

The Novels of Álvaro Pombo: Registers of the Sociopolitical History of  
Contemporary Spain

by

Mary Christine Mohn  
Fort Hays State University, 1983  
Wichita State University, 1998

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Mary Christine Mohn

## ABSTRACT

Mary Christine Mohn, Ph.D.

Department of Spanish and Portuguese, December 2004

University of Kansas

In 1977, two years after the death of the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, poet and novelist Álvaro Pombo returned to his native Spain from an 11-year exile in England. Finding himself excluded from his country's literary mainstream, Pombo struggled to find both an audience and a publisher for his poems, short stories, and novels. Through the years, as his production increased and he received more and more recognition for his efforts, his position on the literary margins began to shift. In 2004, after winning numerous awards and publishing 11 novels, two books of poetry, a collection of articles, and two collections of short stories, he became the newest member of Spain's *Real Academia Española*. Nearly 30 years after his homecoming, Álvaro Pombo has finally arrived, with his academy membership signaling his successful repositioning from the margins to the center of Spanish literary circles.

Pombo, however, was not the only Spaniard to experience exile during the Franco regime, nor was he the only citizen to experience marginalization from centers of power. Many of Spain's citizens experienced similar exclusions during the years of the dictatorship, the transition, and the new democracy. A study of Pombo's novels reveals that his characters often represent many such excluded individuals attempting to alter their marginalized status in Spanish society. Moreover, his novels serve as

registers of the political and social changes occurring at the national level during the country's movement from economic and political isolation during the Franco regime toward full and democratic participation in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In my analysis of four of his novels, *El parecido* (1979), *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* (1983), *Los delitos insignificantes* (1986), and *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo* (1995), I explore how the power negotiations of Pombo's marginalized characters illuminate similar manipulations at the social and political level. Although nearly 20 years separate the publication of the four novels, there are connecting threads among the works. Through the telling of each story, Álvaro Pombo lends insight into Spain's historical development by imbedding its sociopolitical history within the pages of his novel.

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## Introduction

### The Novels of Álvaro Pombo: Registers of the Sociopolitical History of Contemporary Spain

The death of Spain's Francisco Franco in 1975 ended an almost 40-year fascist dictatorship that had silenced the voices of many of its people through exile, censorship, or death. The transition to democracy after Franco's death signaled the beginning of a new Spain and with it a return to the motherland of many of her exiled sons and daughters, among them the poet and novelist Álvaro Pombo. As an expatriate living in London for almost eleven years, Pombo found himself marginalized from mainstream British society because of his status as a foreigner. On his return to Spain in 1977, he again found himself on the outside, as his absence had kept him from inclusion in any traditional "generation" of writers.<sup>1</sup> This exclusionary status made it difficult for Pombo to find a publisher for his poetry and fiction in the early years, and his non-recognition contributed to a uniqueness in his works at the same time that it served him as narrative material.

Nevertheless, struggling against the difficulties that accompanied his exclusionary status neither stifled Pombo's creativity nor impeded his production. In the nearly 30 years since his return to Spain, he has published 11 novels, two books of poetry, a collection of articles, and two collections of short stories. Not only has his work received numerous literary awards, but also Pombo himself has been honored as

the newest member in the *Real Academia Española*. His movement from the margins to the mainstream of Spanish literary circles parallels the shift in status experienced by many previously outcast Spanish citizens who have moved from the periphery toward the center of their society. A study of his work reveals that his characters represent similarly excluded individuals attempting to alter their marginalized status. In addition, his novels serve as registers of the political and social changes that occurred at the national level during the country's movement from a dictatorship to a democracy. The trajectory of Pombo's novels follows that of Spain itself in its transition from the economic and political isolation of the Franco regime during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to a more significant player in world politics at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In my analysis of four of his novels, I explore how the power negotiations of Pombo's marginalized characters illuminate similar machinations at the social and political level as well. In this manner, the fictional works of Álvaro Pombo serve as historical markers of both the individual and national transitions that Spain has experienced in the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

If one allows that marginals are simply those people whom the power structure cannot use (Young 53), Pombo was one of a countless number of unused Spaniards in the transitional years after the death of Franco. Born in Santander in 1939, he grew up under the dictatorship. He describes his generation as “esa generación timorata, cuajada de usías, autoridades, y respetos” (Goñi 6). His eviction, as he calls it, came at the age of 27, when he, like many others, left Spain.



Between scrubbing toilets and answering telephones in London, Pombo also wrote. He published his first book of poetry, *Protocolos*, in London in 1973. He published his second book of poetry, *Variaciones*, and his first collection of short stories, *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia*, upon his return to his homeland in 1977.<sup>2</sup> To his literary production he has added two more books of poetry, *Hacia una constitución poética del año en curso* (1980) and *Protocolos para la rehabilitación del firmamento* (1992); another collection of short stories, *Cuentos reciclados* (1997); a collection of articles, *Alrededores* (2002); and eleven novels: *El parecido* (1979), *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* (1983--Premio Herralde de Novela), *El hijo adoptivo* (1984), *Los delitos insignificantes* (1986), *El metro de platino iridiado* (1990--Premio de la Crítica 1991), *Aparición del eterno femenino contado por S.M. el Rey* (1993), *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo* (1995), *Donde las mujeres* (1996--Premio Nacional de Narrativa, Finalista Premio Europeo de Literatura Aristeion, Premio Ciudad de Barcelona), *La cuadratura del círculo* (1999-Premio Fastenrath de la Real Academia Española), *El cielo raso* (2001-I Premio Fundación José Manuel Lara de Novela), and *Una ventana al norte* (2003). In March of 2003, Pombo became the newest member of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language (*Real Academia Española*).

