of the semiotic can penetrate the discursive, subjectifying structures imposed by the symbolic order, they can introduce change and, in effect, agency. The narrator's access through dreams to the pantheon might be viewed as a reverse journey from the symbolic to the semiotic, one that will change his identification as a subject.

Just as the force of the semiotic far surpasses its physical enclosure within the brain, so do the happenings of the pantheon incarnate a power that extends vastly beyond the physical limits of its space. The deceased Clarisa tries to express this supercession of space to her husband:

El panteón, por otra parte —*la casa*, decía ella— era mucho más espacioso de lo que pudiera aparentar desde fuera, y, aunque no se iba a molestar en enumerarme las dependencias—le faltaban las palabras para nombrar lo que hasta hacía poco desconocía y,

además, estaba casi segura de que yo no podría comprenderla—,
me quería enterar únicamente de que había sitio de sobras. (138)

Clarisa's inability to describe accurately the world of the pantheon reflects that, although subjects can perceive the semiotic retrospectively through the symbolic structuration of language, their speech can never really define the semiotic because it is pre-linguistic. Moreover, as a space that extends beyond its own limitations, the pantheon quintessentially figures the act of border-crossing.

The very act of border-crossing, achieved in this story primarily by Clarisa, calls into question the way one frontier contours the boundary of all that it is not. Thus, in its embodiment of one pole of logic, the pantheon contradicts the rules that order the narrator's patriarchal world. Just as Kristeva's paradigm opposes the feminine semiotic to the masculine symbolic, the domain of the dead in "El lugar" inverts the hierarchies that govern the realm of life. Thus, people who possessed qualities of aggression and exerted overt control when they were alive hold positions of servitude in the pantheon. The father's side of the narrator's family, the Roig-Miró, was notorious for its tyrannical bad temper: "Ricarda, al igual que el abuelo, al igual que mi padre, era una Roig-Miró y ese apellido, durante mucho tiempo, significó codicia, soberbia, un carácter irascible y un compulsivo deseo de fastidiar al prójimo" (113). In contrast, his mother's lineage, the Miró-Miró, was "una gente sencilla y bondadosa" (114). However,

the dead Clarisa reveals that in the pantheon Ricarda is the maid and the formerly meek Miró-Miró "son los peores" (139).

While the semiotic is connected with the feminine because of its association with the child's union with the mother and its opposition to the phallic structure of the symbolic, the pantheon similarly bestows greater power on those who are not trained in the tyrannical tactics of patriarchal force. Thus power is still an issue in the pantheon, it simply inverts the rules of patriarchal logic. To the alarm of the narrator, the pantheon completely transforms his wife's subjectivity and elevates her to a position of power. Clarisa's growing strength manifests itself in her manipulation of her own voice: "Pero ahora Clarisa hablaba con voz propia, o, lo que era peor, no parecía demasiado inclinada a hablar" (140). Whereas the symbolic order relies on discourse to wield its power, the semiotic order makes use of other tactics such as silence, negation and rejection to manifest itself within and distinguish itself from phallic language. Hence Clarisa's silence is the most disturbing indication to her husband that, since she is in a realm he doesn't understand, she is beyond his control.

Wielding her voice with greater and greater strength, Clarisa slips farther from her husband's grasp. As the object of the man's desire becomes more distant, her beauty and desirability intensify:

Estaba bella, espectacularmente bella. El abatimiento había desaparecido de su rostro y se la veía feliz, luminosa, evolucionando entre unas sombras que a ratos se interponían entre nosotros, alejaban su imagen, se erigían en una barrera que yo intentaba por todos los medios franquear [. . .]. Era una voz con eco. Una voz—se me ocurrió en el sueño—de *ultratumba*. (142)

Clarisa's position of power over her husband is undeniable when she appropriates his empty discourse, which he had formerly used to calm her, to pacify his fears: "No tienes por qué preocuparte" (142). Then, after announcing to her husband that the powerful Miró-Miró faction has been subdued, she chills him by raising her voice in the otherworldly sound of raucous laughter: "Enseguida aquella mueca, que yo había creído sonrisa, dejó paso a unas carcajadas sonoras, estridentes. Unas carcajadas que por unos instantes se mezclaron con el eco metálico de su voz y me produjeron un profundo desasosiego" (142-3). The woman's mirth echoes Grock's laughter at the paradox of sameness/difference in El año de Gracia, wherein each image of repetition conceals otherness and each manifestation of difference conceals similarity. Clarisa's manipulation of her voice and her silence marks her rise to power in the world of the pantheon and reveals that her subjectivity, no longer dependent upon her husband for signification, has evolved past the point of his control.

With this incursion into the semiotic, the power relationship has been inverted so that now it is the husband who depends solely upon his wife as the object of his signification, a process crucial to his subjectivity since he is still rooted in the symbolic order. Clarisa's posthumous transformation accentuates the limitations of the patriarchal structure that dominates the protagonist's. Prompted immediately after his wife's death to augment his masculine nature with experiences associated with the womanly, the narrator seeks out the feminine spaces of the market and the notions store to purchase gifts that will facilitate her entry into the pantheon. The disconcerting experience of losing his power over Clarisa in death makes the narrator realize how much used to control her:

recordaba con nostalgia sus primeras apariciones, cuando era apenas una sombra llena de dudas y yo podía aún aconsejarla desde mi mundo. Porque entonces, con una sorprendente habilidad sobre la que no me hacía demasiadas preguntas, yo sabía cómo retenerla, aprisionarla, retomar el hilo del sueño una, dos, hasta varias veces en la misma noche. Bastaba con llamarla, pronunciar su nombre y ella, obediente, acudía a la cita. (140)

This recognition belies his former depiction of his marital relationship as one entirely chosen and preferred by his wife; readers can never know how much of her dependency Clarisa chose for herself, since her life is filtered through her

husband's perspective. Importantly, the narrator discovers that his overt methods of domination are ineffectual on the other side of the divide.

The inversion of masculine/feminine power in the pantheon causes the narrator to re-assess the way the gender dynamic functions in his own world. The protagonist comes to suspect that his mother, whom he always considered to be meekly subservient to his father, was the one who ultimately exercised control in his family:

Mi padre era un ser distante, un auténtico capitán de barco con el que nunca tuve la menor intimidad ya que mi madre se encargó siempre de hacerme llegar sus órdenes, de convertirse en sumisa intermediaria entre el capitán y el grumete. O, quizá, no había tales órdenes ni el fatídico mal genio, pero ella, la mediadora, temía que sin su intervención se desatara aquel proverbial mal carácter, la ira o la furia que a lo mejor sólo existían en su imaginación. (116)

In effect, his mother can be seen as having exercised oppositionality, appearing to comply with the ruling power while covertly "using the characteristics of power *against* power and *for* one's own purposes" (Chambers 10). Once the center of the mother's oppositional self-definition disappeared, with the death of her husband, the space of her subjectivity shrunk: "con la muerte de su esposo, parecía como si mi madre hubiera perdido automáticamente la razón de ser en

este mundo. [. . .] [S]in terrenos ya que proteger o resguardar, se encerraba cada vez más en el gabinete [. . .]" (117). Since she defined herself only in dialectical relation to the masculine center that determined her role as mediator, the contours of the mother's subjectivity diminish once her husband dies.

Now deceased as well, the mother employs the same tactics of "gentle" manipulation in the pantheon. Her power to come between the protagonist and his father recurs hauntingly in his dream of death when she interposes herself to cut him off from Clarisa:

[. . .] intenté hablar, gritar, hacerme oír. Pero lo único que me devolvió aquel mundo de sombras fue una voz, una entonación cansina, una advertencia que me removió las entrañas, me llenó de un sudor frío y me hizo permanecer incorporado en el lecho quién sabe durante cuántas horas. —Hijo, por favor, no insistas. ¿No ves que Clarisa está ocupada? (145-46)

The narrator's experience as the dominated in relation to the world of the pantheon reveals to him the limitations of unidirectional power, making him aware of the vulnerability that one feels as a subservient subject. He also comes to recognize the potential of subtle, oppositional control as the only recourse to power from an inferior position.

Suspecting that his death will subordinate him, as a Roig-Miró who exercises overt, phallic power, the narrator tries to secure his future by exercising

what Chambers would call the oppositionality of seduction. In contrast to the overt power wielded from a position of superiority, Chambers discusses seduction, "not as an exploitive effect of power but as an oppositional response to alienation, that is, as a way –the only nonviolent way, perhaps– of turning the alienating other from attitudes that are oppressive (including self-oppressive) to a more sympathetic 'understanding'" (17). Toward this end, the narrator deposits certain former possessions of Clarisa in a green suitcase that he delivers to her doctor with the request that the man slip the objects into his casket as a final favor to him upon his death. The color of this suitcase recalls the titular character of "La mujer de verde," who similarly serves as a spatial repository. The woman in green encompasses all that the narrator could not tolerate in her own identity—both sameness (the futility of an impossible subjectivity) and difference (the ideal of perfection). Similarly, the narrator of "El lugar" attempts to encase his otherness in the green suitcase to facilitate his acceptance in the other world. By offering these gifts of her former self, he hopes to curry Clarisa's favor, in effect, to mediate her desire so that he can purloin some of her power for himself.

The space of the pantheon unsettles the narrator because it inverts the power paradigm that structures the world he knows. Since, in his dream of death, the feminine, the meek, and the silent all become traits of the center, the protagonist prepares to please Clarisa by incorporating feminine metonymies of

her live self into the green suitcase that he gives to her doctor. The two men seal their pact with a silent toast:

Fue un extraño brindis de copas vacías. Un brindis silencioso, sin homenajes ni discursos. Porque era como si en el aire flotara un epitafio, una sentencia: "Nada es definitivo, ni tan siquiera en la eternidad." O, dicho de otra forma: Clarisa había encontrado *su* lugar. Bien. Pero yo, desde ahora, estaba haciendo lo posible por asegurar el mío. (148-49)

In tribute to the new power paradigm that he prepares to embrace, this toast embodies qualities associated with the feminine: the glass is an empty receptacle, a lack, and the toast is silent, evocative of the inverted code of power in the pantheon. In that realm he will be the displaced one, just as Clarisa was excluded from those who "mattered" in patriarchy.

In "El lugar," then, the male narrator is prodded to open the border of enclosed, definitive, masculine space to the fluid rule of the feminine in the realm of the pantheon. Yet does this inversion of power in the pantheon really change the logic that undergirds the all-or-nothing dialectics of patriarchy? After all, the characters in the pantheon wield the same tactics of oppositional power that they did when they were alive; the only difference is that the identities associated with the center/periphery are reversed. Like Kristeva's semiotic, the pantheon supersedes power associations based on sexuality alone —Aunt Ricarda's

subservience effectively trounces that proposition—but it still defines power based on binary qualities associated with gender constructions. The narrator's struggle to identify himself with the feminine in the pantheon underscores that such an identification is a discourse constructed on otherness and recalls the narrator of "La mujer de verde" who found the ideal feminine to be impossibly "other" than her own reality. Fernández Cubas's preoccupation with space as always constituted by the otherness that it excludes implicitly questions a model such as Kristeva's that is defined by terms of gender opposition. For even if the semiotic is not essentially female, but only a feminine representation, it still marks off a space that inevitably establishes an exclusion, the exclusion of the masculine.⁴⁹ "El lugar" may be read, then, as the "outside" that haunts Kristevan discourse with the very terms it eliminates.

As one of the author's few tales narrated by a man, "El lugar" defamiliarizes a mainstream feminist depiction of patriarchal subjectivity. The border-crossing of Clarisa's posthumous "lugar" subverts the protagonist so that he perceives what it is like to be enclosed in a controlled space and defined as lack, as the powerless, as an objectified reflection of the center. Yet such liminality also destabilizes the terms by which each side defines itself. Thus, through her imagery of a simplistic inversion of the masculine/feminine dialectic of power, Fernández Cubas reveals how absolutist definitions fix the subject into stasis by excluding the object from active subjectivity. As a narrative

text, moreover, this story fundamentally demonstrates the exclusion inherent in any univocal definition of the subject: Clarisa as an individual woman is absent from the text because, in the end, she only figures as the narrator's object, his representation of Woman. Yet the narrator's experience of power on the other side of the divide throws his subjectivity into flux and alters his view of himself and woman, his other. Transgressing the boundary that encloses objects into passivity and static exclusion, then, "El lugar" opens the space of subjectivity to the fluctuations of power and the productivity of change. In doing so, it argues for a viable space for human beings as subjects, not as mere representations of gender-objectified otherness.

"Ausencia":

After the exploration of the ideological positioning of the subject as it relates to space in the first three stories, the space under examination in "Ausencia" becomes the subject herself. Suffering from a mysterious amnesia, the protagonist is able to empty herself of her own identity and thus examine, from a distance, all the elements that construct her subjectivity. This analysis highlights the discursive nature of the construction of the subject, as accentuated by Emile Benveniste, for in "Ausencia" the present tense, second-person narration is dictated by an implicit "I" to a receiving "you."

This story begins with the protagonist sitting in a café, not knowing who she is, and trying to reconstruct her identity on the basis of the space that

surrounds her. She studies her clothes, her purse (which she decides must be hers because it matches her outfit), and her reflection in the mirror over the bar. As she undergoes the gradual process of extrapolating an identity, the protagonist calls her home phone number and listens to her own voice on the answering machine and then goes to confession in order to hear her voice enumerate a series of raucous, extravagant sins. Driven by curiosity, she visits the apartment of Elena Vila Gastón, whose name she bears. There she discovers many clues to her personality, including that she has a companion, Jorge, who needs to be picked up from the airport the next night. She decides that she would like to be Elena Vila Gastón, for this woman has a very pleasant, comfortable life. The following morning, she goes to work and stuns her secretary by looking at her with sympathy and smiling. Suddenly, however, the protagonist begins to be annoyed and irritated with everything, and recognizes this feeling as the way she has always been: “tu vida ha sido siempre gris, marrón, violácea, y [. . .] el día que ahora empieza no es sino otro día más. Un día como tantos” (170).

The most striking element of this story is the second-person narration, which draws readers into identifying with the main character but also signals a division in the identity of the protagonist herself. The psychoanalytic paradigm of the development of the subject through language illuminates the intricate dynamics of this (de)constructed subjectivity. In Lacan’s scheme, for instance,

the split state of this subject separates the discursively constructed "I" in the symbolic order from the pre-linguistic "you" in the imaginary order. In this way the narration points to the limitation of only being able to recuperate the experience of the imaginary order through language. As the subject strives to recapture, through language, some initial state of completion like the imaginary, each successive utterance creates an additional barrier between that original being and the subject formed in language. The protagonist cannot escape the discourse that she generates and from which she herself is generated; after exploring the ideological construction of its identity, the "you" in Fernández Cubas's story complies with her proffered subject position and abandons her "absence" for the frustrated state of its presence in language and ideology. That "you" also beckons the identification of readers, however, who see the futility of the protagonist's acquiescence and can interpret critically the discourse that defines her. The investigation of the subjectifying power of language in "Ausencia" ultimately urges readers to identify not with the interpellated "you" but in an other position of interpreting subject, as a means of exercising agency.

The narration of this story commences with the newly divided subject that uses the present tense to address its "you," from whom it has split just moments before enunciation. This speaking subject informs the "you" that its identity has suddenly become unknown: "¿Qué hago yo aquí?," te sorprendes pensando. Pero un sudor frío te hace notar que la pregunta es absurda,

encubridora, falsa. Porque lo que menos importa en este momento es recordar lo que estás haciendo allí, sino algo mucho más sencillo. Saber *quién* eres tú." (153).

Although the focus of the narration in this story is "you," and no "I" is specifically verbalized, the first-person subjectivity is implicit in the very act of discourse with an other. Benveniste theorizes that the pronominal relationship, which two people accept as positions for themselves in discourse, demonstrates the fact that "the basis of subjectivity is the exercise of language" (226). The implicit "I" in this narrative represents the ideological part of the subject that is constituted in language with its entry into the symbolic order. In Lacanian terms, the identification of the self as an "I" supposes a conscious separation from the other, a repression of the imaginary order into the unconscious, and compliance of the subject with socially constituted subject positions. In contrast to the implicit "I" in this story, the "you" represents the essence of the subject, not yet constructed ideologically, that can be seen as the pre-formed subject in the imaginary order.

The "you" of this narrative subsequently undergoes a process of examining her social construction in order to define her identity as a subject. Gender figures as the fundamental category of identification when, first and foremost, the protagonist recognizes her femaleness even before she confronts her reflection in a mirror: "Tú eres una mujer [. . .]. Lo sabes antes de ladearte ligeramente y contemplar tu imagen reflejada en la luna desgastada de un espejo

[. . .]. El rostro no te resulta ajeno, tampoco familiar. Es un rostro que te mira asombrado, confuso, pero también un rostro obediente, dispuesto a parpadear, a fruncir el ceño [. . .]" (154). This identification suggests that gender is a state that pre-exists the specular identification that evokes a sense of self.

After her first glimpse in the mirror, the "you" is careful to determine her location in space as a means of discovering who she is, but her presence in a café reveals little. Then she searches in her wallet to affirm her name, Elena Vila Gastón, and attempts to discover her age as a way of determining her relation to time. Scrutinizing her specular image further, she begins to recognize it even though she still cannot reconcile it to the linguistic marker of her name: "Te mojas la cara y murmuras: 'Elena.' Es la cuarta vez que te contemplas ante un espejo y quizá, sólo por eso, aquel rostro empieza a resultarte familiar. 'Elena,' en cambio, te sigue pareciendo corto, incompleto, inacabado" (158). In search of further clues to her self, Elena tries to estimate her social class on the basis of her clothing: "Te pones la gabardina y te miras de nuevo. Es una prenda de buen corte forrada de seda, muy agradable al tacto. 'Debo de ser rica,' te dices. 'O por lo menos tengo gusto. O quizás acabo de robar la gabardina en una tienda de lujo'" (158). All these details, carefully observed, hint at Elena's positioning as a subject in space and time, according to social codes; however, she does not identify with the picture she begins to construct.

Elena's distancing from her self also entails her alienation from the discourses that construct her subjectivity. As a result, she begins to question language, numbers, and the origins of her knowledge. As when the narrator of "La ventana del jardín" confronts the sameness/difference of the code of Tomás/Olla, this protagonist's language becomes defamiliarized and devoid of logic: "Abres un estuche plateado y te empolvas la nariz. Ahora tu rostro, desde el minúsculo espejo, aparece más relajado, pero, curiosamente, te has quedado detenida en la expresión 'empolvase la nariz.' Te suena ridícula, anticuada, absurda" (154). When she calculates her age by comparing her birthdate to the newspaper date, Elena questions how she acquired the knowledge of counting (155).

But to question so radically is to risk losing her way completely in an endless deconstruction of her social order, without any center at all: "¿Hablarán tu idioma? O mejor: ¿cuál es tu idioma? ¿Cómo podrías afirmar que la luna del espejo en que te has mirado por primera vez anuncia un coñac francés? Algo, dentro de ti, te avisa de que estás equivocando el camino. No debes preguntarte más que lo esencial" (154-55). Analyzing more than is absolutely necessary threatens to completely destroy her uncertain existence by annihilating its center. Derrida himself notes that there must be a center in order for humans to live; however, his deconstructionist theory demonstrates that such a center is not absolute, but actually a function of the subject's world view.⁵⁰ In reconstructing

her self, the protagonist senses that she must accept a center of identity. Her subjective center—one among many, the story subtly suggests—establishes her as a Spanish woman whose logic of the world conforms to a specific linguistic and numerological pattern.

Elena's defamiliarized perspective of her self and her discourse has the effect of immersing her in a childlike world where language is unfamiliar. Distanced from speech as a commonplace tool, she remembers a similar experience from her girlhood when she would visualize words to represent their character:

De pequeña solías *ver* las palabras, los nombres, las frases. Las palabras tenían color. Unas brillaban más que otras, algunas, muy pocas, aparecían adornadas con ribetes, con orlas [. . .]. Como Ausencia. De pronto ves escrita la palabra “ausencia.” La letra es picuda y está ligeramente inclinada hacia la derecha. (156)

This artistic visualization of words accentuates them as a creation. By attaching visual instead of lexical associations to the meanings of words, Elena, similar to Tomás/Olla, applies an alternative logic to the construction of signification as she enters the system of language.

As the integral expression of speech that communicates one's identity to others, the paramount mark of identity is the voice. In an echo of the other stories in Con Agatha en Estambul, this protagonist ponders alterations in her

voice as a sign of subjective change and re-definition. When the bartender asks her if she is all right, Elena is quite taken with the sound of her own reply: "Te has quedado admirada escuchando tu voz. En la vida, en tu vida normal, sea cual sea, debes de ser una mujer de recursos. Tus palabras han sonado amables, firmes, tranquilizadoras" (157). Once again, the meaning she extracts from words derives less from semantics than from style, from the way they sound. The protagonist feels a certain discontinuity with this voice, however, for she does not yet identify with it as a part of her being. In her renewed experience of developing as a subject, she must recognize the separation of herself as a subject from others before this speaking voice of language can become part of her.

In the psychoanalytic process of her development, the protagonist has already passed through the mirror stage in the imaginary where the infant begins the phase of separation from ideal union with the mother. Even though Elena identifies with the appearance that she sees reflected in the mirror, she is still unsure of her subjectivity: "aunque empieces a sentirte segura de tu aspecto, no lo estás aún de tu identidad" (159). Trying to forge ahead in development, Elena calls her home in the hope of being able to discern her identity through its relationship to others. She needs whoever answers, be it husband, child, or serving girl, to provide a clue as to who Elena really is. Indicative of the mechanization that dominates postmodern society, however, the only "other" who responds to Elena's call is the sound of a voice on an answering machine:

una voz femenina, pausada, modulada, vocalizando como una locutora profesional, repite el número que acabas de marcar, ruega que al escuchar la señal dejes tu mensaje y añade: "Gracias." [. . .] "Gracias," repites. Y ahora tu voz suena débil, sin fuerzas. Tal vez te llames Elena Vila Gastón, pero cuán distinta a la Elena Vila Gastón—si es que era ella—que con una seguridad implacable te acaba de ordenar: "Deje su mensaje." (160)

Elena suffers a new crisis because she can't reconcile the emerging, uncertain image of her self with the artificial sound of "her" voice on the recording. The exchange via the answering machine dramatizes Elena's predicament as a split subject since, pinned in the position of "you," she cannot identify with the voice of the speaking "I." That "I" is eminently conscious of its status as a "locutora profesional," for speaking is an imposed role that it accepts as a way of life. Since Elena, listening in silence at the other end of the telephone line, is not yet constituted as a subject in the symbolic order of language, she certainly cannot mediate herself as a subject against others.

This alienation from the voice of her other "I" provokes Elena to go to confession as a pretense for listening further to her own voice. Realizing with relief that she completely recognizes her surroundings, she refuses to question that knowledge. Indeed, she imagines that alienation from her space would be worse than alienation from her self:

Te sientas en uno de los bancos y te imaginas consternada, a ti, a Elena Vila, por ejemplo, sabiendo perfectamente que tú eres Elena Vila, pero sin reconocer apenas nada de tu entorno.

Contemplando aterrorizada imágenes sangrientas, cruces, clavos, coronas de espinas, cuerpos yacentes, sepulcros [. . .]. (160)

This vision highlights the intricate relationship between the subject and its space; while "Ausencia" explores the formation of the subject, the final story in this collection will investigate the discontinuities produced in the subject outside of its defining space.

Elena enters the confessional booth in the church hoping to recognize her self in the sound of her voice; yet she has no memory of having committed any sins. Caught in an amusing predicament, she tries to manipulate the ecclesiastical discourse in an attempt to comply with the subject position of a mature confessant:

Pero necesitas hablar, escuchar tu voz, y a falta de una lista de pecados más acorde con tu edad, los inventas. Has cometido adulterio. Una, dos, hasta quince veces. Has atracado un banco. Has robado en una tienda la gabardina forrada de seda [. . .]. Pero tu voz, lenta, pausada, te recuerda de repente a la de una locutora profesional, a la de una actriz [. . .]. [N]o te cabe ya la menor duda

de que tú eres la mujer que antes ha respondido al teléfono. (161-62)

The quality of performance, of complying with a role, is the common link now between her voice and that on the machine. In essence, by submitting to the discursively formed roles that are available to her in society, Elena accepts the Lacanian law of the father that determines the symbolic order.

Having begun to identify with a distinct subject position, Elena returns to "her" space in her apartment, where a sense of familiarity can begin to reconstruct for her the history of her subjectivity. She looks at the objects and photos in her house, including pictures of a man whose name she knows is Jorge, and feels comfortable there, recognizing it as her place—like Clarisa in "El lugar." Situating herself in the house that shows her subjectivity as it is constructed in language, ideology, and culture, Elena is able to identify increasingly with the position of that speaking "I." Now in the space of the speaking subject, she plays the messages on her answering machine and hears the response that she had given when she was in the bar, still in the position of "you": "En el contestador hay varias llamadas. Una es un silencio que reconoces tuyo, al otro lado del teléfono, en los lavabos de un bar, cuando no eras más que una desconocida" (166). Kaja Silverman notes that, for Benveniste, this transferability from speaker to listener emphasizes the changeability of subject positions as a result of their inherent definition in language: "These roles are endlessly reversible, as are the

signifiers which depend on them; the person who functions as a speaker for one moment functions as a listener for the next . . . the signifiers 'I' and 'you' have only periodic meaning" (44). By highlighting the temporal nature of these subject positions, Benveniste underscores the radical discontinuity that is implicit in subjectivity. Elena embodies the discontinuity and progressive re-definition of the self as she moves from the position of "you" to that of "I."

When she progressively identifies with her speaking-subject position in language, Elena notes a creeping, familiar sensation of uneasiness, which she associates with her "real" self. This frustration with her self permeates every aspect of her subjectivity: "El malestar que ya no tenía que ver sólo con Jorge, sino con tu trabajo, con tu casa, contigo misma. Una insatisfacción perenne, un desasosiego absurdo con los que has estado conviviendo durante años y años. Quizá gran parte de tu vida" (166). The disturbing sensation intensifies as voices from her past come back to her: "'Vila Gastón,' oyes de pronto. 'Siempre en la luna. . . ¿Por qué no atiende a la clase?' Pero no hace falta remontarse a recuerdos tan antiguos. 'Es inútil'—y ahora es la voz de Jorge hace apenas unas semanas—. 'Se diría que sólo eres feliz donde no estás. . .'" (167). Representing the discourses that construct her subject positions as obedient student and as girlfriend, these voices speak to her as a "you" to position her in their discourse. Silverman emphasizes the necessity of identifying with the position of "you" in the process of accepting subject roles: "the pronoun 'you' only means something

to the degree that the viewer identifies with it, recognizes him or herself in the subject of speech" (49). By associating herself with that position as a receiver of speech, Elena accepts the subjectivity that such discourse would impose.

Elena is glad to experience the "absence" as an escape from the frustrating oppression of her presence as a subject, but in the end she succumbs to the positioning of all those discursive voices that hail her. The speaking subject then condemns its other "you" to the inescapable unhappiness of her fixed identity: "Tal vez tú, Elena Vila Gastón, seas siempre así. Constantemente disgustada. Deseando ser otra en otro lugar. Sin apreciar lo que tienes por lo que ensueñas. Ausente, una eterna e irremediable ausente [. . .]" (170). Significantly, imprisonment in one place is intricately tied to the stifling nature of Elena's identity. In this context, the word "absent" is infused with new meaning: the true essence of her self—that creative, pre-linguistic presence from the imaginary order—is what truly lacks in the structure of her subjectivity in discourse. By allowing herself to be interpellated into the "you" position that is hailed by ideological discourse, Elena permits herself to be defined, confined, and subdued in subjectivity.

As a continuation of the examination of subjectivity in Con Agatha en Estambul, the story "Ausencia" explores the discursive nature of the construction of the subject. It presents a series of infinite supplements of "I" and "you," mirror reflections of subjects and objects that define each other. First, on the

extradiegetic plane, there is the narrating "I" speaking to the "you." Then a new sequence of speaking subject/object relationships is opened up, when the narrating "I" pronounces that the "you" speaks to herself. This is a performative action that is realized, even as it is spoken, in the present tense: "‘Ausencia,’ te dices. ‘Eso es lo que me está ocurriendo. Sufro una ausencia’" (156). The "you" has identified herself sufficiently within the symbolic order of language to be able to verbalize herself as an "I," even though this verbalization is forced upon her by the original speaking "I" at the narrative level.

The division of subjects and objects multiplies further (in an implicitly mathematical imposition of logic on the subject) when the "I" talks to the "you" about "Elena" in the third person: "¿eres tan valiente? ¿Es Elena tan valiente?" (163). This triangular relationship is reminiscent of the image of the three-sided mirror in "La mujer de verde," where each side of the mirror returns a different reflection of the subject, separating it into layers of supplementations. In such an endless play of reflections through the multiple mirror of discourse, the subject becomes divided, duplicated, and distorted into an infinity of subject positions whose original referent cannot be traced. The tracing back of origins is the ostensible goal of the "you" in this narrative, but it is an impossible one because such a deconstruction yields an endless series of supplementations.

Readers themselves, approaching this text, might tend to respond to the hailing of the "you," and identify with the subject who experiences the events

that unfold in the tale. This would certainly comply with Althusser's view of interpellation into ideology: "[Ideology] 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'" (174). If they completely place themselves in Elena's subject position as the "you," however, no change is achieved at all in subjectivity. They only return with Elena, at the end of the narration, to a confined, unhappy subjectivity. Such an ending would be defeatist, not to say pointless.

That is why readers must complete the signification of the text by stepping out of the narratee position of the "you" and stepping into the position of interpreting subject. As Chambers notes,

The change in the reader that occurs as a result of oppositional reading thus necessarily has the character of a conversion from "autonomous" identity (the addressee as a "you" defined, in a dual relationship, as not the addressing "I") to a sense of self that depends on a triangular system of otherness, in which dualities are mediated by a third which prevents any of the terms from claiming an autonomous identity. (17)

The ultimate goal of this exploration of subjectivity, then, is to instigate readers to exercise agency instead of submitting passively to interpellation. Through the

mediation of the text in the process of ideological hailing, readers can step away from the immobility of the "you" and into the agency of the interpreting subject.

"Ausencia" foregrounds the formation of the subject as discursive *construction* by highlighting Elena's tracing of her identity according to a specific sequence—gender, specular image, voice, language—and her refusal to question that order too radically. In doing so, the text implicitly questions the assumptions that Elena does not dare to destabilize. Why must she be a woman, first of all? What, in fact, constitutes a woman? How does she extract meaning from language and numbers? How does her language shape her expression of the world? How does her understanding of mathematics structure her logical quantification of the world? The evacuation of Elena's identity emphasizes that a subject's position is a space, filled with discursive interpellations, that shapes its view of the world. From this perspective, the psychoanalytic story of the subject is just one of many possible discursive ways of plotting the tale—not the masterplot that orders the way a subject *must* be. In light of the many critical deconstructions of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis as a just-so story that retrospectively inscribes the masculine as the originary center, "Ausencia" may be seen to re-cite the trajectory of psychoanalytic construction as a fiction, as one construction of logic among many—even if it is a widely read and accepted story of the subject.

"Con Agatha en Estambul":

While "Ausencia" explores the absence of the subject from its proper place, "Con Agatha en Estambul" unfolds the experience of a subject who is present in a place that is not her own. In "Ausencia," Elena shudders to imagine herself knowing her own identity but "sin reconocer apenas nada en tu entorno" (160). The title story of this collection poses just such an immersion into the alienation of space. The first-person narrator is a nameless, middle-aged woman, married for fifteen years to a man named Julio. One day she spontaneously decides to grant Julio's casually expressed wish, and she buys them both round-trip tickets to spend fifteen days in Istanbul to escape the madness of the Christmas season in Barcelona. Upon their arrival, however, the protagonist cannot even see this other space because it is covered in fog. Her confusion at her blurred surroundings is augmented by a series of strange events that happen to her there. Since the writer Agatha Christie once stayed in her very hotel, the protagonist decides to become a sleuth herself and search for clues to explain the mysteries of her new environment. The narrator decides to embark on an epistemological search for knowledge, using Agatha Christie's detective novels as her guide.

Istanbul imposes a tension between the narrator's epistemological endeavor to seek out the rational knowledge that will explain her perplexities, which is fundamentally undermined by the ontological uncertainty of being

itself as it is defined in this other space. Brian McHale ties the epistemological mode to modernist fiction, with the detective novel as its "genre *par excellence*," and describes typical epistemological questions as: "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?" (9). The preoccupation of the narrator of "Con Agatha en Estambul" with tracing clues seems futile and even laughable because, first of all, the "mysteries" she investigates are often trivial and hilariously overblown. More importantly, the dominant challenge in this story is not to uncover the "absolute truth." Instead, the quest laid before the narrator is, in McHale's terminology, an ontological and postmodernist one of discovering what world she is in, how it differs from her old world, which of her selves can be found in each world, and if ever these divergent paths shall meet.

The first surprise that the other space of Istanbul offers is the subversion of vision as the primary sense by which knowledge is perceived. When the narrator and her husband arrive in Istanbul, the entire city is buried for days beneath a dense fog:

Estaba asomada al balcón mirando hacia el Cuerno de Oro sin distinguir apenas nada que pudiera recordar el Cuerno de Oro. Pero, al tiempo, podía verlo. Tantas fotografías, tantas postales, tantas películas. De pronto me asaltó una sospecha de la que no podría hablar en voz alta sin sentir un asomo de bochorno.

¿Existía Estambul? La sensación de irrealidad que me había embargado en el aeropuerto, nada más bajar del avión, no había hecho en aquellos días sino acrecentarse. Pero ahora ¿estaba yo realmente allí? O mejor: ¿qué era *allí*? (176)

Unable to see the place for herself, the narrator depends on visual depictions of postcards which become more real than the actual referent that encompasses her. Indeed, she has seen so many representations of the city that she begins to suspect that representation is all that exists. The possibility that textual representation might be the only reality accessible to her plunges the speaker into the postmodern crisis of ontological uncertainty of what other realities and worlds might exist. Thus for her, the trip to Istanbul becomes a struggle between the epistemo-logic of knowing in her ordinary world and the irrationality, uncertainty and curious liberty that she encounters in this misty, ontological space.

In addition to subverting her dependence on vision, Istanbul further alters the protagonist's linguistic identification as a subject when she discovers that she can inexplicably speak Turkish. While in "Ausencia" Elena found herself inexplicably devoid of the knowledge that she ought to possess for her subject position, the narrator of "Con Agatha en Estambul" discovers that she controls knowledge of a foreign place that is totally inappropriate –indeed, impossible– for her subject position as an outsider. The narrator stuns her husband by

spontaneously speaking Turkish to the waiter in a restaurant: "el camarero se acercó a la mesa, yo dije '*Iku kahve ve maden suyu, lütfen,*' el hombre sonrió y Julio se enmudeció de la sorpresa" (176). Not even the narrator herself understands how she has mastered the code to ask for coffee and water in Turkish. Her familiarity with the discourses that rule that place changes her subjectivity as a foreigner and draws her further into the world of Istanbul. In effect, she is discovering the answer to the ontological question, pinpointed by McHale, of "which of my selves can know this world" (10). The narrator's knowledge of Turkish posits a new self for her, one shaped inside the cultural boundaries of that world.

The narrator finds liberation in her experience of radical otherness to her former self. After spraining her ankle and having it swell up to an enormous size, the narrator hobbles through the streets and identifies with a native street child with a deformed leg: "Me sentía una coja congénita, una residente, estambuleña de toda la vida" (203). Feeling "contenta, extrañamente libre" (202) in the misty world where overt rationality and consideration of other people is not the point of living, the narrator spontaneously purchases a flask of Chanel perfume called *Egoïste*. Her husband, annoyed at his wife's odd behavior and lengthy ramblings in Turkish during their stay in Istanbul, is completely offended when he catches a whiff of the strong-smelling perfume:

Subimos al coche. Julio indicó la dirección y luego, al instante, empezó a agitarse desconcertado [. . .]. Empezó a olfatear sin disimulo, como un sabueso. Parecía estupefacto, irritado, ofendido.

—*Egoiste* —dije yo. Y le mostré el frasco.

Julio lo miró con incredulidad.

—Deberías pensar en los demás —gruñó secamente.

Y abrió el cristal de la ventana. (208)

This wonderfully humorous passage illustrates a change that the ontological space has wrought in the narrator: no longer preoccupied with following the paths of other people in an epistemological search for knowledge, she now concerns herself with exploring the new, unpredictable world of Istanbul and with understanding the self that fits in this world. Such a project may be egotistical, but it is an exploration of her subjectivity that is long overdue.

During the long hours that the protagonist spends cooped up in the hotel because of her injured ankle, she fixates on a strange fish in a tank, which comes to represent the transformability into different selves that she experiences in this story. The woman is astounded at the ability of the fish to change from an ordinary being into a fantastic one: "a ratos se diría que el pez dejaba de ser pez —enorme y feo—para convertirse en un rostro grácil, infantil incluso. Un rostro de dibujos animados. Tuve que esperar a la tercera transformación para

reconocerlo. "Campanilla" (191). The remarkable ability of the fish to transmute from one self into another enralls the narrator, who spends enormous amounts of time watching for its transformation. She hopes to capture the image of the fish in precisely the instant when it is also, simultaneously, Tinkerbell: "Y ése era el punto. Preciso, indefinible. La fracción de segundos, total, reveladora, que si me esforzaba por concentrarme en el acuario, quizá lograría detener en el pez-Campanilla" (214). The fish seems to serve, then, as a projection of the transformational process occurring within the narrator herself. The protagonist's goal is to capture the blend of the her own two selves—the rational, epistemological one and the transcendent, ontological one—as a means of combining the characteristics of the two worlds she occupies.

The narrator's enchantment with the unpredictable world of Istanbul conflicts with her epistemological tendency to search for the absolute, rational truth to explain her circumstances. Like the narrator of "El lugar," this speaker in "Con Agatha" tries to believe that her knowledge of the new place has logical explanations. Thus she rationalizes her uncanny ability to speak Turkish: "Aquellas palabras, que manejaba con indudable soltura, yo las había visto con anterioridad. En el avión, ojeando—distráidamente, creía yo—un capítulo dedicado a frases usuales de una guía cualquiera, y que [. . .] por un extraño estado de disponibilidad, quedaban grabadas en mi mente" (179). Like the narrator of "La ventana del jardín" who found himself in a similarly "other"

space, the narrator of "Con Agatha en Estambul" subjects the anomaly of her knowledge to a process of logical explanation, retracing her steps to seek out the clue to the puzzle. For this sleuth, however, the difference is not just outside her but within her.

In additional attempts to experience the detectivesque adventure of discovering the "key," the protagonist constructs a number of "mysteries" out of apparently normal events. At times her proclivity to turn up clues is hilarious because it surfaces unexpectedly in the middle of her narration of other events. For example, while pondering a strange voice that she hears, the narrator suddenly exclaims that she has found the answer—but readers are not even sure what the question is: "Enseguida, como si alguien en el cuarto hubiera prendido una luz, vi un número salvador, un rótulo parpadeante, al tiempo que mis labios —esa vez sí fueron mis labios—pronunciaban una cifra: ‘cuarenta y cuatro.’ Me puse a reír. ‘Eso era. Ajá'" (201). Her discovery is not the explanation of the voice she hears, as readers might expect from the context of her exclamation. Instead, the protagonist has remembered her husband's shoe size so that she can buy herself a shoe for her own enlarged foot and walk around the town. In a scrambling of logic that recalls the semantic disassociation of "La ventana del jardín," the syntactic reversals of "Los altillos de Brumal" and the defamiliarization of words and numbers in "Ausencia," this narrator's non

sequiturs and sudden leaps in logic ludicrously construct a new order of reasoning that only she understands.