Many of Pombo's contemporaries, born in the late 1930s-1940s, began publishing their works in the early 1970s. His 11 years of exile, however, meant that Pombo made his writing debut in Spain at the mature age of 37. Both this lateness and his decade-long absence from the country contributed to his marginalized status

as a writer. After the death of Franco, the Spanish novel also began a transition from its postwar social realism to what has come to be called the new Spanish novel.

Pombo's narratives fall into this category, with his first work, *El parecido*, coming four years after Juan Goytisolo broke the postwar narrative tradition with *Juan sin tierra* (1975) and one year after Carmen Martín Gaité offered her masterpiece of metafiction, *El cuarto de atrás* (1978). Angel Basanta includes Pombo in his classification of "novelistas de 68," those writers born between 1937 and 1950, "la tercera promoción de posguerra, cuyos miembros habían nacido entre los años de la Guerra Civil y el medio siglo. Se trata, pues, de la primera generación de escritores nacida y educada en las restricciones del franquismo, contra el cual se rebelaron [ . . . ]" (63). Included in this grouping, developing their own style of the *nueva novela* and publishing simultaneously with Pombo during the 1980s and 1990s are Cristina Fernández Cubas, Eduardo Mendoza, Esther Tusquets, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Lourdes Ortiz, José María Guelbenzu, Juan José Millás, Soledad Puértolas, and Ana María Moix. Also making their unique contributions to the contemporary Spanish novel along with Pombo are the younger writers, those Basanta classifies as the "generación de los años ochenta," including but not limited to Rafael Sender, Javier Marías, Rosa Montero, Paloma Díaz Mas, Antonio Muñoz Molina, and Ignacio Martínez de Pisón (73). Clearly, after nearly 30 years of publishing in Spain, Pombo the writer has shifted his position of marginality more towards the center as his awards and recognition testify.

Despite his achievements, Álvaro Pombo's literary contributions have been relatively ignored by critics. The limited studies to date highlight the author's storytelling skills as well as his ability to characterize personalities with realistic dialogue. Scholars also explore his use of recurring themes of sexuality, religion, and memory. Many commentators maintain that lack of substance is a constant theme in Pombo's work (this theme is also reflected in the title of his first collection of short stories). Pombo himself states that his first four novels form a cycle that he calls “el ciclo de la falta de sustancia” (MoralesVillena 19). The tedious or insincere existence of many of his characters reflects the emptiness of the Franco regime, under which people lived “en la inautenticidad, en la sin sustancia” (Valls 223). Juan Antonio Masoliver Ródenas, in “Álvaro Pombo: Las aventuras de la conciencia,” analyzes the narrative spaces present in Pombo's novels, maintaining that the author's work consists of a series of confrontations between reality and unreality, dignity and humiliation, and masculinity and femininity. In a thematic study of Pombo's works, Lynne Overesch-Maister examines what she calls the two major preoccupations of his novels: “the development or lack thereof, of an alienated personality, and the ontological problem of distinguishing the truth amidst a multitude of variations” (55).<sup>3</sup> Alfredo Martínez Expósito identifies homosexuality in particular as a unifying constant of Pombo's fiction. In “Perenne mediodía: la homosexualidad y sus reciclajes en los cuentos de Álvaro Pombo,” he attempts to explain its literary representation by analyzing the author's stories, situating them within a cultural tradition that considers homosexuality as intrinsically bad and the homosexual as

essentially guilty of a crime against some higher power (92). In the most recent and extensive study of his novels, *Álvaro Pombo y la narrativa de la sustancia*, Wesley Weaver explores the manner in which the theme of insubstantiality presents itself in Pombo's novels. Weaver concludes that the author's body of work consistently suggests that the only truth that exists is the awareness of the lack of truth (268).

Whether critiques of life's lack of substance, an individual's search for truth, or the confrontation between reality and the unreal, the narratives of Álvaro Pombo abound in personalities who, like the author himself, occupy the marginal spaces of society. Many of his characters tell their stories from off-center, outside the mainstream. In the storytelling process, these outcast personages engage those around them in a struggle to move from the margin toward the center, a struggle that inevitably involves the negotiation of power. Although several critics mention self-awareness as a thread running through the Pombo narratives, none has examined his works in terms of marginality as a unifying theme nor has any study been done on the underlying sociopolitical significance in his works. My analyses of three of the novels Álvaro Pombo himself labels pieces of a 70s-80s cycle --*El parecido* (1979), *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* (1983), *Los delitos insignificantes* (1986), plus one example from the 90s, *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo* (1995),<sup>4</sup> -- focuses on the process by which his characters, marginalized by Spanish society in terms of age, gender, sexual preference, or social class, search for legitimacy in a society that traditionally has ostracized them by identifying them as abject or the "other."<sup>5</sup> By viewing these novels in light of current theories of subject formation, identity and

difference, and center and periphery, I not only establish marginalization and the negotiation of power as a connecting thread in the works of Pombo, but also demonstrate that this process mirrors that of Spain itself in its struggle with the concept of centers and margins within the new democratic order of the 1980s and 1990s.

The exclusion experienced by Pombo both in England and in Spain is a social phenomenon common to certain individuals in almost all cultures. Twentieth-century sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural studies theorists analyze how cultural, social, political, and economic marginality functions to isolate, disenfranchise, and oppress human beings. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Young describes marginals as people that the system of labor cannot or will not use. According to Young, there is a growing underclass of people permanently confined to lives of social marginality, including racially marked groups, the elderly, the young, single mothers, the handicapped, and a ever-growing number of unemployed workers (53). In a similar vein, Gino Germani defines marginality as “a situation of nonparticipation (or exclusion according to the case) in certain areas of social action, in a variety of roles that each individual should be able to play” (22). In *Marginality*, he traces the development of the “notion of the marginal man” from an earlier cultural conception of a person who is placed on the limits of two culturally different worlds to its current extension to other types of cultural contact, including marginality resulting from social and ecological mobility. According to Germani, the notion of marginality is the most recent expression of the process initiated in the modern world

since the Enlightenment: “[. . .] towards the conquest of the rights of men and their progressive extension to all sectors of society, to all orders and institutions, and all groups and categories of society, and finally to all areas inside a country, and to all countries inside an international system which at present takes in the entire world” (22). Germani maintains that this process has resulted in as many forms of marginality as there are roles within a given society.