The two drastically different sizes of the protagonist's feet symbolize her state of having a foot in each world, so to speak. The protagonist's deformed foot is one of the elements that make her belong to the misty, ontological world of Istanbul. Yet she adapts to her condition of not fitting into her designated "space," symbolized by her "normal" foot. In contrast to the narrator of "La mujer de verde" who never finds shoes that fit her properly, nor finds a space to accommodate her self, the narrator in "Con Agatha en Estambul" is undaunted by her podiatral anomaly. Instead of recriminating herself for falling short of the feminine ideal of small feet, she simply co-opts a man's shoe for her own use: "A pocos pasos divisé una zapatería. Entré por la sección señoras y salí por la de caballeros. El modelo era casi el mismo. Dos botas de cuero. Un treinta y siete para el pie izquierdo, sección *bayan*; un cuarenta y cuatro para el otro, sección *bay*" (202). By means of such resourcefulness, the protagonist applies her methodical, epistemological tenacity to find a way to penetrate deeper into the ontological world of Istanbul.

The narrator even converts her uncanny ability to speak Turkish into a detectivesque adventure, by studying a textbook as if she were searching for the clues in the language that would lead to the eventual treasure of fluency. After

progressing in the book with relative ease for six chapters, however, she finds it difficult to continue:

Sí, el turco, como todas las lenguas, era un castillo del que no se conocen los planos. Y alguien, desde el castillo, me había tendido un puente levadizo, yo lo había franqueado y ahora, de pronto, me encontraba perdida en el patio de armas [. . .]. Pero lo difícil, el verdadero reto, empezaba ahora. Tenía que hacerme con el manajo de llaves y desvelar los secretos de todas las cerraduras.
(206)

This romantic vision of the pursuit of knowledge, with herself as the hero—in contrast to the females in the House of the Tower of El columpio, no passive, feminine roles will do for this protagonist—stops short when she gets lost in the labyrinth of the castle. The methodological approach to knowing a language can only take her so far before its value is questioned: "La lección siete se estaba revelando sorprendentemente ardua, espinosa. No sólo me resultaba infranqueable, sino que, de pronto, ponía en tela de juicio todo lo que creía haber aprendido hasta entonces" (196-97). The epistemological rules of language that she studies stymie her progress and threaten all the ontological awareness she has absorbed through her immersion into otherness.

The greatest mystery that the narrator creates and pursues is the truth of the relationship between her husband and Flora, another guest in the hotel who

spends time with Julio while the protagonist is immobilized by her sprained ankle. As a wife, the narrator suspiciously analyzes Flora's gaze towards her husband: "Una mirada luminosa, segura, seductora. La mirada de una mujer con proyectos, con planes, con una feliz idea en mente que mi súbita aparición, mi mera existencia, dejaba sin efecto" (193). Naturally, the narrator casts herself as the sagacious, fortuitous detective who stumbles on the sinister plot and manages to impede its successful completion. Employing the discourse of a detective ("Pero entonces. . . lo vi" [210]), the narrator believes that the key to the insidious mystery in Flora's gaze is hidden in her uncanny ability to alter her appearance by changing the direction of her gaze with her profile: "La elegancia de sus rasgos, la perfección de sus facciones, quedaban, sin embargo, desmentidas en cuanto alguien, como yo ahora, la sorprendía de cara, de frente [. . .]. *El enigma de un rostro*, murmuré" (211). The narrator also finds it suspicious that Flora follows her husband to a distant town after she herself had tried to throw the seductress off track by lying about her husband's destination.

Ultimately, the detective's search for truth lands her into a great mess, when her accusations of infidelity provoke a big fight with Julio. Her incensed husband provides an entirely different perspective of the protagonist's behavior, which he considers to be bizarre and unreasonable:

Te empeñaste en beber whisky tras whisky, nos soltaste un rollo descomunal sobre Patricia Highsmith. . . [. . .] El resto te lo has

pasado dopada con esas tremendas pastillas rojas y con cara de imbécil. Moviéndote por la ciudad seguida de una corte de los milagros, empeñada en chapurrear un idioma que desconoces, en usar un perfume pestilente. Y encima, lo que faltaba, un ataque de celos. (221)

As in so many Fernández Cubas stories, pills and alcohol emerge as a possible, “rational” explanation of the “abnormal” events that the protagonist experiences. Ironically, although Julio is infuriated by her objective pursuit of knowledge that unjustly incriminates him, the behavior he criticizes is precisely that which characterizes her entry into the blurred, ontological world of Istanbul—a subjective experience that he does not share.

The narrator's epistemological appropriation of the detectivesque discourse of Agatha Christie (not of Patricia Highsmith, as Julio intimated) highlights the intricate and often nebulous relationship between representation and reality. By its very nature, fiction foregrounds the ontological perspective of other possible worlds in co-existence with the extratextual, “real world.” As Brian McHale expresses it: “Propositions about the real world fall under the modality of necessity. Propositions in fiction, by contrast, are governed by the modality of possibility; they require, in short, ‘suspension of belief as well as disbelief” (33). With a typically postmodern twist, the boundaries between the worlds of representation and reality often blur in this narrative, most notably

with the figure of Agatha Christie. The very hotel where the narrator and her husband are staying stakes its livelihood on the suggestion that the writer of detective fiction has now become a real, live, ghostly protagonist who eerily beckons guests towards the revelation of hidden secrets: "está enmarcado en todas las paredes del hotel. La historia de la médium, el espíritu de la escritora señalando una habitación concreta, el hallazgo de una llave. . ." (186). When the narrator attempts to re-present the story of Agatha in Istanbul to Julio and Flora, she loses herself in the labyrinthine passageways of the tale: "hice lo que ningún desmemoriado debería hacer: seguir hablando como si tal cosa a la espera de recuperar el hilo" (186). After more ramblings, it finally occurs to her that "no había ningún hilo por recuperar" (187); the ontological world of representation is not one whose order can be tracked by epistemological means.

Nonetheless, the narrator pursues her epistemological quest when decides to investigate the mystery of Agatha's ghost. She peeks through the keyhole of the locked door to the room reputed to have been the writer's, yet the "treasure" she glimpses on the other side of that lock is one of her own invention, as she imagines Agatha at work in her hotel room. The protagonist's representation of the writer replaces Agatha Christie's history, for her mental projection of an elderly Agatha does not reflect the youthful age that the famous writer would have been when she stayed in that hotel:

Le oscurecí el cabello, cambié la anacrónica pluma de ave por una estilográfica y la hice pasear por el cuarto angosto. Fuerte, erguida. "Eso era. Ajá." Pero aquella ensoñación, la nueva Agatha, no resistió más que unos segundos. Enseguida reparé en que la mujer canosa y despeinada no se resignaba a abandonar su escritorio. (199)

The ontological creativity of her mental representation of Agatha finally defies the epistemo-logic of following the facts of her history. Ontology then becomes the total dominant of the narrator's representation when the boundary that separates her time and space from Agatha's disappears: "Fue una sensación breve, inexplicable. Agatha, a través de la puerta cerrada, me estaba sonriendo *a mí*" (199). The ontological existence of possible worlds has enticed the narrator to transgress the limitations of her own boundaries and to enter into Agatha's world or, inversely, to invite Agatha to ingress into the narrator's world and shake up its monotonous sameness.

As an extension of the ontological questioning of worlds, then, this story also interrogates reality. The ontological space of Istanbul prompts the narrator to ask after the nature of the reality she experiences. She imagines that the outlines of the city really do not exist at all, but only materialize when called upon to do so by the viewer: "Cuadros que se iluminaban de repente, cobraban vida, y que, tan pronto nos habíamos alejado, volvían a sumirse en aquella

oscuridad inmerecida" (177). The narrator then conjectures that, perhaps, "aquellas escenas en las que creíamos participar no eran más que rutinas de otros tiempos, asomando empecinadamente al presente con tanta fuerza que ni siquiera nuestra débil presencia podía enturbiar" (177-78). In perceiving the city as a representation conjured up by the viewer, the narrator underlines the crucial role of the subject in the reception process: the text does not coalesce into form until it is en-visionsed by readerly desire. Thus the ontological exploration of "Con Agatha en Estambul" also engages the extratextual world of readers, to suggest that interaction with the other, the reader, ultimately constitutes the signification of the text.

The narrator of this story applies her experience with the possible worlds evoked by representation to better understand her "reality." Her expertise in the art of representation provides her with the clue to discerning the real identity of Flora in the detective novel that she projects: "para la identificación de Flora se necesitaba poseer un profundo conocimiento de las artes gráficas, penetrar los secretos de las representaciones dinámicas, de las simbiosis entre cara y perfil" (213). The secret of identifying Flora depends on an interplay of perspectives of her face. Typical of an ontological perspective, however, is the overlap created between the *reality* of Flora's identity within the *fiction* of the narrator's detective novel. In turn, that detective novel is projected from the *reality* of the narrator's

experience in Istanbul within the *fiction* of the story "Con Agatha en Estambul."

Istanbul comes to "represent," then, the transcendent space of subjective reality:

¿Existía Estambul? ¿O no era nada más ni nada menos que un espacio sin límites que todos, en algún momento, llevábamos en la espalda, pegado como una mochila? ¿Era Estambul un castigo o un premio? ¿O se trataba únicamente de un eco? Un eco distinto para cada uno de nosotros que no hacía más que enfrentarnos a nuestras vidas. (223)

Of course, this Chinese box effect of fictions encased within realities ultimately extends to readers, who realize that being an expert in representation helps them to understand reality, for it reveals that reality is one of many "possible worlds" that constantly merge and diverge in untraceable distinction.

Indicative of the narrator's split subjectivity in separate worlds, and evocative of numerous Fernández Cubas texts, is the sound of another voice besides the protagonist's own that speaks to her mind. Calling it "la voz de la sabiduría de los cuarenta años," she hears it prodding her to delve into the "mystery" of Flora's interest in Julio. As the clues of their liaison multiply, she hears the voice berating her: "Agatha en tu lugar hubiese hecho algo –oí. Era la voz. Esa voz que surgía dentro, que era yo y no era yo, que se empeñaba en avisar, sugerir y no aportar, en definitiva, ninguna solución concreta" (200-01). The voice even helps her invent a murder mystery with Flora as the insidious

criminal: "A la voz, y a mí también, nos divertía el juego" (212). This voice emerges in Istanbul as perhaps the mark of her other self, the voice that incites her to lose her old self in the ontological blur of Istanbul.

The protagonist becomes frightened, however, when she has a huge fight with her husband because she pursued the voice's suspicions of Flora. As a result, at the end of the story the narrator gets angry with the voice because she must return to Barcelona on a separate plane from her husband: "si esa voz prepotente, esa supuesta sabiduría de los cuarenta años, sólo servía para obligarme a actuar como una imbécil, mejor que no hubiera despertado nunca" (225). Believing herself abandoned by that echo, she reminisces about the exciting, unexpected adventures she had in Istanbul. Suddenly, she hears a voice again: "Aventura. La vida no es más que una aventura. Asume los hechos. Asúmete. Y empieza a vivir." (231). To the narrator's surprise, the voice that urges her to take this perspective on life is not the "voz de los cuarenta años," nor that of Agatha, but that of the narrator herself: "La mirada del caballero, a mi derecha, me hizo comprender que había sido yo y sólo yo quien estaba hablando de asunciones y aventuras. Y enseguida entendí que [. . .] la voz formaba ya parte de mí misma" (232). Thus she incorporates the other voice, the other self, and the other ontological world into her being.

In celebration of her expanded subjectivity, the narrator takes out the *Egoiste* perfume and sprays herself liberally. The sole passenger at her side

moves to another seat, most certainly daunted by the overpowering scent of her perfume and, no doubt, by her muttering aloud about "aventuras." The narrator takes advantage of the now vacant adjoining passenger seats to stretch out her limbs: "Tumbada en los tres asientos, recordando, fabulando. Decidiendo, en fin, que aquellos pocos días, en Estambul, yo me lo había pasado en grande" (233). Embracing the complex nature of her subjectivity that weaves in and out of possible worlds, she can enjoy the expanded space that her newly conscious voice procures for her.

For the narrator of "Con Agatha en Estambul," the trip to that city serves to immerse her in a nebulous space where borders are blurred and absolutes are relative. Her fascination with the detective novels of Agatha Christie causes her to try to apply epistemological methodology to her own life, seeking out solutions to problems like her swollen foot, and searching for clues to mysteries like the relationship between Julio and Flora. Yet the epistemological detective hunt that she undertakes proves to be a confabulation of a non-existent reality. In effect, her epistemological map is blurred by the mist of the ontological world in which she finds herself. Thus, she realizes that the absolutes of epistemology eventually cede to the uncertainties and possibilities of ontology, and that every reality is, in a sense, another representation to be read. In her representation of her own experience, the narrator, as a writer, actually reads the events of her life. At the same time, by projecting her text out to her readers for representation, she

asks that they write the meaning and complete the signification of her story.

Ultimately, then, writing and reading—two possible worlds that blend epistemology and ontology—converge into one and the same act in the exercise of exploring the space of open subjectivity.

Conclusion:

As entertaining and distinct as each of the tales in Con Agatha en Estambul is, in many respects they can be seen as uniting to tell the same story, the story of subjectivity. The spatial images, multiple voices, questioning of "locura," and ontological subversions are woven throughout the collection, so that the texts reflect one another and intertextually penetrate the borders of one another's designs. Yet each story is not simply a replica of the one before; on the contrary, their order suggests the plot of a collective tale. "Mundo" ironically revives the traditional setting of a convent to suggest that, even in post-totalitarian Spain, repression and fear of difference still permeate the subjective unconscious. "La mujer de verde" depicts a contemporary career woman who, in many ways, is just as repressed as the nun in the first story. "El lugar" reveals that constricted subjectivity is not the lot of women alone, but shows how both genders strive to accommodate themselves in an often inadequate space of subjectivity. "Ausencia" dramatizes the oppositional elements of subjectivity through the interpellation of I/you subject positions, but in the end its

protagonist returns to the limitations of her former speaking self. At last, in "Con Agatha en Estambul," the protagonist embraces a space whose blurred borders give her free reign to discover agency in changing her subjectivity.

In addition to telling a cohesive tale, these stories perform a common function: they inspire readers to interpret oppositionally in order to appreciate the subversions and surprises that the text has to offer. Readers then understand that it is unnecessary, and even detrimental, to simply accept whatever discourse might appear to dominate. Instead, they change their interpretive stance in relation to the text, which in turn projects alternative images of subjectivity to readers. Thus, what begins as an attempt to extract readerly pleasure becomes a process of acquiring readerly power. This transformation occurs in the space of the text via a change in readerly desire: "reading will consequently be [. . .] a 'space' where there is room for oppositional maneuver in that the discursive practice of irony works seductively to shift desire" (Chambers xvi). Thus the act of reading, with all its oppositional potential, constitutes the ultimate space, whose ever-changing contours liberate readers from the confines of a static subjectivity. Such an emphasis on narrative communication and interpretation inevitably problematizes point of view, the perspective from which the self observes and constructs its other. Perspective thus emerges as the subject in my final chapter, on El ángulo del horror.

Plotting Desire: The Visual Construction of the Subject
in El ángulo del horror

While the subject defines its personal space in relation to its oppositional other, a dynamic that I explore in chapter four, in this chapter I interrogate the necessity of such a relationship of duality as shown in El ángulo del horror (1990). In all of Fernández Cubas's works, subjectivity is a process that takes two, wherein the desire for the other motivates, castigates, and inevitably formulates the self. Moreover, this double relationship is synthesized and expressed in the dynamics of seeing subject and seen object, an optical trick that the author always duplicates at the textual level by proffering a distorted interpretation to readers and enticing them to search for a clearer view.

Thus the visual construction of the subject--a motif underscored by the collection's title--becomes a matter of plotting desire. For Peter Brooks, "the reading of plot [i]s a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text. Narratives both tell of desire--typically present some story of desire--and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification" (37).

"Plotting desire" incorporates its own double vision, then: as the gerund indicates, it refers to desire that plots, that searches for its other in order to define itself in an ongoing process; in addition, "plotting" as an adjective

describes the narrative tendency to trace out that desire as its own object and, in so doing, to mark the contours of meaning that give shape to the self.

Desire and vision conjoin in narrative as the central motivation and mechanism for constructing the subject in dynamic interaction with the other.

“Helicón”:

With its focus on doubling, the opening story of the collection undermines the hegemony of a central gaze that sees the subject/object pursuit as only a one-way process.⁵¹ The first-person male narrator of “Helicón,” Marcos, recounts his struggle to fortify his timid masculinity through his relationship with his new girlfriend, Angela. His efforts to impress her with his popularity on the bar scene and to get her drunk on their first date are impeded by Angela’s rejection of alcohol for banana milkshakes. Her subsequent discovery that the shake contains a double banana launches her into an extensive treatise on the horror of all things double, since exact replicas often obscure any distinctions between the two parts. Upon hearing this, one of Marcos’s friends at the bar inevitably mentions Marcos’s own twin brother, Cosme, a bizarre man who is said to reside in a sanitarium.

Only Marcos knows, however, that Cosme is a farce that he fabricated when Violeta, his former amorous fixation, intruded on one of his sessions of

filth, abandon, and inspirational musical creation with his helicon. Unable to admit that he, Marcos, could indulge in such antisocial behavior, he claims to be Cosme, Marcos's twin brother. Some time later when Marcos, in a state of physical disarray, roams the city one night during a drunken spree, a woman he believes to be Angela finds him and locks him in a passionate embrace. Later, when he discovers that this is really Eva, Angela's twin sister, he decides that Angela must harbor the same hedonistic, degenerative identity as her sister, the other side of her controlled and somewhat uptight persona. He rejects Angela as flawed and unfit for him, but then calls up to ask Eva out on a date.

"Helicón" is the story of desire: Marcos's desire for a woman--focused first on Violeta, then Angela, then Eva--which is essentially his desire to strengthen his own masculinity in relation to the women in his life. This desire also manifests itself as the desire to tell, to reflect his image in the mirror of the text. Many critics have commented on the relationship between desire and narrative as an inherently Oedipal one, as Teresa de Lauretis summarizes:

All narrative, in its movement forward toward resolution and backward to an initial moment, a paradise lost, is overlaid with what has been called an Oedipal logic--the inner necessity or drive of the drama--its "sense of an ending" inseparable from

the memory of loss and the recapturing of time [. . .] and the restoration of vision. (Alice 125-26)⁵²

Georges Bataille has observed that the desire for the other parallels the desire for death, the first being the nearest approximation toward continuity that can be experienced in life.⁵³ Much like the desire for the other, the desire to narrate constitutes a parallel drive toward the end in an endeavor to recover or construct a continuity perceived to be lost in the past. “Helicón” posits a narrator who carefully structures his perspective in order to recount his pursuit of the desirable other and his rejection of the undesired one.

On the surface, “Helicón” seems to support the Oedipal trajectory of the male desiring subject who pursues the female object of desire. Such polarities of gender are mythically and culturally inscribed into the act of narration itself as the enunciation of desire:

For if the work of the mythical structuration is to establish distinctions, the primary distinction on which all others depend is not, say, life and death, but rather sexual difference. [. . .]
[A]ll [binary oppositions] are predicated on the single figure of the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In doing so the hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences.

Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter. (Alice 119)

If gender is the initial mark of identity distinction in society, as Fernández Cubas suggests when the amnesiac Elena intuits her own femaleness even before she recognizes her mirror reflection in "Ausencia," sexual difference forms the foundational dynamic of plot-structures. In the plotting of desire, a subject --figured as the masculine hero--can pursue its object--figured as the feminine obstacle, object, or traversed space.

The fundamental connection between the mythic text and the plot-text is their function of explanation, the incorporation of the transgressive into the established norm. As Jurij Lotman points out: "plot (narrative) mediates, integrates, and ultimately reconciles the mythical and the historical, norm and excess, the spatial and temporal orders, the individual and collectivity" (Alice 120). Thus plot always posits a center, a dominant perspective that explicates and appropriates its dialectical other. The key to this structuration in "Helicón" is the narrative perspective that determines what is excessive and must be interpellated into the normalizing plot. In this story Angela represents the excess, for she eludes Marcos's demand for her to be a passive, cooperative object of desire. Whereas Marcos would weld her into the amalgam of Woman, as an exact replica of every other woman, Angela

persists in voicing an alternate viewpoint that focuses on the *difference* inherent in every double, in every manifestation of the same. The dominant narrative perspective purports to defuse Angela's dissension by collapsing her into a single identity with her sister Eva. Nonetheless, the protagonist's rejection of Angela for her sister suggests that there is a marked difference between the two: as an object of desire, Eva duly reflects the specular image of virility that Marcos seeks. The narrator tries to recapture and re-present this past encounter in a more pleasing light for himself as desiring subject; however, the constant motif of doubling--manifest in images as well as other character perspectives--undermines the centrality of his point of view.

On Marcos's initial date with Angela he constantly strives to get the women he encounters to reflect his desired image of himself. He chooses a bar where the bartender, Aureliana, knows him and can reinforce his desired image of a "cool" patron. Despite the carefully chosen setting, Angela will not perform her designated role in the drama of inebriation and facile seduction: "Me disgustó que Angela no probara el alcohol. Eso ponía las cosas un poco difíciles. Yo diciendo tontería tras tontería, y ella, cada vez más sobria, más nutrida y vitaminada, observándome--observándonos, porque pronto llegarían los amigos--como un juez implacable y justiciero" (15). Instead of fulfilling her obligations as the object of desire, Angela inverts the paradigm of the look so that she is the observer. Marcos's

discomfiture with being the object of Angela's gaze is only intensified by Aureliana, who announces that she put a double banana in Angela's milkshake and unwittingly triggers Angela's obsessive discussion of doubles.

The topic of twin bananas leads Angela to meditate on the repulsiveness of twin egg yolks. This specter of the double profoundly disturbs her because it embodies inexorable repetition:

Dos. Exactamente iguales. Repulsiva e insospechadamente iguales. [. . .] Pero no es del todo cierto. Mientras las dos yemas convivieron en el interior de la cáscara, es decir, toda su vida, estaban condenadas a contemplarse la una en la otra. Una, en cierta forma, era parte de la otra. Y su fin, el lógico fin para el que nacieron, para el que estaban destinadas, parecía todavía más angustioso: fundirse fatalmente en una tortilla [. . .] y volver a lo que nunca fueron pero tenían que haber sido. Un Algo Único, Indivisible. . . (18)

This mirror image of seeing oneself exactly in the other disturbs Angela because it threatens to obliterate difference.

In response, Angela projects the need to assert what Mikhail Bakhtin or Judith Butler would term the difference inherent in simultaneity, in reiteration. If this motif of duality is read as a metaphor of women who are culturally, socially, even mythically constructed as mere repetitions of

Woman, Angela--unlike Elena in "Ausencia"--resists the fate of mere sameness to which destiny (or patriarchy) would reduce her. Later, she informs Marcos of how she rescued the yolks from their fate of duality and allowed them to express their difference:

las eché por el fregadero. Una tras otra. Una por el sumidero de la derecha; la otra por el de la izquierda. En ese punto culminante alcanzaron la felicidad. Venció la diferencia, ¿sabes? . . . Porque una, la primera, pereció burdamente aplastada contra la rejilla. La otra, en cambio, sinuosa, incitante, se deslizó con envidiable elegancia por la tubería. (25)

Angela's obsession with double objectification highly unsettles Marcos: "Lo único que pretendía era acabar con el amenazante monólogo de Angela" (19). He would rather ignore the detail of difference because he needs women to be the same, a homogeneous reflection of him as the virile actant-hero.

Angela's ideas threaten her suitor, not only because they distract her from complying with her role as man's object, but also because they point to a certain agency inherent even in the view of subjectivity as repetition. If objects are differentiated and capable of enacting their own distinctions, then they may well be able to act as subjects and traverse the divisive border ("/") to turn the subject/object relationship into one of reciprocity. Blind to Angela's point of view, Marcos persists in seeing even the deconstructed

images of duality as a confirmational reflection of his own desired image:

“Era obvio que, tras aquel desigual desfile de modelos en el fregadero, Angela veía en mí la reencarnación de la yema B, la sinuosa maniquí del sumidero de la izquierda” (25). As narrator, Marcos persistently objectifies not only Angela but her discourse; he assigns value to “aquella maravillosa mujer que yacía en mi lecho” (25) as an object for his pleasure and determines the meaning of her words, thus denying her the autonomy that she so desperately seeks. Confusing sex with conquest, Marcos believes himself to be reaffirmed as the powerful one.

Nonetheless, Angela herself is not immune to the tendency to define the self in total opposition to the other, as her opposing characterization of the two egg yolks suggests. Considering that one yolk “perció burdamente aplastada contra la rejilla” while the other “se deslizó con envidiable elegancia por la tubería” (25), it is not difficult to imagine which yolk serves as *her* object of identification. Angela repeats this obsessive search for difference within sameness with her fixation on a newspaper clipping about two middle-aged twin sisters who committed suicide together and were found dead in their apartment:

tampoco resultaba aventurado sospechar que existiera una pequeña, casi imperceptible discrepancia [entre las dos].

Porque la vida tenía que haber dejado forzosamente sus huellas

en aquellas antiguas muñecas encantadoras, hoy cincuentonas momificadas. Angela estaba dispuesta a jurar por su honor que no murieron en idéntica posición. Una de ellas--¿María Asunción acaso?--, rígida, perfecta, como en el fondo debió de haber sido siempre. La otra--¿María de las Mercedes? --, un tanto más desmadejada y omisa, como nunca pudo dejar de ser . . . (22)

The twin Marías, just like the double egg yolks, display their difference in opposition to one another. In both anecdotes, Angela constructs identity according to a division of rigid perfection versus weak laxity--or lack. These qualities resonate with traditional associations of the male/female dichotomy; what Angela truly strives to assert, then, is her ability to be strong.

The oppositional characterizations that Angela assigns to every double that disturbs her reflect, not coincidentally, the contrast between Angela and her twin, Eva. Even the sisters' names evoke contrasting biblical archetypes: Angela (like María de la Asunción) is angelic, pure, associated with light and goodness, while Eva is the fallen woman who seduces Adam into eternal damnation, as Kathleen M. Glenn has observed ("Gothic Indecipherability" 138). However, these identities subsume their own oppositions, for Lucifer was a fallen angel of darkness and Eve was created as the perfect, original

woman; each one thus embodies its opposite as well. Marcos persists in dialectically opposing the two sisters and sums up his view in his description of their kisses. Angela delivers “[u]n beso insípido, cortés, un beso de muchachita *bien rangée*” (43), whereas Eva, “sudorosa, despeinada, jadeante,” overwhelms him with her passion: “me rodeó con sus brazos y aprisionó mi boca con la suya. Ignoro cuánto duró aquel singular secuestro en el que no pude pensar, protestar o respirar siquiera” (39). His initial bafflement stems from the fact that, at the time, he thinks both women are Angela but knows that he only receives the passionate kiss when he is dressed as Cosme. Marcos’s account of one of Angela’s conversations with him reveals that she fears being equated as the same as Eva as much as she dreads being contrasted and found lacking: “¿qué tenía de extraño que ella, Angela, se avergonzara de su doble, de ese reflejo distorsionado que se veía obligada a soportar a diario, de la posibilidad de que los demás detectaran en la otra lo que no habían podido percibir en ella?” (48). Thus Angela, too, sees identities in terms of otherness and opposition; she longs to assert her own sovereignty as different in spite of her likeness to her sister because she fears the other within herself. As a result she separates her look-alike on the basis of good/bad, strong/weak, perfect/imperfect. Even as she struggles to surmount the system of duality founded on sexual differentiation, she cannot escape the discourse of those terms.

By taking the construction of differences upon herself, nonetheless, Angela takes on an agency that undermines Marcos's masculine domain as the active subject. Marcos comes to detest her, wildly imagining that she is some misplaced psychologist playing with him as her object of study: "Angela, de mujer deseada, pasaba a convertirse en mujer odiada" (41). Like the narrator over Ulla's monstrous power in "El provocador de imágenes," Marcos vehemently resists the feminine inversion of the examining gaze. Indeed, these subversive women threaten the underlying sexual premise of the whole subject/object structure that permeates mythical, psychoanalytic and cultural discourse. As de Lauretis observes:

The business of the mythical subject is the construction of differences; but as the cyclical mechanism continues to work through narrative--integrating occurrences and excess, modeling fictional characters (heroes and villains, mothers and fathers, sons and lovers) on the mythical plane of subject and obstacle, and projecting those spatial positions into the temporal development of the plot--narrative itself takes over the function of the mythical subject. The work of narrative, then, is a mapping out of differences, and specifically, first and foremost, of sexual difference into each text; and hence, by a sort of accumulation, into the universe of meaning, fiction, and history,

represented by the literary-artistic tradition and all the texts of culture. (Alice 120-21)

Angela's insistence on the difference that underlies reiteration and her assertion of the individual subjectivity of each female double violate her role as acquiescent object and convert her into assertive subject. Thus she undermines the constitutive binary of sexual difference on which the patriarchal construction of subjectivity is founded.

In this manner, Angela's interpretation serves as a counternarrative to Marcos's discursive construction of self/other relations. Significantly, although "Helicón" reproduces exactly the text of the newspaper clipping, Marcos subsumes Angela's interpretation of it beneath his own voice by means of free indirect discourse. Whereas he cited her directly to present the story of the egg yolks, in the indirect account of the dead twins the man attempts to undermine the impact of this competing narrator, whom he criticizes as "un tanto monotemática" (21). With this tactic of indirect discourse the narrator subordinates Angela's voice and perspective to his skeptical and critical point of view. Nonetheless, as a manifestation of what Bakhtin calls "double-voicing," Angela's suppressed voice resonates behind Marcos's words. Of course, beyond Marcos's voice is that of the implicit author, whose point of view readers construct from the composite of the story's multiple overlay of voice and vision. Asserting his narrative control,

Marcos seems blissfully unaware that he, too, may be the object of a critical gaze from a source other than Angela.

The twist in this story is that, despite his annoyance with Angela's preoccupation with doubles, Marcos himself relies on a double to excuse parts of his character that he would rather not recognize before his friends. Marcos is afraid to own up to "abnormal" aspects of himself, so he thrusts that bizarre identity onto the figure of his invented twin, Cosme. Indeed, he feels the same fear of being equated with Cosme that Angela harbors of being confused with her twin sister, Eva: "No añadió 'en cierta forma es como si una parte de Marcos estuviera enloqueciendo. . .', pero adiviné enseguida que era eso precisamente lo que estaba pensando Angela" (23). Ironically, Angela is precisely the person who might best understand such a concern, but the narrator is too busy imagining and interpreting her thoughts to listen to her ideas. When he finally discovers that Angela has a real twin who is just as eccentric (or ex-centric, as the case may be) as Cosme, he condemns her exactly as he feared she would judge him: "Ya no podía ignorar que Eva, entre otras cosas, era la cara oculta de su hermana" (50). Yet none of his friends assumes that he is insane like his brother; only his worried projections of their thoughts pass such a judgment. In contrast, Marcos assumes that Angela and Eva must be the same, a homogeneous object that lacks the virtue of differentiation.

Marcos's very creation of Cosme in the past surged from his panicked need to be the actant in control of a confrontation with another woman, Violeta. The fiasco began when he gave Violeta the keys to his apartment with the expectation that she would behave according to the accepted code of femininity: "Cuando un hombre entrega las llaves de su piso a una mujer--la réplica de las llaves de su piso, para ser exactos--lo hace [. . .] íntimamente convencido de que esa mujer [. . .] llamará antes a la puerta" (26-27). Nonetheless, Violeta breaks the rules of what a woman possessing a man's keys should do and sneaks into his apartment unannounced. Unbeknownst to the narrator, when he bemoans his error the imagery he selects is hilariously phallic (a little joke, perhaps, on the part of the "implicit" female author): "¿Cómo no pensé en introducir mi llave en la parte interior de la cerradura o sujetar, por lo menos, la cadena de seguridad?" (28). These unwitting metaphors of the sexual act (and even of "abnormal" sexual behavior) inadvertently underscore Marcos's status as the passive, violated object, the role normally assigned to woman in the binary of sexual differentiation. Wielding the keys--the symbol of a replicated and displaced phallus--and thus the control of the situation, Violeta manipulates her power in order to penetrate his space. When she observes his debased reverie with the helicon--behavior she judges to be abnormal--Marcos's objectification before an interrogating gaze is complete: "Supe lo que mi arte tenía de vil,

rastrero, impresentable y bochornoso. [. . .] Lo supe de golpe, he dicho.

Cuando la palabra *abyección* fue la única que me escupieron aquellos ojos redondeados por el espanto, por la vergüenza, por el asco" (30). Violeta's gaze of horror marks him as the abject, the outside, the criminal, and inscribes him with the memory of "el terrible día de autos" (28), the day when he becomes the objectified confessee.

The surrender of the doubled keys and displacement of phallic power are all the more amusing in their juxtaposition to Marcos's equally phallic description of his helicon. Each musical session is a ceremony that culminates his ritualistic preparation, which entails ceasing to bathe or clean up the house for days in order to immerse himself in a state of viscous, putrid abandon. Then, unlocking his armoire with another (phallic) key, Marcos takes out his helicon--the object of everyone's admiration in childhood parades, he explains--and begins to play: "El instrumento más gigantesco y fascinante de todos los desfiles obraba en mi poder" (29). Of course, in addition to being an enormous tuba that envelops the entire body, the helicon also evokes the mountain where the Greek muses dwelled, thus symbolizing a source of power and inspiration. Indeed, the narrator virtually personifies it, referring to it as "Helicón" as if it were a proper name. Each ritual with the helicon restores Marcos's phallic sense of power, which apparently transmutes to timidity when he is not able to sustain his dominance in daily

interactions with others. Beneath the critical gaze of Violeta, however, Marcos sees these sessions as a demonic indulgence: “operaban como invocaciones a elementales, a íncubos de la más baja estofa, a poderes de la peor categoría [. . .]. Y comprendí también por qué después de aquellos trances me sentía renacido, puro, el Marcos amable y tímido que conocían los demás” (30). Like Angela, the protagonist defines himself as a duality, but he recognizes that both poles of the binary Marcos/Cosme reside within him.⁵⁴

With his dual sense of self laid bare before Violeta’s disgusted eye, Marcos comes to see himself as other, as the abject: “Y al observarme, al sentirme observado, desnudo, despeinado y pringoso, al aspirar la atmósfera nauseabunda que señoreaba la casa, comprendí por primera vez que abyección era el término exacto, propio e insustituible” (30-31). He observes himself differently now because he feels himself to be observed. Yet, unable to bear the image that this gaze imposes on him, Marcos inverts the power paradigm by turning himself into Violeta’s mirror reflection: “Entonces Violeta gritó, y yo, presa del terror frente a mí mismo, me uní como en un espejo a su alarido” (31). In his complicitous reflection of her horror, Marcos tries to excuse himself from responsibility for his otherness. Claiming to be Cosme, Marcos’s twin, he then interrogates her as to why she is creeping into the house with her shoes in her hands. Stunned into submission, Violeta

believes the fiction, meekly excuses herself, and leaves. Cosme as double is born, then, from the union of Marcos's and Violeta's screams of horror at the specter of abject otherness: "aquel triste día entre Violeta y yo nos inventamos a Cosme" (33).

It is significant that in "Helicón," as in other Fernández Cubas stories, monstrosity and insanity as quintessential labels of abnormality figure in the exploration of otherness. When telling their friends about Cosme, Violeta's discourse exploits these binary definitions (and others, such as that of a potentially sadistic sexual predator) to their extreme in order to heighten the titillating horror of the other:

La aptitud fabuladora de Violeta, una cualidad que no había valorado lo suficiente, me ayudó a alcanzar mis objetivos. Pronto me enteré, no sin cierto deleite, de que mi monstruosa réplica no se había contentado con amenazar de palabra a la inocente intrusa. Un amago de estrangulamiento, desgarrones brutales en su delicado traje de seda, y una pasión y un deseo capaces de aterrorizar a la mujer más bregada componían ahora el cuadro de sufrimientos y penalidades por los que había pasado la dulce heroína. (35)

In her narration, Violeta casts herself as the heroine but only in the sense that she is acted upon; her task is to withstand the advances of the virile male and

to enhance her own virtue in resistance to his menacing otherness. Her confabulations complement the image Marcos wants to project of Cosme, since he needs to distance himself as far as possible from the undesirable, unacceptable otherness he harbors within himself:

Violeta se estaba enfangando tanto como yo, y a mí no me quedaba más que dar por zanjado el asunto. Así que interné a Cosme en un sanatorio, condené al helicón al eterno ostracismo en la oscura soledad del armario ropero y me juré a mí mismo que aquellas extrañas sesiones que tanto me alborozaran no volverían a repetirse en la vida. (35)

With this ostracism to darkness or the insane asylum, Marcos resorts to time-honored tactics of suppressing the monstrosity of otherness.

The play of opposites reaches a climax in the story when Marcos sets up a showdown with Angela in a bar, where he plans to manipulate her into submission. Still unaware that Angela's inconsistent behavior is due, in part, to the fact that "she" is really "they," two people, he tries to gain the upperhand by arriving an hour late and then spying on her: "quise reservarme unos minutos para estudiar el rostro alterado de Angela, su expresión azorada y recrearme en su creciente nerviosismo. La observé complacido. Su desaforada pasión por la simetría la había conducido a sentarse frente al espejo, junto a dos sillas vacías" (46). He believes he has the

liberty of choosing which chair he will fill, which role he will enact: Cosme or Marcos. Just as the protagonist created Cosme in dialectical union with Violeta, now he strives to recreate Marcos in conjunction with Angela, for like Violeta in "Lúnula y Violeta" or Daniel in El año de Gracia, the weakness he perceives in the other reflects, to his oppositionally oriented perspective, corresponding strength onto himself. His smugness quickly becomes stunned surprise, however, when he realizes that there is no mirror reflecting Angela's image, but that the double is her flesh-and-blood twin.

Although Marcos initially devalues Angela as tainted by her inextricable identification with her double, he inadvertently recognizes their difference when he learns that Eva has fallen in love with Cosme. Sticking his head out of the phonebooth in the bar, where he talks unobserved to Angela on the restaurant phone while watching her without her knowledge, he then stares at Eva, who "[s]e estaba hurgando la nariz con toda la tranquilidad del mundo" (49). Like Narcissus mesmerized by his own reflection, the protagonist is beckoned by this alternate mirror image that returns, instead of a threatening difference, a gratifying likeness to himself. Thereafter he behaves subtly like an empowered Cosme, even if he does not alter his appearance: "me hice con una llave herrumbrosa y la introduje en la cerradura del armario ropero. [. . .] Helicón, el causante de todos mis desafueros, seguía allí, desterrado desde el día en que cobardemente me

asusté ante el mundo, ante los amigos, ante mí mismo" (51-52). Now it is he who takes action, who wields the key. If the "yo" who struggled in fright through much of the story can be seen as Marcos repressing the "me/mí mismo" that is Cosme, then the speaker now identifies with Cosme, who might be seen as a Lacanian *moi*, the "true" self. Finding the suppressed double within himself confirmed in a new female object, the narrator embraces the previously denied side of his personality.

As underscored by the title of this collection, El ángulo del horror, the angle of vision is crucial to the construction of the subject, of what one sees. Despite all the narrator's efforts to control her, Angela persists as an excess that questions the validity of reducing all women into a single, undifferentiated object. Her perspective, juxtaposed with his, reveals that the narrator's point of view is not the only one and re-views his masculine construction of the feminine subject from an angle of horror. Whatever their alternative perspectives may be, each character in this story defines herself or himself through the dialectic of desire between subject and object. Yet even as desire moves toward its end, its process is in fact never-ending: "If desire is the question which generates both narrative and narrativity as Oedipal drama, that question is an open one, seeking a closure that is only promised, not guaranteed. For Oedipal desire requires in its object [. . .] an identification with the feminine position" (Alice 133-34). No woman in this story completely acquiesces to

Marcos's desire, whether it be physical or narrative. Indeed, Marcos can only squirm beneath the power of a feminine gaze that finds him lacking. Thus the line that divides the roles of male/female and subject/object is revealed to be simply another border that was meant to be crossed, another taboo that cannot exist without its own transgression.