From a specifically cultural standpoint, Steven McGill in *Language and Marginality* extends the label of marginalized to cultural groups that include gays, feminists, and what he calls disabled “activists” (i). McGill links marginality to the dynamics of center and periphery, citing the recognition of and the resistance to this opposition between a culturally-dominant center and a marginalized periphery as one of the most consistent and significant features of contemporary analyses of twentieth-century culture (i). This notion of center and margin implies an inequality of power relationships. In “Notes on Centers and Margins,” Poonam Pillai posits that power, in terms of economic, political, and ideological practices, is one of the key issues underlying the ideological distinction between centers and margins. I propose to explore these unequal power relations and how resistance, or lack of resistance, to them shapes the development of the different personalities present in Pombo's novels.

The power struggle inherent in the center/periphery opposition is complex and contradictory. According to Christine Gallant in *Tabooed Jung*, marginality can also be a source of power. She writes: “This power is not any revolutionary kind of power—that of outsiders who join forces to smash the hegemony. Rather the power comes

from the state of marginality itself, and from the dangers that this formlessness poses for the prevailing social order” (77). Gallant identifies the marginalized as “tabooed,” and maintains that their marginality vests them with “a power to pollute others who have remained within the structures of society so that they too become marginal” (77). The very presence of a taboo signals danger to society. This taboo described by Gallant parallels the notion of the abject as defined by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*. According to Kristeva, the abject is what disturbs the system, what does not respect borders, positions, or rules (4). These disturbances result in a repulsion of the abject by the system, the designation of it as “other.” Judith Butler takes up this theme in *Bodies That Matter*. Butler proposes that certain abject zones within society threaten the dissolution of the subject, thus constituting areas of uninhabitability that a subject fantasizes as threatening its own integrity (243). According to Butler, the abject designates “those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (3). This construction by exclusion creates the domain of the abject, the marginalized. Butler considers these categories not only to be unstable, but also to result in a process of disidentification. Such collective disidentification, Butler writes, can facilitate a reconceptualization of which bodies matter: “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

regulatory law” (2). Because the excluded defines the included, the abject that defines the limit of the centered subject immediately begins to redefine itself in order to move from the margin toward the center. My study will examine the manner in which the abject characters in Pombo's novels, in this process of redefinition or disidentification, attempt to renegotiate their positions in order to destabilize and reconceptualize their exclusionary status.

The marginal characters represented in the novels of Álvaro Pombo bear a striking resemblance to the marginal groups struggling to define their position in the culture, society, and politics of post-Franco Spain. In “A Cultural Approach to Marginality in Spain,” Susan Tax Freeman defends the necessity of studying margins and centers together in order to understand the dynamic relationship between the two, claiming that a phenomenon such as Spanishness cannot itself be understood without a good comprehension of both components (5). According to Freeman, Spanishness grew and strengthened during the Inquisition as Spain expelled what she defined as ethnic foreigners and non-Christians, but with them she expelled the very opposition which gave form and purpose to the cause of “Christian Spanishness.” Freeman contends that the center then began to create new margins, with modern Spain turning inward to make outsiders of its own people whose lifestyle or origins were analogous to that of the foreigners of the past. Under the Franco regime, a similar expelling of the unacceptable took place, with the persecution, exile, and even death of the undesirables. Jo Labanyi describes this repression as relegating those suspected of opposition to “the ghostly status of the disappeared,” consigned to physical or cultural



death (7). After Franco's demise, these disappeared abjects began to reappear under the relaxed restrictions of the transitional government. They, like Pombo on his return to Spain, then began the renegotiating of their marginalized position in an effort to move themselves more toward the center, in the process that Butler describes as disidentification with the periphery. I posit that the novels of Pombo under consideration contain characters that represent the different marginalized groups present in the Spanish society of the 80s and 90s. These Spaniards, both the fictitious and the real ones, expelled from the center because of otherness of gender, sexual orientation, age, or social class, engage in similar processes of redefining their positions of marginality. The power struggle inherent in this repositioning from margin to center destabilizes the system and, as Butler says, facilitates the reconceptualization of traditional societal structures.

Quite clearly, Pombo was expelled from the center because of otherness of gender. As with many of Spain's artists and intellectuals, his departure from his homeland resulted from the repressive policies of the Franco regime. His emigration to England in 1966 came after he revealed his homosexuality and was removed from his teaching job in Madrid (Europa Press 1). In order to avoid punishment under the 1953 *Ley de Vagos* that mandated the confinement of such "deviants" to penal camps, Pombo left the country. His return to Spain in 1977 coincided with the transitional government's repeal of this long-standing policy of intolerance toward homosexuals. In much the same way that his life has been affected by the changes in Spanish politics in the last 30 years, so do Pombo's novels bear witness to the political and

social events unfolding at the time of their creation. Just as he began anew in Spain in 1977, so did the country under the leadership of Adolfo Suárez take on new life with the first free general elections since before the civil war. Negotiation, consensus, and compromise proved a hallmark of these years as leaders from opposing parties worked to craft the constitution of the new Spain. The characters in Pombo's first novel, *El parecido* (1979), bear a striking resemblance to the factions involved in the power struggles and political maneuvers that marked the years of Spain's transitional government.