All these dualities turn out to be repetitions, but different. Is it possible, then, to privilege any single perspective in the text? Angela clings to the difference inherent within each double because she reads it as the saving grace of her superiority over her sister—she is distinct from her sister in that she is better than her sister. Is this really any different than the way Marcos defines himself? The names of each side might shift, but the dialectical relation endures—just another repetition of similitude and difference. Even the narrator must be seen ultimately as a composite: he is as "anal-retentive," self-conscious, and detail-oriented as Marcos, yet at the end he speaks as Cosme. The dizzying array of double images, double perspectives, and even double voicing forces us to constantly change our positionality in relation to the text in order to modify our view of it. Who, then, is the subject and who is the object in the dynamic of reading? "Helicón," even as it fans our desire for an end, finally eludes any satisfying closure. If it did not, we would not desire to decipher it, to capture it, nearly so much.

“El legado del abuelo”:

The desire for an end figures as the need to explain death itself in the next story in El ángulo del horror, “El legado del abuelo,” in which an adult narrator recounts his childhood experience of his grandfather’s death. He focalizes all the upheaval, uncertainty, pain, and suppressed anger from the perspective of a young boy who does not yet know the intricate social codes of discursive expression. Thus the way the churlish grandfather is described posthumously as kind and doting by the boy’s mother, María Teresa, her older siblings, particularly Uncle Raúl, and the maid, Nati, jars with the candid evaluation of dislike provided by the child. The old man’s surly treatment of the child incited the latter, in revenge for the old man having stolen money from the boy’s piggy bank, to withhold the bedridden invalid’s pills when he was having a seizure. In fact, the boy himself caused his grandfather’s death. When the child finally pieces this together, he silences his knowledge in order to protect himself. Several days after the death, the adults’ euphemistic eulogies cede to angry resentment when they cannot find their father’s will. The siblings suspect the boy’s young mother of having sequestered the inheritance that the grandfather always hinted at, since she had been the one taking care of the old man for so many years. In vain, Teresa and Nati turn the house upside-down in search of some legacy, while the boy resents the increased emotional distance that he perceives in his mother as she sinks into hopelessness at her situation.

At one point, the two women remember a Chinese box with a tiny key that the grandfather always treasured. The boy tells them he has harbored the box in his room since the day of the death and explains that its contents are only an old pipe and some photographs. He decides that the photographs of his grandfather's young children were the real legacy, one that those grown-up children could not appreciate, and is angered when they never consider the sentimental value of the family photos. Never actually perusing the contents of the box themselves, the women briefly ponder and then dismiss the peculiarity of the grandfather having saved a pipe, since he never smoked. Disgusted with what he perceives as his mother's increasing weakness and disregard for him as well as her purely monetary interest in her dead father, the protagonist identifies emotionally with his grandfather as someone else whom María Teresa had treated unjustly.

After many years of estrangement from his mother, the protagonist as a young adult happens upon the Chinese box again and studies its contents. This time, he realizes that underneath its patina of grime the pipe is made of solid gold and that it bears an inscription from the grandfather that lovingly bequeaths it to Teresa. Stunned, the protagonist realizes that the old man had truly loved and appreciated his daughter and had intended for her to live comfortably. Instead, she has given up on life, grown old before her time, and for many years has resided in a retirement home with people much older than herself. This new

perspective reveals that he had misjudged his mother completely; ostracism and rejection—the fate which his grandfather had always feared but escaped because Teresa took care of him—were exactly the end the protagonist imposed on his mother.

In that its view at the end completely alters the meaning of the narrative, “El legado del abuelo” dramatizes the drive towards the end, towards death, as a retrospective structuration of signification. The death of the grandfather propels the narrative as an endeavor to explain that death, to understand and integrate it into the realm of discourse. In this way it parallels Peter Brooks’s idea that “plot is the internal logic of the discourse of mortality” (22). The act of narration stands out as the plotting of events over time in an effort to create order and meaning: “It is the ordering of the inexplicable and impossible situation as narrative that somehow mediates and forcefully connects its discrete elements, so that we accept the necessity of what cannot logically be discoursed of” (Brooks 10). Thus part of this story concerns the young protagonist’s apprenticeship with language, his journey toward learning the discourse “for what cannot be logically discoursed of.” The narrator’s desire to understand death and its relation to life is both the motivation and the *denouement* of his tale. Indeed, the desire for death may be the *only* motivator of narration, as Peter Brooks stresses: “Walter Benjamin has made this point in the simplest and most extreme way, in claiming that what we seek in narrative fictions is that knowledge of death

which is denied to us in our own lives: the death that writes *finis* to the life and therefore confers on it its meaning" (22). This retrospective process of coming to know the end is one integrally dependent on time and shifting perspective, as Fernández Cubas underscores in her novel El columpio. While a plethora of perspectives that question absolute vision figures in all of Fernández Cubas's texts to some extent, in "El legado del abuelo" this motif is so crucial that it essentially *becomes* the story, the story of a changed perspective.

The ingenuous point of view from which the child perceives everyone's reaction to the grandfather's death humorously highlights the artificiality of the way the adults treat death in this story. The boy cannot reconcile his household's lamentations with the resentment they all felt towards the tyrannical old man when he was alive:

hasta la Nati, refrotándose las manos en el delantal, alzaba los ojos al cielo, decía: 'Pobre señor' y *gemía*. El desconsuelo de la Nati fue lo que más me sorprendió al principio. Estaba cansado de oírla rezongar en la cocina cada vez que el abuelo hacía sonar la campanilla de su cuarto o el timbre de la cama, de escucharla gritar: '¿Qué mosca le ha picado ahora a ese tipo?'. O llamarlo 'tiña', 'peste' [. . .]. (55)

The adults represent the old man with their words according to an ideal construction, and remember their own actions toward him in an enhanced way,

as well. Such power of discourse to transform reality is instigated, for the child, by death itself: “Me di cuenta enseguida y comprendí que, de las muchas desgracias que podían suceder en vida, la peor de todas era la Muerte” (57). The child intuits that a fundamental goal of language is to express and explain death, even if that representation effects a great distancing from the “reality” of the death itself.

Indeed, the dissonance between discourse and death cause great confusion for the little boy as he attempts to learn to communicate with adult lingo. Having listened avidly to his mother’s and Nati’s discussions of the death, he tries to fulfill his assigned job of communicating the news by telephone to numerous relatives: “mi madre había repetido hasta la saciedad lo que tenía que decir y en aquellos instantes, en los que por nada del mundo quería disgustarla, transmití el mensaje palabra por palabra, como si tratara de una contraseña secreta [. . .]. –El abuelo está con la abuela –dije” (65). At first this laconic code, uttered completely out of any context on the telephone, unsettles and confuses even the adults. The child identifies with their astonishment: “[yo] también, como ahora mi tío, pensé en algo peor. No tanto en que el abuelo se hubiera ido a no sé dónde a reunirse con la abuela, sino en que la abuela, desde ese lugar situado en no-se-sabía-dónde, hubiera decidido de repente venirse a pasar unos días con nosotros” (66). The child’s untrained perspective humorously defamiliarizes the signification of the message that society has assigned and

highlights the constructed nature of language, which depends on context and expectations of meaning in order to create communication.

Moreover, the protagonist's infantile point of view underscores the function of appearances to veil what hovers underneath. Nati's and Teresa's worried discussion of how to dress the grandfather thoroughly puzzles the boy: "Lo de vestir al abuelo, aquel día, a aquella hora y en aquellas circunstancias, me pareció lo más extraño que había escuchado hasta entonces. Porque, por más que me esforzara, recordaba al abuelo siempre igual, embutido en un pijama de rayas [. . .]" (59). Finally, however, the child recalls a single occasion when he saw his grandfather fully dressed:

tuvo que salir—un funeral seguramente o algo relacionado con un amigo muerto—y lo vi por primera vez con abrigo y sombrero [. . .], me pareció mucho más alto, fuerte y terrible que de ordinario. Tuve entonces la impresión de que el abuelo era en realidad así, como aquel día, y que los otros, es decir, toda la parte de su vida que yo conocía, no había hecho más que fingir [. . .]. (60)

Notably, this transformation in the grandfather is provoked, for the child, by death. The need to deal with death is the fundamental cause of the disjuncture between being and appearance, as if death were a truth that must be concealed: "aquella tarde la ropa parecía cobrar una importancia capital" (67).

The pajamas become a metonymy that is literally and figuratively inseparable from the grandfather and also serve as a metaphoric “cover” for oppositionality. The old man’s constant wearing of the pajamas symbolizes his refusal to be active in life, which in turn has made him put on weight so that the pajamas are the only clothing that fit him. As a result, Teresa and Nati resort to dressing him in a Bedouin robe that the old man had brought back from the war in Africa. Their hope is that, “para quien no lo supiera, podía pasar por una túnica” (69); thus even the death shroud is not what it would appear to be and must stand for something other. Death as the ultimate other is underscored here by the dynamics of additional “other” relations. Uncle Raúl becomes furious when he sees that his father is “vestido de moro” (68), precisely the people he hated and fought against during the war. This “aside” engages the traditional dialectic of *cristiano/moro* that, when inverted, enrages the tyrannical Eloísa in El columpio. As Fernández Cubas's fiction signals, it is another key historical and cultural construction in Spanish identity.

In Teresa's defense of the cadaver's inappropriate attire that misrepresents the side of the binary that her father embraced, she falls back on the dialectical opposition of gender as the impediment to her acting otherwise: “Porque no se debía olvidar que tanto la Nati como ella eran mujeres y que el abuelo, su padre, era, al fin y al cabo, un hombre. Por eso,

debajo de la túnica, le habían dejado el pantalón a rayas del pijama” (69).

The African robe masquerading as a tunic is indispensable then, to cover up the pajama bottoms which, the boy imagines, conceal his grandfather’s identity in order to project a fictive persona. Finally, the pajama bottoms are required to veil a father’s masculinity from his daughter—in a humorous twist of the prohibition that a drunken Noah once violated in the bible.

These multiple layers of meaning tied to the pajamas purport to conceal what should not, cannot, or will not be seen. Significantly, the foundational prohibition is that of the phallus, suggesting that perhaps the most basic stratum of otherness here is indeed that of gender. In Fernández Cubas’s imagery, however, the garments’ reversible association with one side or the other of the binary that they represent implicitly unravels the seam between each pair of constructs that they oppositionally stitch together.

At a loss for how to deal with the intricate maneuvers that death requires, Teresa appears childlike in her confusion and helplessness, which helps her son identify with her perspective. The narrator characterizes his mother’s guilelessness by her gaze: “Mi madre había cambiado de aspecto y sus ojos, a ratos, recordaban los de una niña, sorprendida e indefensa, perdida en un laberinto frondoso del que no se confía en encontrar la salida” (58). The boy’s desire for his mother as a puerile equal also idealizes her as a reconstruction of glamorous women he has observed in popular culture:

la forma en que sostenía el pitillo, la dedicación que ponía en aspirar y expulsar el humo me recordaban a las artistas de cine y de la televisión, las fotografías de las revistas de moda [. . .]. Me sentía muy a gusto allí, en el sofá, al lado de mi madre, envueltos en humo, en aroma de café, y deseé que aquel momento en que nos habían dejado solos no acabara nunca" (68).

Of course, the phallic symbolism of the cigarette in the boy's identification with his mother is psychoanalytically suggestive—not to mention the fact that his father died while she was in the hospital giving birth to her son. Suffice to say that the child basks at the center of his mother's regard.

Nonetheless, the gaze of this idealized other soon shifts to different objects. His mother's look becomes as self-centered as everyone else's, in the child's eyes, when the euphemisms of death are displaced by the financial priority of the questionable inheritance: "Porque ahora los ojos de mi madre se parecían tremendamente a los de tío Raúl, tía Marta y tía Josefina. Mirándose con recelo, acusándose unos a otros [. . .]" (74-75). Feeling "como si yo me hubiera vuelto invisible otra vez" (79), the child's adoration of his mother inverts to abhorrence. Hence this female archetype joins the ranks of fictional Fernández Cubas women—Lúnula, Fátima, Josefina, Ulla, Adriana, Laura, Jezabel, Carolina, Dina Dachs, Clarisa, and Angela, soon to be extended by Rosa (la "flor" de España)—who do not gaze at their objects—male or female—the way those objects

desire. The child in "El legado," unseen by his mother, believes he now holds no importance for her: "Ahora que había perdido su expresión de niña era obvio que no me necesitaba para nada" (80). This disillusionment and abandonment spur him to outgrow his own infantile ignorance and learn the codes of the adult world.

The household's preoccupation with the inheritance leaves the boy with plenty of freedom to explore on his own. He learns to take the bus and wander the streets alone, and to recognize and cynically condemn the self-serving discourse of his mother and Nati:

Pero ya estaba cansado de todas estas historias. De que dijeran '¡qué tontería!' cuando de nuevo les estaba contando la verdad. Ellas, que no hacían más que mentir. Que hablar de cariño, de dolor, de las razones sentimentales por las que habían tapizado a grandes flores los sillones, las sillas, el sofá del abuelo. . . Pero de mi boca no surgiría una palabra. Y escondería la caja. Callaría [. . .]. (89)

The women had torn the furniture cushions apart in search of the inheritance, an inheritance that the boy possesses but wants to conceal (although later he slips up and mentions that he has the box, he never shows it to them). Moreover, the child wields his knowledge of the adult codes when he deliberately hides his role in the old man's death: "Pero yo mismo me tapé la boca. Porque lo que me

asustaba aún más, si cabe, era que [. . .] apareciera una de aquellas dos mujeres en mi cuarto y descubriera que lo sabía todo” (84). Silence, he realizes, is itself a kind of discourse that serves to mis-represent and distance the other from what will not be expressed.

The emotional distance the protagonist feels toward “aquellas dos mujeres” increases with the years, as his sense of personal superiority—born of disillusionment and alienation—causes him to reject his mother and identify with his grandfather. Believing that the old family photos in the Chinese box, hoarded to stave off “la desconfianza, el miedo cervical a acabar sus días en un asilo” (92), to be the grandfather’s true legacy, the boy has identified himself as “el único destinatario de aquel legado” (93). Disillusioned by the duplicitous discourse of the adults that he himself has manipulated against them in revenge, the boy grows up believing he has seen the truth about his mother and found her to be lacking. Once again, he is displaced as the object of desire of his idealized other when, years later, he rediscovers the Chinese box and its pipe of gold:

Y a medida que frotaba con una gamuza iban apareciendo en la embocadura unas letras que dejaban muy claro quién era el destinatario de aquel objeto: ‘Para María Teresa, mi hija.’ Y fue precisamente esta inscripción lo que me hizo dudar de todo lo que hasta entonces había dado por cierto. [. . .] Y constaté que nada me había servido creerme el receptor del legado del abuelo. Porque

había hecho precisamente de mi madre lo que él siempre temió
que hicieran conmigo. (95-96)

Now an adult, he sees the pipe, as a sign, differently. His maturity over time has taught him to recognize that the pipe is made of gold and to perceive its obscured message for María Teresa.⁵⁵ Hence the protagonist learns that any interpretation of a text depends on the perspective from which it is seen.

This knowledge is the fundamental distinction between the “experiencing self” and the “narrating self” of the story.⁵⁶ The new perspective of his life radically changes his vision of his mother and of himself: “Veía mi mirada de rey destronado, escrutando a mi madre, acusándola en silencio, convirtiéndome en el juez de una situación que únicamente los nervios, las circunstancias y mi obsesiva presencia podían provocar” (96). Having spent his life in pursuit of desire, longing to be the object of desire in the gaze of his mother, he now sees how he victimized her as the object of his own gaze. In a parallel manner, knowing the end changes the meaning of the text for readers, who can re-view the signs with a new perspective and see the irony of the narrative discourse. For instance, readers understand that the narrator’s declaration that everyone felt that the grandfather’s death “parecía un hecho insólito y extraordinario” (56), silences the truth: the death seemed strange but was not, for the protagonist himself provoked it. The perspective of the ending casts new emphasis on the

word “parecía,” underscoring yet again the distance between being and appearance.

The distance between narrating and experiencing self highlights the fundamental role of shifting perspectives as one of the elements that creates meaning. At first only marked by verb tenses (past versus present), and then informed by the different perspective afforded by knowing the end, the effect of time on the text is underscored by the capricious factor of memory. As the recuperation of the past in the present, memory is shaped indelibly by time, as the narrator discloses when he recalls the tassels of his grandfather’s robe “con las que, cuando era tan pequeño que casi no me acordaba, habíamos jugado los dos al teléfono. O tal vez no había jugado nunca y tan sólo hubiese querido jugar. O algún amigo mío, quizá, me habló de otro batín, de otro abuelo y de unas borlas como aquéllas [. . .]” (59). Thus memory is the reconstruction of the past as the subject perceived it to happen. Time blurs perceptions, all the more so in that its past and present manifestations are always dependent on perspective and invested with desire.

The dual levels of perspective proffered by “El legado del abuelo”—those of the protagonist and those of the narrator—dramatize the effects of time on the subject as he progresses toward greater knowledge and/of death. Plotting desire, then, is a way to understand the way we have come to be. If desire is what drives us toward the end, to reorder events over time in order to create

meaning retrospectively, however, to satiate that desire would be to unite with death itself: “with the possibility of total realization of desire, the self encounters the impossibility of desiring, because to desire becomes, and can only be, the choice of death of that same self” (Brooks 51). And so it is that desire is also what constantly drives us back to the beginning, to reread and search for new meanings, always from an altered perspective and place in time.

“El ángulo del horror”:

As the title story of the collection, “El ángulo del horror” synthesizes and epitomizes the visual construction of the subject through the other. Indeed, its focus on perspective—on an unexpected, often bizarre and even horrific angle of vision—can be seen as a metaphor for all of Fernández Cubas’s fiction. The angle of sight shapes the way everything is perceived and thus it mediates in relationships of power, gender, colonialism, history, and subjectivity itself. “El ángulo del horror” explores the dynamics of the gaze as perhaps the most fundamental delineator of the subject in relation to its object.

The multiple and complex implications of the gaze are posited in a surprisingly simple plot in this story. An eighteen-year old young man, Carlos, returns home on vacation from his studies in England in order to visit his two sisters, Julia and Marta, and his parents. The family and particularly Julia, who focalizes the third-person narration, worry when Carlos mysteriously becomes

listless and apathetic right after his arrival and locks himself in his room. Finally, he allows the devoted Julia to enter and tells her of a dream he had in England in which he saw their house from a completely different and dreadful perspective, an angle of vision that has permanently contaminated his view of everything. As Julia listens to his haunted tale, Carlos realizes that he is able to look at her directly and see her as she is, undistorted.

Not long afterward, he goes downstairs and chats normally with the family, who plan to commit him to an asylum to try to help him. Then he goes into the bathroom and returns to his room. Suddenly, Julia realizes what he has probably done and rushes to his room just before he breathes his last breath, in a self-induced repose of overmedication. Horrified, Julia sees not Carlos but Death itself languishing there; now everything *she* perceives is contaminated and corrupted by the terrible vision of implicit and impending death. Running outdoors to escape, Julia is comforted to learn that at least she can still look normally at her younger sister, who has followed her. At that moment, the expression in Marta's eyes changes as she comprehends that "a ella, Julia, le estaba ocurriendo algo" (115), just as Julia's gaze began to change, days before, with the realization that *something* was happening to Carlos.

The expectation of another repetition of the angle of horror in young Marta created by this ending foregrounds the motif of repetition of the same-yet-different which weaves throughout the author's work. As I have shown in my

analyses thus far, the tension between sameness and difference underlies every binary opposition that Fernández Cubas explores and deconstructs. Yet why must all human relations hinge on this duality? Is it endowed with some overarching power, as the origin that must repeat its authority before it can be deconstructed? In terms of subjectivity, it seems that sameness/difference is the fundamental measuring stick by which the subject defines itself in relation to its others.

In his studies on the subject, Mikhail Bakhtin proposes that the self and other incarnate the master distinction of perspective that applies to all relationships from the personal to the philosophical to the political. Bakhtin was highly influenced by Einstein's concept of relativity, which demonstrated that perspective is a relational concept dependent on two bodies: "the observer's ability to see motion depends on one body changing its position *vis-à-vis* other bodies. [. . .] Stated differently, one body's motion has meaning only in relation to another body; or--since it is a relation that is mutual--has meaning only in *dialogue* with another body" (Holquist 20). Hence Bakhtin derives his overarching metaphor of dialogue to describe relational dynamics, and Michael Holquist, in his explanation of the great Russian thinker's ideas, coins the term "dialogism:"

Dialogism argues that we make sense of existence by defining our specific place in it, an operation performed in cognitive time and

space, the basic categories of perception. Important as these categories are, they themselves are shaped by the even more fundamental set of self and other. We perceive the world through the time/space of the self and through the time/space of the other.

(35)

The fundamental way human beings perceive the world always contrasts the way they see themselves with the way they see everything else. In this sense, as Holquist succinctly notes, “self for Bakhtin is a cognitive necessity, not a mystified privilege” (22); therefore, any identification of the self as center is also cognitive and relational, not an absolute.

Although the focus on self/other may seem to reify binarisms as foundational, Bakhtinian thought undermines dialectical relationships. For him, it is never *one* as opposed to the *other*, but one and the other only come to signify at all in the *relationship* between them of mutual simultaneity and separateness. At issue, then, are three parts, a triadic connection in which the self and other depend upon one another for meaning. The differential relation of self/other results from distinct ways of seeing each one’s realm of time and space: “The other is in the realm of completedness, whereas I experience time as open and always as yet *un-completed*, and I am always at the *center* of space” (Holquist 26). The self is incomplete in and of itself because it cannot *see* itself fully. It is logical, then, that subjects so frequently long to be the object of the gaze, for this

is a fundamental step toward understanding their subjectivity: “In order to be perceived as a whole, as something finished, a person or object must be shaped in the time/space categories of the other, and that is possible only when the person or object is perceived from the position of outsideness” (Holquist 31). Thus the subject needs its other to supplement its vision of itself. Moreover, it always defines every other it sees according to relations of similarity and difference to itself.

“El ángulo del horror” accentuates the desire to see and be seen as fundamental to knowledge. Indeed, the opening line features a frustrated Julia who spies in search of her brother’s secret: “Ahora, cuando golpeaba la puerta por tercera vez, miraba por el ojo de la cerradura sin alcanzar a ver [. . .]. Julia se daba cuenta de que debía haber actuado días atrás, desde el mismo momento en que descubrió que su hermano le ocultaba un secreto” (99). As Carlos’s adoring sister, Julia is baffled by his refusal to recommence their customary adventures together, and posts herself outside his door in the hope that “ella vería. Vería al fin en qué consistían las misteriosas ocupaciones de su hermano, comprendería su extrema palidez y se apresuraría a ofrecerle su ayuda” (100). If *ver* is *comprender*, Carlos obscures his own vision in order to block out the knowledge transmitted by his altered view of the world, which he cannot bear to accept: “en sus ojos parecían concentrarse los únicos destellos de luz que habían logrado atravesar su fortaleza. ¿O no eran sus ojos? Julia abrió ligeramente uno de los

postigos de la ventana y suspiró aliviada. Sí, aquel muchacho abatido, oculto tras unas inexpugnables gafas de sol, [. . .] era su hermano” (105). The play of light and darkness in Carlos’s room highlights the literal menace of vision and the metaphorical threat of knowledge. Since Carlos has finally invited her in, Julia is delighted to be reconfirmed by his gaze and his esteem: “Un destello de orgullo iluminó sus ojos. Carlos, como en otros tiempos, iba a hacerla participe de sus secretos, convertirla en su más fiel aliada, pedirle una ayuda que ella se apresuraría a conceder” (106). Julia longs to be seen, from the outside, by her brother because her relationship with him is crucial to what she believes she knows about herself.

Yet Carlos’s vision has been irremediably altered by the shift of time/space from which he views the world. He first sees the angle of horror in the realm of his dreams, while he is in England; thus, at least implicitly, it is associated with a double displacement from the daily reality he knows in Spain. Essentially, Carlos has come to see “the same” from the perspective of difference, from the outside:

Era [. . .] la casa en la que hemos pasado todos los veranos desde que nacimos. Y, sin embargo, había algo muy extraño en ella. Algo tremendamente desagradable y angustioso que al principio no supe precisar. Porque era exactamente *esta casa*, sólo que, por un extraño don o castigo, yo la contemplaba desde un insólito

ángulo de visión. Me desperté sudoroso y agitado, e intenté

tranquilizarme recordando que sólo había sido un sueño. (108-09)

Once he has found this perspective, Carlos can never return to the position from where he saw things before: “[Es] Un extraño ángulo que no por el horror que me produce deja de ser real. . . Y lo peor es que ya no hay remedio. Sé que no podré librarme de él en toda la vida. . .” (109). Julia, watching Carlos, has not yet learned how to see from his point of view the first time he observes the house from his new perspective: “Carlos se había quedado ensimismado contemplando la fachada de la casa como si la viera por vez primera. Tenía la cabeza ladeada hacia la derecha, el ceño fruncido, los labios contraídos en un extraño rictus que Julia no supo interpretar” (102). Carlos’s angle of seeing/knowing recalls Judith Butler’s point that what is excluded from any body is as formational of its boundary as the body itself. Carlos has crossed the border to see the center—his home in Spain—from the perspective of the outside.

Although reluctant to accept the knowledge Carlos tries to share with her, Julia’s altered view of him changes the way she sees herself. At first, the girl tries to look away from her brother in denial of the new view of him: “Los últimos sollozos la obligaron a desviar la mirada en dirección a la azotea. De repente le incomodaba encontrarse allí [. . .] ante el desmoronamiento de aquel ser a quien siempre había creído fuerte, sano y envidiable” (109). Refusing to acknowledge him, she claims that she must take Marta to the movies. Julia’s altered

perspective of her brother is offset, however, when she glimpses her own image reflected in duplicate in the two lenses of Carlos's dark glasses:

Dos cabezas de cabello revuelto y ojos muy abiertos y asustados.
 Así debía de verla él: una niña atrapada en la guarida de un ogro,
 inventando excusas para salir quedamente de la habitación,
 aguardando el momento de traspasar el umbral de la puerta,
 respirar hondo y echar a correr [. . .] y ella sentía debajo de
 aquellas dos cabezas de cabello revuelto y ojos espantados dos
 pares de piernas que empezaban a temblar, demasiado para que
 pudiera seguir hablando de Marta o del cine [. . .]. (110)

With the trick of reflection, of repetition, Julia is able to see herself through the eyes of the other. She realizes that this self-image reveals her own perspective shaded by the discourse of fairytale and myth, which inscribes binary oppositionality as the fear of difference. From that angle, the little girl trapped in the monster's lair longs to cross the threshold—the border—and escape from the threatening other and his space. Yet Julia also comprehends the perspective of Carlos and realizes that the other, although different, is not a threat but an additional way of seeing herself. As her double, this other reflects a double vision with which she identifies: she *feels* two pairs of legs that connect to the two heads and frightened pairs of eyes that she observes. Significantly, right after Julia has this cognition Carlos realizes that “A ti, Julia, a ti aún puedo mirarte”

(111). He can see her because she, too, has begun to glimpse an *other* way of seeing.

Finally, when she observes her brother's death, Julia can fully comprehend the horrific angle of vision that so disturbed him: "Julia volvió la mirada hacia su hermano. Por primera vez en la vida comprendía lo que era la muerte. Inexplicable, inaprehensible, oculta tras una apariencia de fingido descanso. Veía a la Muerte, lo que tiene la muerte de horror y de destrucción, de putrefacción y abismo" (114). Like Teresa and Nati in "El legado del abuelo," Julia is confronted by what must not be seen, by what cannot be understood. Yet the way of seeing other-wise forces her to contemplate the semblance of Death and comprehend it as the ultimate Other: "Porque ya no era Carlos quien yacía en el lecho sino Ella, la gran ladrona, burdamente disfrazada con rasgos ajenos [. . .] mostrando a todos el engaño de la vida [. . .]" (114). Julia recognizes Death as the dialogic other of life, inseparable from life. Death and life mean nothing as separate entities, for each is constituted as meaningful only in their relationship to one another.

Fernández Cubas's altered angle is horrific in the sense that it displaces the borders we erect to protect ourselves and to create the illusion that we are encircled by life, by what we know, by the same.⁵⁷ The dialogic vision that informs all that we can see and know cannot be attained by the self alone, for the self can never perceive its completeness, its own death: "this possibility of

conceiving my beginning and end as a whole life, is always enacted in the time/space of the other: I may see my death, but not in the category of my "I" For my "I," death occurs only for others, even when the death in question is my own" (Holquist 37). Carlos sees death in every other upon whom he rests his gaze. The only way to escape this omnipresent vision, this constant knowledge, is to die himself, for he cannot see and be fully cognizant of his own death. Julia, when she observes her brother's death, is re-positioned into the extended angle of vision that the other provides—a perspective that she eventually will pass on to her sister, a different other.

While the siblings alternately shift into this different angle of sight, they are not able to see the larger picture of relationships that I have sketched here, for they are implicated within that picture. As Holquist notes, "An event cannot be wholly known, cannot be seen, from inside its own unfolding as an event" (31). The view we as readers take of these relationships parallels that of Bakhtin's outside observer:

In Bakhtin's thought experiments, as in Einstein's, the position of the observer is fundamental. If motion is to have meaning, not only must there be two different bodies in a relation with each other, but there must as well be someone to grasp the nature of such a relation: the non-centeredness of the bodies themselves requires the center constituted by an observer [. . .]. Bakhtin's

observer is also, simultaneously, an active participant in the relation of simultaneity. Conceiving being dialogically means that reality is always experienced, not just perceived, and further that it is experienced from a particular position. (Holquist 21)

Positioned on the outside, readers observe but also participate in the dialogic relationship in that they experience it through their perception. Readers see the larger purview of dialogic perspectives in their position of what Bakhtin calls transgredience: "Transgredience [. . .] is reached when the whole existence of others is seen from outside not only their own knowledge that they are being perceived by somebody else, but from beyond their awareness that such an other even exists" (Holquist 32). Readers' outside view in "El ángulo del horror" is integrally shaped by the "omniscient" narrative perspective of this tale, one of the few Fernández Cubas stories told in the third person. Thus the narrator's perspective parallels that of readers, outside the subject/object dynamics he purports to observe. In contrast, a first-person narration would preclude the transgredience that comprehends the full import of all the dialogic subjects and objects that it relates.

The dual meaning of "relate," as 1) to interact in the creation of meaning and 2) to tell a story, is fundamental for Bakhtin, since narration observes and weaves together the relationships among characters as subjects and objects. Thus he distinguishes the novel as a metaphor for dialogic dynamics. So too with the

short story, I would argue (viewing the vaguely delineated requirement of length—the principal distinction between the two “genres” of short story and novel—as a dialogically [de]constructed border). As a narrative text, then, “El ángulo del horror” focuses on the dynamics of perspectivism that dialogically constitute subject/object relations. By constantly reversing the relationship of seer and seen, this text suggests that knowledge is achieved not dialectically, but relationally, dialogically, through ever shifting centers of vision. In this way, Fernández Cubas’s narrative reveals the agency inherent in dialogic subjectivity:

the tripartite nature of dialogue bears within it the seeds of hope: in so far as my ‘I’ is dialogic, it insures that my existence is not a lonely event but part of a larger whole. The thirdness of dialogue frees my existence from the very circumscribed meaning it has in the limited configuration of self/other relations available in the immediate time and particular place of my life. For in later times, and in other places, there will always be other configurations of such relations, and in conjunction with that other, my self will be differently understood. (38)

If the desire for knowledge, mediated by perspective, ultimately points toward knowledge of death and the end of the story of the subject, the story is always repeated “in another time, in another place” by successive readers. The story is

always begun again and consumed anew in the drive towards the end and an altered vision of our others and ourselves. This, after all, is why we read.

“La Flor de España”:

Fernández Cubas playfully emphasizes the effect that repositioning the subject in “another time, another place” has on the subject’s visual construction of itself and its others in “La Flor de España,” the last tale in this collection. The Spanish narrator/protagonist of this text, who works as a university instructor in “el país del frío” (presumably a Scandinavian country), characterizes Spaniards and Northerners according to the time and space of their homeland. Feeling miserably out of place in this land, and having just been dumped by her northern boyfriend, one day she happens upon a small shop called “La Flor de España,” run by a short, blond woman named Rosita. Annoyed that a northerner would presume to be able to transplant Spain to this land, the narrator tries to find fault with Rosita. Eventually she realizes that Rosita is Spanish and friends with a whole “colony” of Spaniards with whom the narrator herself begins to associate. Within this group of expatriates, the narrator identifies most with the northern wives of some of the Spaniards. With increasing frequency, she visits “La Flor de España” and tries to bait Rosita into conversation and interprets Rosa’s terse, apathetic replies as gestures of friendship.

Puzzled when the other workers finally announced that Rosa is both ill and very busy and will be indisposed for months, the narrator spends her summer vacation with the three northern women, who delight in belittling the Spanish. From these women she learns that, oddly enough, the northern boyfriend who recently dumped her has become romantically involved with her previous northern boyfriend, whom she herself had rejected. At the end of her vacation, the protagonist hides herself to keep watch outside the shop door of “La Flor de España” in anticipation of its re-opening. Rosa finally arrives—suntanned, vivacious, and in control—but seems to have some sort of collapse after the narrator enters the shop to pester her with questions once again. Unconcerned, the narrator decides that she will not, after all, abandon the country of cold since she has so many good friends there, the most important of whom is Rosita.

The binary opposition of north/south in this story, with the radically different cultural adaptations to space and time that characterize the respective lands, invites a consideration of the role of the chronotope—or “time space”—in shaping the perspective of the subject.⁵⁸ Borrowing the term from mathematics and the Theory of Relativity, Bakhtin employs the chronotope to study the intricate connection between space and time: “In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible;

likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin 84). This inter-relationship becomes central in light of the tenet of Einstein's relativity and Bakhtin's dialogism, that the position of the subject intrinsically shapes his or her perspective.

While Bakhtin's chronotope is a complex concept with multiple applications in his study of the novel, it interests me in its role as a marker of subjectivity, that is, in the way it delineates a subject's space and structures a subject's time. As Michael Holquist notes,

Chronotope, like situation, always combines spatial and temporal factors with an evaluation of their significance as judged from a particular point of view. [. . .] As experienced by subjects, time and space are always tied up with judgments about whether a particular time or a particular place is good or bad, in all the infinite shadings those terms can comprehend. Perception is never pure; it is always accomplished in terms of evaluating what is perceived. (152)

Human perception is inseparable from the interpretation of what is seen; these value judgments are inevitably shaped by the way subjects' respective chronotopes have conditioned them to view the world. In the context of Bakhtin's dialogism and Fernández Cubas's fictional cosmos, one chronotope achieves meaning when set in tension with another. "La Flor de España"

establishes a chronotopic dialogue to explore how time and space shape the subject's visual construction of others and of itself.

In "La Flor de España" the narrator's displacement into the "other" chronotopic sphere of the north contours her critical assessment of the people who surround her there. Her first sentence heralds her own identification with a southern chronotope as superior to the northern one that envelops her: "Hacia un frío pelón; [. . .] y me preguntaba, como cada día, qué diablos estaba haciendo allí, en una ciudad de idioma incomprensible en la que anochece a las tres de la tarde y no se ve un alma por la calle a partir de las cuatro" (119). The psychological distance indicated by the deictic "allí"—even though the speaker is physically present there—accentuates the narrator's derogatory condemnation of the time space of the north. Her perspective posits her own chronotope, that of "cierta península del sur en la que casualmente yo había nacido" (154), as the center and standard of normality.

Feeling completely out of place in this foreign chronotope, the narrator rejects the possibility that others might viably overlap two chronotopes in order to extend and enrich their perspectives instead of belittling one or the other. When she spies the neon sign of the Spanish shop, her critical gaze evaluates it and finds it to be deficient:

A medida que me aproximaba me pareció que el de La Flor era de todos el más vistoso [. . .] por los curiosos guiños a los que se

entregaba la tilde y que supuse no del todo preconcebidos.

Aquella no era una tilde normal y corriente. Una onda apenas esbozada, un signo ligero, sugerente, sino un auténtico disparate, un trazo desmesurado, toscamente añadido a una inocente e indefensa ene. (121)

This fixation on the inaccurate reproduction abroad of the tilde as the quintessential symbol of Spanish identity is amusing in the extratextual context of Spain, which has felt pressure from the international community to repress its tilde in order to facilitate international type-written communication. Through the narrator's obsession with the tilde, Fernández Cubas playfully problematizes the connection between language, national identity, and worldview: other countries' keyboards often do not reproduce the ñ, since it is not part of their linguistic representation of the world.

Moreover, from the narrator's point of view, the shopowners have distorted something northern in order to approximate something southern, ineffectually trying to integrate two distinct chronotopes. She judges that their endeavor is doomed because they mutilate a northern letter to make it masquerade as a deficient tilde from the Spanish language:

Pensé en el prurito de los propietarios de La Flor, en su deseo de hacer las cosas bien hechas, pero también en su evidente sentido del ahorro para acudir a un apaño casero como aquél y aprovechar

una B, una S, un trozo de cualquier letra hecha en serie que, tal vez por las manipulaciones y no por otra causa, sólo accedía a mostrarse con intermitencias. (120)

She assumes that this “letra mutilada” (120) is not an *authentic* tilde because it is not situated in the place of *origin*, the central chronotope of Spain itself. By extension, this shop in the north surely cannot boast of authentic Spanish products: “No era la primera vez que veía una tienda como aquella.

Naturalmente a lo largo de mi vida había visto cantidad de tiendas como aquella. Pero allí, en medio de una calle desierta, en el país del frío, donde los días acaban a las tres de la tarde y no se ve un alma a partir de las cuatro . . .”

(121). What the narrator does not enunciate—what she deems too obvious to be uttered—is that the realm of one time-space *cannot* be duplicated within the realm of another. Like Angela in “Helicón,” she fears the annihilation of individuality in repetition, in the reproduction of the self within another.

If the country of cold where the sun sets at three in the afternoon is an inferior chronotope that produces inferior subjects who speak an incomprehensible language, then Spain is privileged as the chronotopic measure of all that is desirable. The narrator imagines an experience in Spain for the shopowner, one that altered her subjectivity and inflamed her desire for the better things in life:

en medio de algo muy semejante a una iluminación, creí comprender el porqué del insólito negocio. Aquella mujer había conocido tiempos mejores—no hacía falta ser muy sagaz para averiguar *dónde*—, tiempos irrepetibles y lejanos, dorándose al sol, bebiendo ingentes cantidades de sangría, enamorándose sucesivamente del guía, del portero, del chófer del autocar. De cualquier hombre de piel curtida que se le pusiera por delante. [. . .] Ante la imposibilidad de traerse al muchacho moreno—el guía, el portero, el conductor del autocar —se había traído el resto.

(123)

In this enumeration of stereotypes, the narrator delineates Spanish subjectivity only along the most visible, superficial level of sun, *sangría*, and seduction. Her Spanish chronotope—with its long days of warm relaxation and its nights of desire and revelry—radically contrasts with the darkness and deserted cold of the north. Beyond oppositions of race and nationality, the narrator also depends on the gender binary to inscribe the woman's experience in the south. Her list of possible male others precludes any distinction among Spanish men by setting them up as a chain of interchangeable substitutes. She views them all as swarthy, seductive, and servile—perhaps revealing, more than the northern woman's experience with the Spanish man, her own relationship with them based on superficiality and all-or-nothing power-plays. Unable to appreciate the

subtleties of “the same yet different,” the protagonist thrives on the absolutes of dialectical opposition in order to reinstate her side of various binaries as the superior one.

To give due credit to Fernández Cubas’s skill, I should emphasize that the self-centered obsessiveness of the narrator’s perspective surfaces indirectly in the text, in a much more subtle manner than my analysis might suggest (since I endeavor to disclose the angle of her gaze). Much of the overall humor of this story depends on readers’ seeing (and knowing) more than just what the narrator shows and says. The narrator’s vision and voice work against her, for instance, in the scene where she initially peers into the shop window; readers recognize how the trope of the window can dramatize the reversibility of the gaze, wherein the critical subject can become the ridiculized object. Threatened by the unspoken implications of the mixture of chronotopes, the narrator notes that the boredom which led her to scrutinize the shop “se convirtió, con la nariz pegada al escaparate y nieve hasta las rodillas, en el más absoluto desconcierto” (121). She identifies only with her own perspective, looking with disdain into the display window. She does not consider the possibility that those people inside the shop might also look out at her (not to mention that *readers* “look” at her). The narrator unwittingly depicts herself to be seen as an object: a nosy woman immersed in filthy snow, her nose smashed against the pane as she

cranes her head and squints to pass judgment on what she sees. We see, although she cannot, that she looks ridiculous.