*El parecido* was not the only late 1970s novel to serve as a register of political events. After the death of Franco in 1975, novelists gained the freedom to engage in political criticisms in their works. In the same year as the demise of the dictator, Juan Goytisolo published the revolutionary *Juan sin tierra*. A novel that deals with its own creation, this anti-novel directly challenges Franco and the regime at the same time that it redefines the concept of the novel. In a less radical self-referential work, *El cuarto de atrás* (1978), Carmen Martín Gaité questions traditional gender roles created by the ideological and repressive apparatuses of the regime. A more indirect criticism than *Juan sin tierra*, *El cuarto de atrás* blends documented history with fantasy in its challenge of gender attitudes and divisions. Also published in 1975, *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* by Eduardo Mendoza represents not only a different type of narrative, but also a more subtle form of political engagement. Mendoza's indirect critique of Spain's past politics unfolds within the pages of a detective story in which the story itself is more important than the process of its creation. In an

equally indirect manner, Pombo illuminates the sociopolitical context of the transition in *El parecido*. While neither a self-referential novel nor a detective story, Pombo's novel does stress storytelling as narrative device. The focus of the work, however, is the individual's search for truth in a world of images and representations.

In 1978, voters approved the country's new constitution, with general elections in 1979 returning Suárez and his *Unión de Centro Democrático* (UCD) party to power. Nevertheless, party dissension coupled with voter dissatisfaction soon spelled trouble for the government. The resignation of Suárez in January of 1981, followed by an attempted coup of February 23, 1981, weakened the leadership capabilities of the UCD. Capitalizing on their opponents' failures, the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE), under the guidance of Felipe González, stormed to the forefront and won the 1982 general elections by an enormous margin. Published in 1983 and 1986 respectively, the next two novels, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* (1983) and *Los delitos insignificantes* (1986), appear to be indexes of the political situation during the first four years of rule by the socialist government.

As mentioned previously, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* and *Los delitos insignificantes* form part of Pombo's "lack of substance" cycle. While his focus is on the individual's search for self, other novelists of the 1980s deal with related issues of identity. In her collections of stories *Mi hermana Elba* (1980) and *Los altillos de Brumal* (1983), Cristina Fernández Cubas challenges traditional value systems by investigating identity as a construct and questioning gender roles.

Although she does not directly address politics in her stories, issues of marginalization hover near the surface as she questions the traditional performances of men and women in Spanish society of the 1980s. Also dealing with gender, *El río de la luna* (1981) by José María Guelbenzu, focuses on narration, both in the past and the present, to critique the effect of the Franco ideology on attitudes, especially those of men, toward gender. Guelbenzu's references to the fascist past in his analysis of the present resemble Pombo's retelling of his protagonist's childhood to reflect on today's values in *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*.

The liberal policies of the PSOE government dominated the Spanish political scene for the next ten years as Spain benefited from the economic prosperity that accompanied their entry into the European Community. Eventually, however, internal incidents of conspiracy and corruption proved fatal to the party, causing González and the PSOE to lose the confidence of the people. In the elections of 1996, voters narrowly replaced the liberal socialists with the conservative *Partido Popular* (PP). With José María Aznar at the helm, the PP would remain in power for the next eight years. With changes occurring rapidly, Spaniards found themselves forced to adapt almost overnight. Written in the waning years of the socialists' leadership, *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo* (1995) foregrounds this adaptation. The female protagonist's choice to abandon her past and build for the future points to the 1996 elections in which the Spanish people walked away from the scandal-ridden PSOE to begin again with conservative leadership of the PP and Aznar.

Other novelists publishing during the 1990s tackled a number of tough issues related to society's rapid change. Fernández Cubas published two more collections of short stories, *El ángulo del horror* (1990) and *Con Agatha en Estambul* (1994), in which she continues her investigation of identity and subjectivity. Also in 1994, Almudena Grandes published her collection of stories, *Modelos de mujer*, in which she explores a variety of conflicts dealing with how society views women. Although with different narrative styles, these and other works of the first part of the decade share themes of identity, gender roles, and communication. Those appearing in the second half of the 1990s, however, reflect an increasing focus on the lack of communication that accompanied the consumer society of the 1990s. In the best example of what is called "Generation X" fiction, *Historias del Kronen* by José Ángel Mañas introduces the reader to a youth culture that values sex, violence, and drugs and in which movies, television, and video games substitute for communication with adults and each other. While the world of Pombo's Celia Cecilia was closely tied to the television, she tells her story in a manner far removed from that of the narrator of Mañas novel. This end-of-millennium shift to "anything goes" narration signals a realignment in terms of margins and centers. As the young, controversial writers form the new periphery, writers such as Pombo move from the margins toward the center of the literary power structure.

Although his works chronicle much of Spain's recent social and political history, Pombo does not consider himself a political writer. He does, however, put his

novels in a political context. During a recent interview, he addressed the issue of politics and his writing:<sup>6</sup>

I am not politically minded in the sense that . . . I'm not a writer like, for example . . . Sartre was, who had these engagement things. I think writers should . . . be engaged in the important things as persons, as people of the country. . . . For example, I vote. I have political opinions. As a writer, one's got to write what one knows. . . . I've certainly tried to represent living people. I get them from reality, and that means that they are politically engaging things. And of course, there are some novels where I refer [to] the Franco era for example. It's easy to see that and also the period like the transition in Spain for example. (260)<sup>7</sup>

He explains that he uses political and social situations as background in order to indirectly draw attention to issues:

There's a political background, absolutely, a social political background undoubtedly. . . . It's not as much a thesis, nothing as strong and clear cut as a thesis. Perhaps it is sort of an intention. Oscar Wilde entitled his book *Intentions*. Well, my intention is somehow to draw attention. I think that is the best way to put it . . . drawing attention to some issue. (260)

He also does not consider himself a writer of resistance. Rather than a political writer, he is a writer with political convictions who chooses the indirect approach. "I am

doing fiction,” he said, “and fiction illuminates the world in sort of an indirect way. Illumination, which comes from fiction, is indirect, is oblique” (263). As for how he uses political situations in his work, he describes it as an inside-outside approach:

Let me show you, for example with this book . . . John le Carré, this is his last book. He takes the world situation and writes a book using the world position, using the states of Iraq and Europe, taking full account of the political situation. And the characters he picks, they are engaged in political activities. They are spies or they are informers, or they are whatever. He is politically minded. He is a good popular writer, a splendid political writer. . . . Now then, I am more a sort of sophisticated writer. Yes, I use politics, but I use politics very much as I use them in my life. . . . I don’t invent figures in political terms. I use the politics as background. I do a fiction that is very much the development of images or obsessions or ways of being which I particularly have, so it’s very much a personal venture. It’s a question of finding in myself the vices or the virtues that I later express. I don’t go from the exterior work, from outside, but the other way around. . . . I go from the inside to the outside. That means that I’m sort of, if you like, a more difficult writer. I am more difficult. Sometimes I can be more complicated . . . because what I describe is the inner goings on, with how people see themselves or the world. I tell the inner story.

(263)

Thus, he tells the inner story of characters in light of their political and social background. “Not politics properly speaking,” he said, “but I would say politics in the sense of the ways of life or ways of experience, the politics being not only the politics of politicians but the politics of the people” (264).

On a related topic, Pombo addressed the idea of marginalization as a connecting thread in his work: “The important thing is that we are all marginalized if we are not careful. I am 64 . . . 64 suddenly seems to be the end of it, and it certainly isn’t the end of anything” (261). In terms of his own marginality, he believes that his acceptance into the *Real Academia* signals that he has arrived:

At this moment I’m an institutionalized writer. . . . I started publishing very late . . . at 37 or something. And the first 10-15 years I was a bit of an outsider. I struggled quite a lot. I had to keep myself doing odd jobs and things. And in those days I was really a bit of an outsider, but I don’t think I am now. Anything I publish or anything I say is immediately in the press. (264)

At the time of this interview, Pombo had just released his 11<sup>th</sup> novel, *Una ventana al norte*, and was putting the final touches on the speech he would be delivering before the *Real Academia* on June 6, 2004. At the age of 64, he had no intention of retiring.

In terms of the novels included in this dissertation, Pombo’s comments lend credence to the overall thesis that through his works one can trace the sociopolitical changes of the country. While the statements included here have been edited, a transcription of the interview appears in the appendix. I began our discussion of the



novels with *El parecido*, asking for verification of its publication date. Pombo responded: “Yes, when I wrote the first part of it, I was still in England. I finished it in Madrid. I started it perhaps in 1977 when I was in England. I was writing other things then too” (262). As for the novel’s political context, he placed it squarely in the years of the transition:

That is a book of the transition, the political context there is the transition. . . . Doña María is very much a Franco character. . . . She’s a grand lady; she’s authoritarian; she doesn’t understand life very well. She loves her kid, but she doesn’t know what to do with him. She’s a very Spanish, authoritarian character, you see. This is a reflection of an authoritarian situation. I think the whole novel reflects that point [in history] of 1976, 77, 78. Things were changing; people were changing.  
(262)

While he likes his mixture of humor and drama in *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, he believes the subject matter in *Los delitos insignificantes* to be very serious:

Delitos is a nasty novel. . . . I had to write this novel. One doesn’t write only about people who do funny things. It is a very bitter, somber novel, and I think it is well constructed. It is similar to *El parecido*, but it is better constructed. . . . It tries to deal with people who cannot communicate and finally commit suicide. The theme there is the impossibility of communication. . . . The trouble is that people

communicate with great difficulties. And it belongs to a period in my life in which I very much believed that there was no possibility of any type of communication of any sort. And then I changed from that to my new novels in which people really attempt to communicate and can't communicate somehow. It's not easy. It is a complicated thing. You can work on it, especially in your day-to-day lives. One needs to communicate for a short time in an interview, or for a few months or for a few days. It's another thing to communicate throughout life.

(261)

On the other hand, Pombo considers *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo* to be a humorous novel, and he likes his female protagonist:

I think it is a very amusing book. And it's also a serious book that people, for one reason or another, . . . liked. . . .It's an imitation of ordinary language, the way a middle-aged girl has been working for a man for a long time, but she is nothing to him, just a secretary. What goes on in her mind, I thought, was very amusing. . . . What happens in television and what happens in real life sometimes sort of gets mixed up. . . . My girl, my character, she practically lives with this figure [Jesús Hermida] in her living room every day. And suddenly this figure calls her because he wants to know about the life of the writer. And then she enters into this fantastically, absolutely unreal world of television plateaus sort of thing. . . . She was a very ordinary

Spanish girl, not an intellectual or anything. She's a very clever girl who loves her work. She knows she's been working for a very important person; she feels in part like a sort of wife. (258-59)

Although Pombo now considers himself institutionalized as a writer, his homosexuality continues to marginalize him in terms of gender. He commented on being homosexual in today's Spain and responded to accusations by critics of his earlier works, especially after the publication of *Los delitos insignificantes*, that his writings were homophobic:

That's very silly, because I'm not homophobic. The thing that this has to do with [is] the question of writing novels with a thesis. I don't write novels with a thesis, I describe situations, human situations. I am homosexual myself, and I never hide. I state it clearly and naturally. But the thing is, Spanish homosexuals are very militant in an old fashioned way. I think they are imitating American attitudes of 1968. We have changed a lot since then. [In the novel] I am describing part of the homosexual situation at that time. And understanding a particular case of a relationship between a man and a boy in that novel. . . . The truth is that homosexuality is like any other human thing. It's got dark sides and clear sides . . . and it's stupid to present anything as sort of perfection because it's not. It's like presenting heterosexual marriage as perfect; it's ridiculous. . . . It's like saying because somebody wrote *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, because Albee wrote

it, he's against heterosexual marriage, but he's not. This is ridiculous. Nobody would say it, but homosexuals say so. No one says "Oh, he was very much against heterosexual marriages." He wrote a piece in which two people try to get rid of each other. They cannot stay together; they cannot stay separated. They can't stand each other, they can't stand [to be] away from each other. Is that his view about the whole of heterosexual marriage? I don't think so. I'm sure it isn't. I wrote a book frankly talking about a particular type of people. My idea is that the older person was a coward. What I am saying is that any relationship, homosexual or not, needs bravery. And fortitude, and truth. If you don't have truth and strength and you are not brave enough, things deteriorate. My accusation against homosexuals, heterosexuals, or whomever, it is that you are a coward if you don't do the right thing. Things deteriorate. I think it is ridiculous. (265-66)

Growing up in Spain under the Franco regime, Pombo experienced firsthand the hostility and fear associated with homosexuality. He believes, however, that his views, as well as those of the country, have changed over the years.