As a seeing subject, the protagonist constantly passes *her* critical eye over the products in La Flor de España, always in search of the most remote and insignificant flaw in order to demonstrate the invalidity of the project of transgressing borders and transposing chronotopes. Dissatisfied with the news that Rosita would stock all the traditional kinds of *turrón* for Christmas, she makes a fuss over the lack of *turrón de coco*. When she observes jars of *pimientos de pico*, she obsesses over the heinous oversight of not stocking *pimientos de piquillo* as well (although she is not certain whether there is really a difference between the two). In addition to seeing the array of Spanish products in the north as lacking, the protagonist paradoxically considers them to be an excess, a grotesque distortion that northerners could only view as the fearsome specter of otherness:

Lo que acababa de contemplar era lo más semejante a un museo de horrores; una vitrina de ídolos extraños arrancados de su origen [. . .]. Me pregunté a quién se le podía haber ocurrido la idea de montar un negocio tan grotesco e imaginé a algunos padres rubios y de ojos azules amenazando a sus hijos, también rubios y de ojos azules, con llevarles a La Flor de España si no acababan la sopa.

The protagonist is unsettled by the specter of exact repetition within a time space of difference, for she can only view the north/south dichotomy as a sacred, dialectical otherness that must be preserved as separate. Her attitude unveils the standard tactics by which any center marginalizes its periphery: by visualizing and inscribing it as lack, as excess, as the abject to be rejected because of its difference which must not be recognized as the same—or its sameness which must be represented as difference.

Toward this end, the protagonist identifies oppositionally in every situation she encounters, even to the point of siding against “her own” people, the colony of Spaniards in the city of the north. The first time she attends one of the colony’s gatherings, she notices the importance of individual nationality: “Todos—yo misma desde que entrara por la puerta—teníamos nuestro lugar de origen marcado a hierro en la frente” (130). Whereas for the protagonist these differences are grounds for absolute division, she is amazed to learn that the other expatriates *choose* the blend of chronotopes in which they live: “Me sentí un poco en el exilio. Ninguno de los presentes se encontraba allí por razones forzosas; ganaban sueldos espléndidos y no parecía que se plantearan ni por asomo deshacer sus pisos y regresar a su ‘lugar de origen’” (131). In this group of exiles, of compatriots who have voluntarily crossed the border of nationality and embraced an overlay of time space, the protagonist feels like an exile. As a result, she identifies with the northern wives of some of the Spaniards—“no tardé

en formar parte de su pequeño círculo, ese grupo dentro de un grupo, aquella colonia dentro de una colonia" (152)—with whom she indifferently sides against her own people: "asistí indiferente a la enumeración metódica, diaria y exhaustiva del cúmulo de defectos y atrocidades que [. . .] irradiaba cierta península del sur en la que casualmente yo había nacido" (154). In this union with the different against the same, the protagonist seems to have crossed the border of identity that constructed her with the mere accident of birth. She feels more affinity with those on the northern side who, like herself, resent the transplantation of cultures and the superimposition of chronotopes.

Nonetheless, part of the subtlety of perspectivism in this story lies in the way the narrator, at times, vocalizes very enlightened opinions about definitions of national difference. When one Spanish woman in the colony voices her frustrations with the way Northerners are so unlike Spaniards, the protagonist mentally takes the opposite side: "aquello, además de una solemne estupidez, me pareció una aseveración un tanto discutible. Primero: ¿cómo éramos nosotros? O mejor: ¿era bueno o malo ser como nosotros? No seguí por ese camino porque resultaba evidente de qué lado se hallaba lo correcto, positivo y envidiable [. . .]" (133). Yet as her friendship with the northern wives deepens and they begin to recognize her as "one of them," the protagonist re-identifies herself along the Spanish side of oppositional national lines: "Y supe, aunque nada dijeron, captar la profundidad de su mensaje: 'Ahora sí, por fin. . . Ahora

empiezas a ser un poco de las nuestras.' Un poco, sí, era cierto. Pero, ¿y ellas? ¿Serían alguna vez como yo, como *nosotros*?' (155). If there is any pattern at all to the oscillation of her self-definition, it may lie in the protagonist's persistent identification in *contention* with the object of her attention, regardless of the opinions they profess.

The protagonist doggedly pursues oppositional identification as a means of reaffirming her own power over others and the "other" that she most prefers is Rosita, whom she sarcastically identifies as the true flower of the Spanish shop. In constructing Rosita as her dialectical—not dialogical—other, the protagonist insists on dividing and allocating Rosita's amalgam of diverse national characteristics onto one side or the other of the binary. Rosa is blond and fluent in the northern language, but she also is extremely short and a native speaker of Castilian. Instead of seeing her as a combination, the protagonist first portrays her as solely Northern and then as purely Spanish: "Se había puesto en pie, y observé que, además de desvaída y seca, era fondona e increíblemente baja. Me pregunté cómo podía haberla confundido con una autóctona. Porque la verdad es que se había puesto en pie, pero se diría que seguía sentada" (126). The narrator's gaze focuses on Rosa's shortness as the target of her caustic humor and beratement of all things Spanish in the north.

Of course, as Foucault and many others have demonstrated, the oppositional definition of the self is inseparable from the drive for power. The

protagonist's unwaning passion for finding fault with the services of La Flor de España is an effort to assert her own superiority:

Me había atrevido a pronunciar *¡qué contratiempo!*, y ahora me daba cuenta de que una de las constantes de esa magnífica y engañosa expresión estaba precisamente en la superioridad arrogante, el tono de conmiseración o distancia con que la persona que dice *¡qué contratiempo!* califica unos hechos—la carencia de turrón de coco, por ejemplo—y coloca a los responsables en una posición dudosa e imprecisa, pero una posición, en resumidas cuentas, de simples siervos. (143)

Once again, however, the narrator ignores that her gaze and her discourse are not the only ones that construct others as objects. All her efforts to defy the superimposition of chronotopes overlook the additional chronotope of readers—any of the almost infinite time spaces from which they might perceive and interpret her story. Most contemporary readers of this story in Spanish will recognize the ridiculous pettiness of her demands—who obsesses over *turrón de coco*, after all?—and subvert her, beneath their gaze, as the object of their humor.

The humor of the protagonist's blind struggle for power is intensified by her persistent misinterpretations of the way other characters react to her. When she brings her homemade oxtail soup to Rosa in a gesture of friendship—and also in a demonstration of “la superioridad de cualquier sopa de rabo de buey hecha

en casa, sobre el caldo del mismo nombre que aparecía machaconamente repetido y enlatado en uno de los anaqueles del establecimiento” (148) (another attempt to assert the value of differentiation, perhaps?)— Rosa insists that she does not eat between meals. Readers perceive this as a desperate excuse to discourage further gestures by the protagonist. However, the protagonist herself delightedly observes that “la flor volvía a mostrarse tan extrovertida y locuaz como en viejas ocasiones” (148). Extroverted? Loquacious? Readers’ astonishment at the incorrigible woman’s point of view may be surpassed only by that of Rosa herself:

La flor se entregó a un curioso parpadeo y yo, sonriendo, acerqué una silla al mostrador. Pero enseguida me di cuenta de que me había precipitado. Porque durante unos segundos el azul de sus ojos había dejado paso a un blanco espectacular. [. . .] El blanco más blanco de todos los que, a lo largo de mi vida, había visto ponerse fugazmente en blanco. (148-49)

In her zeal to assert her perspective as superior, the protagonist is blind herself to others’ impressions of her. Yet again, she inadvertently reveals the way others see her, this time by disclosing that Rosa is only one of many who react by revealing the whites of their eyes. While the protagonist dismisses this as a “curious blinking,” readers see it for a gesture of supreme annoyance and frustration, not to mention desperation.

The playfulness of perspective in “La Flor de España” demands its own game of oppositionality, then, by positioning readers against the protagonist. Yet this dynamic is not reduced to dialectics, since the meaning of the text lies in the *relationship* between those two points of view: the self must take into account the vision of its other if it wants to see beyond its own limitations, for only in their co-operation do the two come to signify at all. The re-vision that dialogism requires unsettles the narrator, for it displaces her from the sphere of power she has staked out for herself. While, within the text, self and other take their shape from their respective chronotopes, the integration of those time spaces suggests a merging of difference into simultaneity that the narrator perceives as a threat to her sovereignty. Her perspective, however, in tension with other points of view, produces the dialogic vision created in the text, which spotlights the fundamental nature of subjectivity as repetition within difference and separation within simultaneity.

In some ways, Fernández Cubas may be seen to parody her own treatment of the discourse on sameness and difference, for in “La Flor de España” the motifs of repetition and difference pervade nearly every image and technique, no matter how insignificant they might seem—right down to the oxtail soup and *pimientos de pico/piquillo*. Doubles and differences collide and repel, gazes are imposed and inverted, words and images capriciously twist toward multiple interpretations, all in a kaleidoscopic array of overlays and

contradiction, inversion and displacement, until this reader, at least, can only throw up her hands in helpless laughter at the outrageousness of it all. Perhaps humor, after all, is the best teacher. For in many ways the most horrific angle of vision is the hilariously obnoxious and judgmental perspective of this narrator, whose blindness to the way her antagonism alienates everyone she encounters isolates her from all of them, same or different.

Conclusion:

In the stories of El ángulo del horror desire for the other and the end is both the motivation and the potential undoing of the subject. Physics has demonstrated that the way in which we see necessitates additional points of view in order to complete our vision, while psychoanalysis, myth, linguistics, and numerous other fields inscribe the dualistic interaction of the self and other in the process of identity formation. The dynamics of the gaze always functions as a crucial tactic in this construction; however, Fernández Cubas's texts persistently overturn any illusions inscribed in patriarchy that the seeing subject is male and its object female. As El ángulo del horror highlights, optical perception is a relative exercise, dependent on perspective, and a relational one, dependent on the dialogue between object and subject for its meaning.

As Fernández Cubas constantly reminds us in her stories, the subject's plotting of its desire for the dialogic other constantly confronts the paradoxical

duality of sameness and difference. For if each object reflects its subject, its duality can reaffirm or invalidate, according to how repetition is perceived. Yet even as being is, as Bakhtin holds, co-being, a simultaneous relationship between self and other, it is also one in which each person serves to differentiate the other. Such a perspective radically destabilizes the comfortably familiar lines of binary opposition along which the Western subject has traditionally drawn its identity. Although its visual *deconstruction* of the subject may be horrific, Fernández Cubas's angle on subjectivity may also incite the subject to plot (and) desire differently.

Afterword

As a closing note, I would like to underscore that the theoretical issues that I have highlighted in individual chapters of this study inform all of Fernández Cubas's texts. While I selected concepts to help elucidate the intricacies involved with the re-construction of identity in each work, the theories and texts could be re-configured. For instance, power relations infuse the mediation of identity in El ángulo del horror, while El columpio posits contradictory constructs of gender invested with power. Mi hermana Elba and Con Agatha en Estambul problematize subjectivity as inscribed in many discursive fields such as literature, nationality, and religion. El año de Gracia alters temporal and spatial markers that individuals take for granted, and blurs the chronotopic boundaries that contour their existence. Finally, the tension of perspectives in Los altillos de Brumal demonstrates that, while the power of vision imparts knowledge, knowledge is at most partial and may be just illusory. Although Fernández Cubas's theoretical story of subjectivity might be repeated, each tale that tells it is different.

In the wake of Spain's rejection of authoritarianism, Fernández Cubas's fictional world registers power, authority, and discourse as transitory. Far from being unmitigated, power permeates all relations and is perhaps the most fundamental element of subjectivity. Its changeable nature

ensures that subjectivity need never be completed, but can engage itself and its others as an ongoing process. In unveiling absolute power as an illusion, Fernández Cubas's narrative also refutes the notion of inviolate authority. In this author's work every discourse is recognized as intertextual by nature, for it always transmutes from and refers back to what has gone before. This gives rise to a crisis over originality/duplication for many characters in her texts. Inevitably, the issue condenses to the unsettling paradox of sameness and difference, for--as with innumerable other binary oppositions-- Fernández Cubas inverts, subverts, and subsumes these poles to show that they both repel and dwell in one another. As a result, her characters discover that the very borders they depend upon to define their subjectivity also delineate the subjectivity of their others, both similarly and oppositionally. In the end, it is precisely the difference and repetition imbued in oppositionality that establish, destabilize, and expand the identity of the subject who is open to angles of otherness.

In this light, however, the constant repetition of doubles in Fernández Cubas's fiction brings into question what duality *itself* excludes in order to constitute the terms of its own existence. Why does the self always depend on its other to reflect and complete its image? Despite the endless inversions and subversions of power that typify subjectivity, each subject is still defined by its object, each center mapped by its margin. The constant shifts of

perspective in her texts suggest that no viewpoint can ever be total in and of itself, hence the need for reflection, repetition, supplementation, alteration, and so on, in a chain that could extend indefinitely. If the nature of subjectivity necessitates an other in the quest for completion, the augmented perspective from outside that relationship affords even greater vision and knowledge. Thus the visual optics of subjectivity in her work ultimately surpass duality to create multiplicity, extending out to the textual level. More than dialectical, this model is dialogic in its search for supplementation.

Fernández Cubas's stories always implicate readers in this dialogic process, for she sets up and subverts readerly expectations in order to induce them to change their perspectives. At times the author posits such a dynamic in terms of theatricality: if the characters are like actors on a stage (both performing subjects and seen objects) they are also objects of the gaze of others (spectators or readers). Hence Fernández Cubas's metaphor of subjectivity as performativity traces an implicit path to agency for those beyond the stage (those supposedly denied the opportunity to act), by enlisting the critical power of their gaze into the performance. This interpretive role, bestowed by theater, fiction, and literature in general, dramatizes subjectivity and power as mutable processes that can be manipulated by all. Rather than mere repetition designed to reify some "original," constructed identity, Fernández Cubas's narrative discourse elicits

the *interpretation*--the reading and acting out--of subjectivity in order to challenge the performance of identity both within and without the text.

The genius and complexity of her tales are such that, even if readers believe that they perceive a message and attempt to illustrate it through textual analyses, the stories themselves threaten to undermine the stability and certainty of their interpretations. This leads to readers inventing more and more texts, in response to those that the author initially created. One could view this endeavor pessimistically, as a constant chain of supplementation that drives one farther and farther from the origin, from the "truth," whatever that may be. Yet I prefer to see it another way, as would, I suspect, Fernández Cubas: creating texts is a productive undertaking, for it spurs the subject to interrogate his or her own discursive constructions by searching for their abject zone--those things left out in order to present the work as a cohesive entity. Thus we, as subjects, seek out the similarity and difference in the excluded other to glimpse, within the discourses we construct, those discourses that construct us. As a result of interpreting our texts and ourselves from angles of otherness, then, we continue plotting the story of subjectivity as one whose ending is yet unwritten.

Notes

Introduction

¹ It is not my intention to suggest that 1975 was a magical year that triggered sudden, absolute changes in Spain. I see it more as a symbolic marker of a transformation that was well on its way in the 1960s. Critics have long debated over the time and degree of the change from Francoism to Post-Francoism--see, for example, the Introduction to La cultura española en el posfranquismo, edited by Samuel Amell and Salvador García Castañeda. What is undeniable, however, is that major alterations have occurred. My particular study is concerned with the literary representation of altered Spanish identity, not with the actual timing of when it took place.

² Robert C. Spires correlates the end of Francisco Franco's dictatorship with the initiation of a global shift in political power: "Franco's death in 1975, along with the elections of 1977, set in motion what was destined to become a worldwide trend away from dictatorship and centralized power" (Post-Totalitarian 51)

³ For more information on the development of feminism in Spain in the contemporary period, the following sources may provide a starting point for investigation: various publications by the Instituto de la Mujer, such as

Carmen Ortiz Corulla's La participación política de las mujeres en la democracia (1979-1986); Anabel González, El feminismo en España, hoy; Pilar Folguera, ed., El feminismo en España: Dos siglos de historia. For perspectives on feminism in contemporary Spanish narrative, see Biruté Ciplijauskaitė, La novela femenina contemporánea (1970-1985); Margaret Jones, "Different Worlds: Modes of Women's Communication in Spain's Narrativa Femenina"; Joan Lipman Brown, Women Writers of Contemporary Spain; Roberto C. Manteiga, et al., eds., Feminine Concerns in Contemporary Spanish Fiction by Women; Elizabeth J. Ordóñez, Voices of Their Own: Contemporary Spanish Narrative by Women; Janet Pérez, Contemporary Women Writers of Spain; and Phyllis Zatlin, "Women Novelists in Democratic Spain: Freedom to Express the Female Perspective."

⁴ Basic texts that set up and debate the phenomenon of postmodernism include: Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition; Frederic Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism; Ihab Hassan, The Postmodern Turn; Brian McHale, Postmodernist Fiction and Constructing Postmodernism; Linda Hutcheon, A Poetics of Postmodernism and The Politics of Postmodernism. As a sampling of the debate over the validity of the term "postmodern" when applied to Spain and Latin America, the reader might consult the issue entitled "Fragmented Identities:

Postmodernism in Spain and Latin America," with Alejandro Herrero-Olaizola as guest editor, in Journal of Interdisciplinary Literary Studies 7.2 (1995). For a postmodern analysis of specifically Spanish novels, see Gonzalo Navajas, Teoría y práctica de la novela española posmoderna.

⁵ Paul Smith's Discerning the Subject provides a lucid explanation of "agents" and "agency." For him, agency may be seen as a form of subjectivity where "the possibility (indeed, the actuality) of resistance to ideological pressure is allowed for (even though that resistance too must be produced in an ideological context)" (xxxv).

⁶ In addition to the works already cited, the following studies provide an overview of the general trends in post-Franco narrative: special issues of Insula, nos. 464-65 and 512-13, which focus on the status of the contemporary Spanish novel; Santos Alonso, La novela en la transición (1976-1981); Oscar Barrero Pérez, Historia de la literatura española contemporánea (1939-1990); Angel Basanta, La novela española de nuestra época; Isabel de Castro and Lucía Montejo, Tendencias y procedimientos de la novela española actual (1975-1988); and José B. Monleón, Del franquismo a la posmodernidad: Cultura española 1975-1990.

⁷ See Constantino Bértolo's "Le nouveau pacte narratif" in France's Magazine littéraire.

⁸ See Fernando Valls's interview with Cristina Fernández Cubas, Ignacio Martínez de Pisón, Juan Miñana, Enrique Vila-Matas, and Pedro Zarraluki in "De últimos cuentos y cuentistas."

⁹ It is also possible that, as a child of parents from Aragón who was raised speaking Castilian, Fernández Cubas does not feel that the Catalán identity is hers to embrace. She has been criticized by those who feel that *lo catalán* should be expressed by texts written in that tongue, yet her professional formation was not constructed in that language. Interestingly, in her childhood "el catalán, en aquella época, era una lengua de juegos" (Nichols 57). The contrast between the Catalán expression of free playtime and the Castilian expression of daily life presents an interesting duality of exclusion/inclusion, although it is one which the author herself has chosen not to incorporate into her fiction. For a discussion of manifestations of "feminism" in the author's work, see my study of the representation of gender in Los altillos de Brumal in chapter 2.

¹⁰ While I agree with the intertextual parallels that Bellver lucidly draws in this article, our distinct conclusions are probably a reflection more of slightly different interpretations of postmodernity as a creative versus limiting force. These alternate emphases draw from the debate over postmodernism alluded to above.

¹¹ In addition to the novels and short story collections that I have mentioned, Fernández Cubas has published a short story, "Omar, amor," in the anthology Doce relatos de mujeres, edited by Ymelda Navajo, and a work of children's literature, El vendedor de sombras (1982). In selecting amongst her short fiction for my study, I have chosen to focus on her collections since they imply an interrelationship among the stories within each collection.

¹² Spires discusses the representation of power as "all-pervasive and contradictory" in post-totalitarian Spanish fiction in "A Play of Difference: Fiction after Franco" (286).

Chapter One: Looking Objectively at the Subject:

The Spectacle of Power in Mi hermana Elba

¹³ In his introduction to the collection of essays, Samuel Amell discusses the arguments of numerous critics on this issue (7-10).