But I changed with a reason. I have adopted over the years a more open attitude. What I am saying [about] homosexuality, is that standard gay people have very simple-minded attitudes in Spain nowadays. And the gays somehow are not renovating themselves. They are behaving like the Stonewall type of things in '68 or '69. . . . I

think the lesbians are doing much, much better. They are saying much deeper things about sexuality, homo and heterosexuality. . . .

Homosexuals are perfectly well accepted nowadays. I think it is bad for them. I think such an amount of acceptance is bad for their intelligence or something. I don't think they are thinking. . . . It's all politically correct nowadays to be homosexual and to say it. . . . When I started saying it, it was a very hard word. It was terrible really.

Nowadays, it's almost fun, well; it's politically correct. And I think this is reducing the degree of reflection. And then they say these stupid things like "you've treated homosexuality badly, because you have the people dying." People die in novels, heterosexual people throw themselves [under] trains like Tolstoy in killing his heroine. If you think for a moment, for example, what Tolstoy did with Ana Karenina, well, you wouldn't say he was writing against heterosexual marriage. And so we (gays) are simple minded, as a group nowadays in Spain. We've got to be careful, we cannot be silly. (266-67)

Whether discussing the "silliness" of gays in Spain today, his status as the newest member of the *Real Academia*, or his interest in politics of the United States, Álvaro Pombo expresses his opinions freely and without reservation. He writes from the inside to the outside. He writes works of fiction that illuminate. His stories represent living people engaged in life. By calling attention to the marginal, Pombo challenges the center, thus disturbing the system. By placing his novels within identifiable

sociopolitical contexts, he also assigns his works the secondary role of fictional markers of Spanish history.

The time frame for the crafting of Pombo's first novel coincides with that of the transitional government's drafting of the new constitution. It is only appropriate then that this study should begin with that first work, *El parecido*, written during the formative years of contemporary Spanish democracy. In Chapter 1, I develop the relationship between the novel and its historical circumstances by showing how the shifting identities of the characters reflects the social reality of shifting political identities during the years of the transition, 1977-1979. I draw on the power theories of Michel Foucault's to demonstrate how power permeates all the personal relationships within the story and, by extension, within the post-Franco society. I trace the connection between the marginal positions of the characters in the novel with those occupied by many Spaniards during the early post-dictatorship years. My reading of Avery Gordon's theories on haunting informs the argument that, just as the ghost of the protagonist haunts the novel, so did that of Francisco Franco haunt Spain during the transitional period. I also apply Butler's philosophy on imitation, inversion, and performance in my reading of the identity crises suffered by both the characters within the novel and the transitional leadership of the country.

With the elections of 1982 signaling the end of the transition, attention could then turn more toward retrospection. In Chapter 2, my analysis of *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* proposes a link between the past with the present. I maintain that the coming-of-age of the novel's protagonist mirrors the maturation process of

the country itself during the 1950s (the temporal setting of the work). By expanding traditional definitions of the *Bildungsroman*, I argue that Pombo's second novel not only traces the *Bildung* of the young protagonist, but also that of Spain itself as it experienced the growing pains that preceded its entry into democracy. Current theories on game playing inform my exploration of how the adolescent Kus-Kus manipulates the other marginalized characters that inhabit his world, and how they, in turn, engage in their own performances within the text. I propose that similar power games took place at the national level in the 1950s as the Franco regime reconsidered its economic policies and that these manipulations influenced the development of those who came to be leaders of the socialist government in 1982.

The setting for the novel under study in Chapter 3, *Los delitos insignificantes*, returns to the 1980s, specifically to Madrid during the early years of the PSOE government. I propose that the economic and social instability that marginalized large sectors of the population during the first half of the 1980s created an identity crisis not only for the two protagonists, but also for the country. My analysis engages Foucault's theory of repression as a disciplinary tool to examine how fear and guilt result in an individual's lack of a positive self-image and an inability to commit. Theories of the narcissistic personality influence my reading as I equate the self-reflexive behavior of the younger protagonist with the country's new focus on itself during the socialists' growth campaign of the 1980s. I suggest that the shifting power relations that alter the dynamics of the relationships between the marginalized characters in the novel point to similar efforts to shift the power paradigms at the

national level as the socialists leaders prepare for Spain's entry into European Community.

In Chapter 4, *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo*, I analyze the struggle of the female protagonist for self-definition in Spain of the 1990s in light of Foucault's theories on discipline and punishment. By drawing on Victoria Enders and Pamela Radcliff's theory of separate spheres, I establish the historical marginality of women in Spain, while using panoptical functions of discipline to explain the indoctrinating power of the Franco regime and its *Sección Femenina*.<sup>8</sup> By applying Foucault's theories on confession, I explore how the power of confession not only can liberate the one confessing, but also can invert the power relationship with the confessor. I propose that the protagonist's engagement with and liberation from the three dominating powers in her life parallels the process by which the women of Spain removed themselves from historical domination and redefined themselves as a participating force in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Spain.

Nearly 20 years separate the publication dates of the four novels included in this study. There are, however, connecting threads among the works. Each novel tells the story of individuals on the periphery struggling to alter their marginalized status, and each also chronicles the historical time in which it was written. Although Álvaro Pombo does not consider himself a political writer, he does write about politics. He imbeds it within the pages of his novels. In Chapter 1, he lends insight into Spain's transitional years by telling the story of a ghost who haunts the story, just as one haunts the nation as it moves from a dictatorship to a democracy.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Masoliver Ródenas makes this claim in articles published in both *Insula* and *Vuelta*.

<sup>2</sup>*Variaciones* received the poetry prize *El Bardo*. According to Masoliver Ródenas, Pombo's first book went unnoticed because it had nothing in common with the then dominant poetry of the “generación del 50” and very little to do with the proposals of the “novísimos” (Álvaro 30)

<sup>3</sup> In “Echoes of alienation in the novels of Álvaro Pombo,” Overesch-Maister studies *El parecido* as an illustration of the “impossibility of truly knowing another person, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* for its depiction of the destructive nature of false self-configurations and the persistence of imaginary games typical of childhood, and *El hijo adoptivo* as a demonstration of the difficulty of self-knowledge.

<sup>4</sup>I chose these four novels because, in addition to the unity characterized by the first three, their characters represent a variety of marginalized groups with a time span of sixteen years separating the first from the fourth. This temporal selection allows one to see the changes and the similarities in Pombo's art, thereby offering more support to the proposition of a connecting thread in his fiction.

<sup>5</sup>This use of “abject” stems from Kristeva's definition in *Powers of Horror*, in which she describes the abject as the “jettisoned object” that lies outside or beyond (2).

<sup>6</sup> On April 23, 2004, I interviewed Álvaro Pombo at his home in Madrid. I had just finished the basic outline for the last chapter of my dissertation. Because my husband, who speaks limited Spanish, accompanied me on the interview to take photographs and to help with the tape recording, Mr. Pombo suggested that we conduct the interview in English.

<sup>7</sup>These page numbers refer to the Appendix, where the personal interview appears. The initials used in the text of the interview indicate my questions (C,) those of my husband (J), and Pombo's answers (P).

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the *Sección Femenina*, see Carmen Martín Gaité's *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*.

## Chapter 1

*El parecido*: Shifting Identities and Haunting Resemblances

Álvaro Pombo introduces his first novel, *El parecido* (1979), with excerpts from Plato's *The Sophist*, wherein the Stranger and Theaetetus pose the question of similarity, likeness, point of view, and appearance. Along with the title of the novel, this citation introduces the reader to the world of Jaime Vidal, the central character around whom *El parecido* revolves: "Lo que parece asemejarse a lo hermoso debido a no ser visto desde el sitio debido, pero que si alguien pudiera abarcarlo suficientemente con la mirada, resulta que no es semejante a lo que dice asemejarse. ¿Cómo lo llamaremos? ¿No diremos, puesto que aparenta asemejarse y no se asemeja, que es una apariencia?" (9). This question of what to call that which appears to be like the original, yet is not, proves an underlying motif for Pombo's first work. With appearance, imitation, and resemblance playing against reality, identity surfaces as the focus of the novel. A shifting of point of view also brings other issues into play. A closer study of the work reveals that questions of identity are further complicated by the characters' marginal positions in society and by their off-center relationships with each other. In a work in which identities fuse, separate, and disappear, one also finds shifting power structures at work that play decisive roles in the formation of the individual personalities. By situating the novel within its historical context, one finds similar issues of identity formation and relationships of power present in the political and social makeup of Spain in the late 70s following the

death of Francisco Franco. These were decisive years in the country's transition from a dictatorship to a democracy.

The year 1977 proved a landmark for Álvaro Pombo. Returning to Spain after eleven years in London, he published his second book of poetry, *Variaciones*, and his first collection of short stories, *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia*. He also began work on his first novel, *El parecido*, in that same year, although it was not published in Spain until 1979.<sup>1</sup> For Spain, 1977 was also historic, as its citizens participated in the first free general elections since before the civil war. Attempting to build a democratic system after nearly four decades of a totalitarian regime, those crafting the new government defined the parameters of the New Spain. They moved from a centralized government to one of peripheral power centers, and interaction of the various parties in the system helped create a new identity for the country. In this chapter, I will explore how the characters in *El parecido* struggle to separate appearance from reality as they examine their relationships with a deceased young man who in many ways had controlled them. This process of facing the reality of past relationships in order to define present ones mirrors that of Spain during the transition, as its leaders attempted to forge the country's new identity from the vestiges of the dictatorship of the powerful and controlling *Generalísimo* Franco.

In *El parecido*, the deceased Jaime Vidal, like the survivors left to grieve after his death in a motorcycle accident, was both socially and economically marginal. A spoiled, upper-class young man, Jaime shares a commonality with young people during the uncertain years of the transition. He had no identification with a past or

any connection with a future. His mother, María, although wielding power as an upper-middle-class widow, still finds herself outside the patriarchal tradition of northern Spain (supposedly Pombo's Santander). Jaime's lower-class former fiancée, Mati, struggles to assert herself in a battle against his mother. The chauffeur, Pepelín, not only comes from a lower social class, but also bears a striking resemblance to the dead young man, a coincidence that leads to confusion, manipulation, and deceit before and after Jaime's demise. The boy's uncle, Gonzalo Ferrer, a well-known writer and closet homosexual, is secretly in love with Jaime. Ferrer, hounded by guilt over his obsession with the boy, loses his life in a robbery attempt as he tries to protect what he believes is a letter from the dead young man. Even the narrator and the voices from the town of Letona, excluded from the inner workings of the upper-class Vidal household, offer a point of view and an interpretation of the events from the periphery. The marginal positions of the characters in *El parecido* resemble those occupied by many Spaniards in the years immediately following the death of their dictator. In life, Jaime, like those of the younger generation coming of age during the transition, sought validation at a time of disenchantment with traditional role models. In death, his phantasmic influence on his survivors mirrors the ghostly presence of Franco that haunted the new government after the dictator's death. Abandoned and betrayed by the power source they had helped to create, the Spanish aristocracy and the Catholic Church, much like María Vidal, found themselves excluded from any position of power in the new government. The young women of Spain, on the threshold of equality after centuries of oppression, struggled, as did Mati, to define