¹⁴ See Spires, Post-Totalitarian 106.

¹⁵ Hereafter, I shall abbreviate my references to the titles of Foucault's various works in this manner: PK for Power/Knowledge, DP for Discipline and Punish, and HS1 for History of Sexuality, vol. I.

¹⁶ Foucault's account reads, "On 2 March 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned 'to make the *amende honorable* before the main door of the Church of

Paris' [. . .]. Bouton, an officer of the watch, left us his account: 'The sulphur was lit, but the flame was so poor that only the top skin of the hand was burnt, and that only slightly. Then the executioner, his sleeves rolled up, took the steel pincers, which had been especially made for the occasion, and which were about a foot and a half long, and pulled first at the calf of the right leg, then at the thigh, and from there at the two fleshy parts of the right arm; then at the breasts. Though a strong, sturdy fellow, this executioner found it so difficult to tear away the pieces of flesh that he set about the same spot two or three times, twisting the pincers as he did so, and what he took away formed at each part a wound about the size of a six-pound crown piece'" (DP 3-4). When the horses were unable to pull the limbs off the prisoner, the executioner had to assist by hacking at them: "After two or three attempts, the executioner Samson and he who had used the pincers each drew out a knife from his pocket and cut the body at the thighs instead of severing the legs at the joints; the four horses gave a tug and carried off the two thighs after them, namely, that of the right side first, the other following; then the same was done to the arms, the shoulders, the arm-pits and the four limbs [. . .]" (DP 5).

¹⁷ Lúnula's ability to "provocar imágenes" as a tactic of power links her to other great manipulators in Mi hermana Elba, Eduardo and the narrator in "El provocador de imágenes."

¹⁸ Ana Rueda observes that this ambiguous identity merges the two women into one, thereby fusing the opposition of power between them. In effect, they become a single identity, a single body, and a single text (262).

¹⁹ See Fernando Valls ("De las certezas" 19).

²⁰ My thanks to Robert Spires for pointing out the complexities that the mirror introduces in the theatrical subjectivity of this scene.

²¹ The semantic confusion of "luna" in this story also harks back to the word's ambiguity in relation to the "luna del espejo" and to Lúnula, who did not reflect power or knowledge according to the expectations of Violeta's logic.

²² I draw here on Stanzel's distinction between the narrating self and the experiencing self (59-70).

²³ The difference in perception that a displacement in time imposes on the subject serves as the focus of my analysis of El columpio in chapter 3.

Chapter Two: Performing and Reforming Gender in Los altillos de Brumal

²⁴ See Phyllis Zatlin's "Amnesia, Strangulation. . ." and Mary Lee Bretz's "Cristina Fernández Cubas and the Recuperation of the Semiotic."

²⁵ The author has insisted that "literatura y feminismo no tienen nada que ver" (Carmona, et al. 158).

²⁶ In this power struggle, Olvido eclipses the children's actual mother, who is a flighty, self-centered, and largely absent figure. This non-ideal mother also serves to detract from any perceived elevation of the feminine as solely positive.

²⁷ In this respect, Clara/Sonia's feat evokes Butler's analysis of Irigaray's penetration of patriarchal philosophy. Butler describes Irigaray's repetition of male-centered philosophy as a resurgence of the excluded into the center:

Irigaray's response to this exclusion of the feminine from the economy of representation is effectively to say, Fine, I don't want to be in your economy anyway, and I'll show you what this unintelligible receptacle can do to your system; I will not be a poor copy in your system, but I will resemble you nevertheless by miming the textual passages through which you construct your system and showing that what cannot enter it is already inside it (as its necessary outside), and I will mime and repeat the gestures of your operation until this emergence of the outside within the system calls into question its systematic closure and its pretension to be self-grounding. (Bodies 45)

²⁸ Butler points out the inconsistency of Lacan's theorizations of the phallus as both 1) the law of the father that originates the masculine versus

feminine binary, and 2) the prototype of any body part, thus exempt from strict gendered associations. Butler stresses that the phallus cannot be both origin and prototype or symptom of the origin. This unveils the contrived nature of the privileged penis:

we can read here the phantasmatic rewriting of an organ or body part, the penis, as the phallus, a move effected by a transvaluative denial of its substitutability, dependency, diminutive size, limited control, partiality. The phallus would then emerge as a symptom, and its authority could be established only through a metaleptic reversal of cause and effect. Rather than the postulated origin of signification or the signifiable, the phallus would be the effect of a signifying chain summarily suppressed. (Bodies 81)

Playing on the instability of the foundation of gendered roles in the law of the father, Butler then posits that the phallus is fundamentally transferable: as an idealization that can never be realized through any body part, the phallus is intrinsically tied to none, which makes it transferable. This displacement of the phallus from the origin is key to a concept of agency, for it frees the feminine from the moorings of mere reflection or exclusion, and it liberates the masculine from the illusion of centrality and originator of power:

Inasmuch as the phallus signifies, it is also always in the process of being signified and resignified. In this sense, it is not the incipient moment or origin of a signifying chain, as Lacan would insist, but part of a reiterable signifying practice and, hence, open to resignification: signifying in ways and in places that exceed its proper structural place within the Lacanian symbolic and contest the necessity of that place. If the phallus is a privileged signifier, it gains that privilege through being reiterated. And if the cultural construction of sexuality compels a repetition of that signifier, there is nevertheless in the very force of repetition, understood as resignification or recirculation, the possibility of deprivileging that signifier. (89)

See Butler's deconstruction of the phallus as the paradigm for sexual signification in her chapter entitled "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," Bodies that Matter, pp. 57-91.

²⁹ In "Authority and Marginality in Three Contemporary Spanish Narratives," Kathleen Glenn argues that this story inverts the binomial of masculine/feminine, thereby installing woman at the center of power and authority. On one level, this tactic does seem to take place, but I am not sure that Clara maintains domination or "has the last word." I see the story more

as an implicit questioning of the validity of the gender binary itself. In my view, this work erodes authority as a locus of originating power for male or female, by showing that both genders--like the text itself--are discursive constructions.

³⁰ In the figure of Clara/Sonia, Fernández Cubas embodies the union of the north/south polarity that is also evoked by Ulla, “la sueca” in “El provocador de imágenes.” The author conjures a similar blending of difference in the East/West oppositions that undergird “El reloj de Bagdad” in this collection, as well as “Con Agatha en Estambul” in the collection by that title. Alternately, she undermines the Old World/New World discourse in “Lúnula y Violeta” of Mi hermana Elba, in El año de Gracia, and in “Mundo” and “El lugar” of Con Agatha en Estambul.

³¹ Fernández Cubas often allows for a “logical” explanation of events in characters’ altered mind states caused by alcohol, drugs and insanity. This motif reflects the author’s ludic resistance to absolute closure in her stories, as well as her questioning of the nature of reality and reason. See, for example, “La mujer de verde” and “Con Agatha en Estambul,” both from Con Agatha en Estambul, as well as “El ángulo del horror” from the collection by that title.

³² In a 1991 interview with Glenn, three years before “Mundo” is published in Con Agatha en Estambul, Fernández Cubas comments on the

similarity of the image of a trunk with the image of the attic in “Los altillos de Brumal”:

Es posible que los altillos, como espacios cerrados y un poco misteriosos de las casas, me hayan interesado siempre. [. . .] [Tienen elementos] de misterio, de recuerdos, de descubrimientos, de nostalgia. Son lugares donde de alguna manera la vida se ha detenido, ha quedado encerrada en arcones viejos. Por cierto, no sé si sabes que en algunas zonas de España a un arca o a un baúl se le llama “mundo.” [. . .] A mí los trasteros siempre me han encantado, desde niña. Los lugares cerrados, los armarios, las habitaciones en penumbra donde, de repente, aparecen cosas, cosas de otra época o cosas de las que habías llegado a olvidarte. (“Conversación” 358-59)

³³ Fernández Cubas has said that she wanted the one tale that captivated everyone’s attention in “La noche de Jezabel” to be an Edgar Allen Poe tale, in tribute to the great master (Personal interview, 25 July 1996). “La noche de Jezabel,” like many of her other stories, follows along the lines of Poe in its penchant for disturbing readers and leaving them in dissolution at the end.

³⁴ For further explanation of “Performativity as Citationality,” see the section by that title in the Introduction of Bodies that Matter, pp. 12-16.

³⁵ Pyllis Zatlin (“Tales from Fernández Cubas”) and Lynn K. Talbot analyze in detail the fantastic elements in this and other short stories by Fernández Cubas. José Ortega also examines the fantastic in her work, although he does not include “La noche de Jezabel” in his analysis. Exploring a related genre, Kathleen Glenn discusses the Gothic elements in the author’s work (“Gothic Indecipherability and Doubling”). For a more detailed explanation of the distinctions between the fantastic, the marvelous and the uncanny as literary genres, see Todorov’s influential work, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, especially pages 24-57.

Chapter Three: Re-Citing and Re-Siting the Story of the Subject in El año de Gracia and El columpio

³⁶ For further analyses of the intertextual elements of this novel, see Catherine Bellver, Pyllis Zatlin (“Women Novelists in Democratic Spain”), Julie Gleue (“The Epistemological and Ontological Implications”), John B. Margenot, III, and Robert Spires (“El concepto del antisilogismo” and Post-Totalitarian Spanish Fiction, pp. 156-172).

³⁷ See John B. Margenot, III.

³⁸ Spires perceptively notes the repetitious, cyclical nature of the numbers of time and dates in Daniel's life. See Post-Totalitarian Spanish Fiction, p. 158.

³⁹ To date, no criticism other than reviews has been published on this novel.

⁴⁰ Bellver ("Displacement of the Word"), Zatlin ("Tales from the Fantastic"), Alborg, and Spires (Post-Totalitarian Spanish Fiction) discuss various metafictional elements in this novel.

⁴¹ Interestingly, in The End of Modernity Vattimo argues that the experience of the work of art offers one of the few opportunities to experience truth in the post-modern world: "We may then say that the work of art is a 'setting-into-work of truth' because it sets up historical worlds; it inaugurates and anticipates, as an original linguistic event, the possibility of historical existence--but always shows this only in reference to mortality" (126). The work of art is subject to differing interpretations according to the influence of history--of the passage of time--on the viewer. This idea is borne out in El columpio as the niece and her uncles, effectively living in different historical moments, see radically different truths in their interpretations of the painting of Eloísa.

⁴² The images of the *cajón olvidado* and the *cajones secretos* of Eloísa's desk and other furniture in the house, as well as the closed spaces of the rooms, the attic, the tower, and the house itself, all in turn repeat similar images in other Fernández Cubas stories such as "Mundo" and "El lugar" in Con Agatha en Estambul (see my analysis in chapter 4). Such spaces sometimes represent closure and prohibition, while at other times they implode inward into paradoxically infinite openness, depending on the use ordained by the person associated with that space.

⁴³ Fernández Cubas plays further with the concept of intertextuality by incorporating within El columpio numerous allusions to images in other texts that she herself has written. Repeating the characteristic imagery of "Mundo," "El lugar" and other stories in Con Agatha en Estambul, the protagonist foregrounds the imagery of trunks and other enclosed spaces where time is suspended: "Los desvanes son como inmensos arcones en los que el tiempo se ha detenido" (70). In addition to being timeless, the metaphor of Lucas's mind as an attic also alludes to the chaotic defiance of order in Los altillos de Brumal: "[. . .] Lucas, que parecía haber abandonado por fin el caos de su altillo" (70-71).

Indirectly, El columpio also repeats the intertext of Mi hermana Elba. With its characterization of a little girl who possesses the uncanny ability to

manipulate time and space, this novel might well be called “Mi madre Eloísa.” The treatment of time itself in El columpio is alternately foregrounded in El año de Gracia. Moreover, Fernández Cubas’s second novel projects a plane of suspended time that depicts a perspective of things from an “ángulo del horror.” Lucas describes how Eloísa’s manipulation of the *diábolo* affected the viewer’s angle of vision:

Describía las ondulaciones de la cuerda; su seguridad, su maestría, el desafío aparente a las leyes de la naturaleza. La penumbra que señoreaba la cocina ayudaba a creerla allí. En cualquiera de los ángulos. O en un ángulo de otra dimensión, que superponía de pronto a cualquiera de aquellos ángulos que pregonaba Lucas, como en una feria de pueblo, la garita de un mago, un circo en el que el maestro de ceremonias pudiera, con la sola fuerza de la palabra, convocar imágenes, personajes, decorados. (71)

Even the reference to “convocar imágenes” points to a Fernández Cubas intertext, recalling the discursive power of “El provocador de imágenes” in Mi hermana Elba. So many references, condensed into two pages of El columpio, underscore Fernández Cubas’s reiteration of the act of writing as a repetition of other texts that have gone before.

Chapter Four: The Space of Oppositional Subjectivity

in Con Agatha en Estambul

⁴⁴ This displacement of the “original” text and its author by the translator may be an ironic acknowledgment of the slipperiness of language, the writing profession, and authority itself. Once again, Fernández Cubas focuses on repetition as a destabilizer of authority: translation, as reiteration, is a re-inscription that writes over and often re-places the original, even as it reaffirms and disseminates that original.

On a somewhat related note, the underlying thematics of Spain vs. Spanish America, with a woman translating two codes of communication that represent two systems of power in confrontation, distantly recall doña Marina’s role in the encounter of self/other that changed the history of the modern world. Notably, in “Mundo” women also figure as players in the struggle for power. I doubt that this story attempts to advance any idealized matriarchal model of rule, however, since the female characters wield many of the same tactics as men in their efforts to secure their control and assert their subjectivity. Fernández Cubas seems to insist that the self/other tension, hinging on power, underlies all human relations.

⁴⁵ It is not my intention to associate imagistic communication solely with the feminine or to ally the written word only with the masculine. The

relation of image/text (or text/image, as the case may be) does reflect, as Mitchell asserts, a tension akin to that of self/other, in that it embodies a contrast and even a struggle for power between two different modes of expression. If I associate the privileging of the word with patriarchy, it is not to suggest that women do not wage power struggles with the very same tools. "Patriarchy" may be the term to describe a culture in which men have dominated textual and hence ideological inscription; however, women participate in that process as well. Likewise, both genders perform in the deconstruction of logocentrism, as Fernández Cubas's fiction depicts. For my analysis of the author's treatment of binary positions specifically related to gender, see chapter 2.

⁴⁶ Julie Gleue poses an alternate interpretation of this story by reading the protagonist's confrontation with Dina Dachs as a hallucination, not an actual event. By allowing for numerous interpretations, the rich complexity of this tale escapes any definitive interpretation; indeed, its elusivity argues for the impossibility and pointlessness of absolute delineations in language, in literature, and by extension, in life.

⁴⁷ Smith's use of the term "resistance" is more general and inclusive than Chambers's, and would incorporate Chambers's definitions of both resistance and oppositionality.

⁴⁸ In the figure of Aunt Ricarda, who exploited the resources of the Americas for her own enrichment, Fernández Cubas problematizes the Old World/New World binary, a thread which she also weaves into texts such as "Lúnula y Violeta" and El año de Gracia. While Lúnula's otherness triumphs with her discursive obliteration of the subject of enunciation in that story, in El año de Gracia and "El lugar" the author posits otherness as a spatial inversion by re-situating the subject as object, in the realm of the outside.

⁴⁹ Teresa de Lauretis underscores the problematic nature of the poststructuralist psychoanalytic privileging of femininity:

we are cautioned [that] this femininity is purely a representation, a positionality within the phallic model of desire and signification; it is not a quality or a property of women. Which all amounts to saying that woman, as subject of desire or of signification, is unrepresentable; or, better, that in the phallic order of patriarchal culture and in its theory, woman is unrepresentable except as representation. (Technologies 20)

⁵⁰ In an interview, Derrida is reported to have emphasized, "First of all, I didn't say that there was no center, that we could get along without the center. I believe that the center is a function, not a being--a reality, but a

function. And this function is absolutely indispensable. The subject is absolutely indispensable. I don't destroy the subject; I situate it" (271-72).

Chapter Five: The Visual Construction of the Subject

in El ángulo del horror

⁵¹ Little criticism has been published to date on El ángulo del horror.

However, for further discussion of doubling in "Helicón" and other Fernández Cubas stories, see Kathleen Glenn's "Gothic Indecipherability and Doubling in the Fiction of Cristina Fernández Cubas." José Ortega and Phyllis Zatlin ("Amnesia, Strangulation. . .") have noted the play of the fantastic mixing with reality in this text. Taking a different perspective, Robert Spires views this collection as emblematic of the contemporary subversion of cause-and-effect relationships in narrative, wherein "symmetry yields to aberrancy [and] the Euclidean straight lines bend into fractal strange loops" ("From Angles to 'Strange Loops'" 1). He also examines how the work "addresses a dimension of the illogic of logic" ("Postmodernism/ Paralogism" 234). For further critical reference, Julie Gleue discusses this text in her dissertation and Valls refers to it in the introduction to his anthology of Spanish short fiction.

⁵² Throughout Alice Doesn't, de Lauretis traces the Oedipal logic of narrativity as presented by numerous critics. This paradigm involves the inscription of desire in the very movement of narrative, the unfolding of the Oedipal scenario as drama (action). Can it be accidental, I ask, that the semantic structure of all narrative is the movement of an actant-subject toward an actant-object (Greimas), that in fairy tales the object of the hero's quest (action) is "a princess (a sought-for person) and her father" (Propp), that the central Bororo myth in Lévi-Strauss's study of over eight hundred North and South American myths is a variant of the Greek myth of Oedipus? (Alice 79)

In this collection of essays, De Lauretis discusses numerous theoreticians whose treatises engage the Oedipal foundations of narrative. For the original texts see, for example, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology and The Elementary Structures of Kinship; Sigmund Freud, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, particularly the essay "Femininity" in vol. 22; Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, Encore: Le seminaire livre XX, and "Pour un logique du fantasme"; Jurij M. Lotman, "The Origin of Plot in the Light of Typology"; and Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale.

⁵³ Bataille observes: “eroticism is assenting to life even in death.

Indeed, although erotic activity is in the first place an exuberance of life, the object of this psychological quest, independent as I say of any concern to reproduce life, is not alien to death” (11). He further explains, “We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity” (15). This “lost continuity” is re-achieved through death, or through sexual union with the other. Interestingly, when Bataille fleshes out the details of this drive toward continuity he, too, founds his explication on the binary opposition of male/female:

In the process of dissolution, the male partner has generally an active role, while the female partner is passive. The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity. But for the male partner that dissolution of the passive partner means one thing only: it is paving the way for a fusion where both are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution. (17)

While “the same degree of dissolution” may be the end goal, it is realized by the female eradicating herself and being subsumed by the male. Despite the limitations of this reductive foray into the intricate workings of subject

formation, I believe Bataille signals an inescapable element of subjectivity: the impetus to define oneself in relation to an other. Moreover, he draws an important parallel between the desire for the other and the ineluctable drive toward death.

⁵⁴ Considering the powerful image of the helicon, Robert Spires observes, "This instrument, with its capacity to amuse and frighten, attract and repulse, threaten and comfort, could well serve as a metaphor for all of Fernández Cubas's fiction" ("From Angles to Strange Loops" 1).

⁵⁵ Spires interprets the symbolism of the pipe ironically:

The ugly corroded pipe serves as a sign of corrupted family and moral values, a sign reinforced by the visual images of the grandfather's children. These are the old man's legacy to his grandson: keepsakes that reify the older generation's avaricious, hypocritical, tyrannical, and illogical essence. The grandson not only inherits these qualities, but contributes an act of sadistic parricide to pass along to his own eventual heirs.

("Postmodernism/Paralogism" 236)

⁵⁶ For a discussion of the distinction between the experiencing self and the narrative self in first-person narrations, see Franz Stanzel, "The First Person Novel."

⁵⁷ In his analysis of the subversion of logic in this story, Spires comments: "Rationality itself constitutes the horrific angle from which we join Julia to view this stranger than fantasy world called reality" ("Postmodernism/Paralogism" 235). In displacing the angle from which reason views reality, the author defamiliarizes readers' view of reason itself.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the ambiguity of signs in this story, see Glenn's "Gothic Indecipherability and Doubling."

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