themselves in light of the changing sexual and political environments. Many of those politicians charged with leading Spain after the death of the dictator sought, much like Pepelín, to recreate themselves in Franco's image in order to move from their peripheral positions toward the center of power. And those marginalized because of sexual identity, like Gonzalo Ferrer, who had spent the years of the dictatorship in exile, imprisoned or incognito, moved to renegotiate their marginal positions as the new Spain began to recognize the diversity of its citizenry. Representing a microcosm of the marginalized positions found in Spain after the death of Franco, those who survive the demise of Jaime Vidal confront their memories, and through the process of remembering, they reveal their own identity crises. By shifting their points of view, they, as Spain itself, come to see both the deceased and themselves in a new light.

The turbulence felt by the characters and the town of Letona after the young man's death reflects a similar disruption to the system incurred on a larger scale by Spain after the death of Franco in 1975. Pombo's confession that he purposefully attempts to reflect particular time periods in his works supports the proposition that a link exists between the characters in *El parecido* and the sociopolitical climate of the time in which the novel is set.<sup>2</sup> The unsettled atmosphere in Letona following Jaime's funeral resembles the turbulent political and social climate in Spain between 1975 and 1978, decisive years in the country's transition to democracy. Franco's death brought an end to a dictatorship that had ruled the country for 39 years (1936-1975). While some political changes had begun before the death of the *Caudillo*, the process that eventually ended in a parliamentary democracy did not begin in earnest until his

demise. At Franco's death, his hand-picked successor, Juan Carlos de Borbón, assumed the throne, and within a short period of time, the new king made it clear that democracy was his goal for Spain. He believed, however, that such a change should come from within the existing legal structure. According to David Gilmour, this conviction made the process more difficult but, ultimately, more effective:

The peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy in Spain was only possible if it was done legally, that is, if it was carried out by the institutions of the previous regime. If the democratic reforms were approved by the *Cortes*, then it would be difficult for the Right to repudiate them later on. But if the government ignored the institutions, as the opposition suggested, and introduced democracy by decree, it would almost certainly provoke a civil conflict or a military coup.

(164)

The cabinet of the first government was a mix of reformers, *franquistas*, and military conservatives. For his first prime minister, Juan Carlos appointed Carlos Arias, who held that same position at the time of Franco's death. Fractionated from the beginning, the king's first government was a failure. Gilmour writes: "it was muddled, divided, and unsure of what it was meant to be doing. [. . .] At no time did the first government of the monarchy have a coherent policy on political reform. The leading ministers all made contradictory statements about their real aims" (142). After only six months, on July 1 of 1976, Arias was asked to resign. For Juan Carlos,

choosing a successor would determine the future of his dream of democracy for Spain.

The appointment of Adolfo Suárez, the minister of the *Movimiento*, as the next prime minister proved a clever choice for the king because, according to Gilmour, he was a *franquista*, he understood the regime, he knew where the power lay, he had few political principles, and fewer political ideas:

He considered himself to be a loyal *franquista* in 1975, a christian democrat in 1976, and a social democrat in 1977. In fact he was none of these things. To him they were merely labels which could be altered or discarded whenever it was convenient to do so. Politics was the art of getting on with the job, compromising where necessary and refusing to allow ideological considerations to interfere with the running of government. (152)

Suárez, in turn, formed a government of members with little experience, some even called them men of “second rate” talent (153). Initially, the new prime minister did not inspire the confidence of the political powers within the country. Within a few weeks of its formation, however, the king’s second government was making a difference: “In its first declaration it announced that sovereignty resided in the people, and proclaimed its intention of working for ‘the establishment of a democratic political system based on rights and civil liberties, on equality of political opportunity for all democratic groups and the acceptance of genuine pluralism’” (152). With a successful referendum for the Law of Political Reform in December of 1976, the



process of democratization was underway. There remained ahead, however, many hurdles and much dissension.

The next step for the Suárez government was preparation for the general elections of 1977. Starting the year in a position of strength, Suárez began negotiations with the opposition. Consensus was the key. Conversations with the opposition leaders began shortly after Suárez became prime minister, but with the initial success of the new government, the opposition realized that negotiation and compromise were necessary if they were to have any part in the political future of Spain. According to Gilmour: “The battle over reform or *ruptura* was in effect a struggle for control of the democratic process. By abandoning its demands and accepting the rules laid down by Suárez, the opposition was accepting that the new, democratic regime would be run, at least initially, not by democrats but by men of the old regime” (164). To assure their role in Spain’s political future, opposition parties began preparations for the general elections. Political parties formed at all levels of the spectrum while the government defined the electoral rules. By modifying the Law of Political Associations to allow the legalization of political parties and then establishing the electoral system, the government prepared the way for the elections.

One of the most controversial of the parties requesting legitimation was the PCE or *Partido Comunista Español*. The opposition had consistently demanded its legalization, with almost all parties beginning to understand that there could not be full democracy without the participation of the PCE:

Moreover, they realized that the party's exclusion would make it difficult for them to enter the elections without being accused of collaborationism. A further preoccupation, shared by many other people as well, was the likelihood of social unrest if the communists remained outlawed. The PCE controlled the *comisiones obreras*, the largest and most powerful trade union force in the country, and there was little doubt that they could be mobilized in the party's support.

(173)

In February of 1977, Suárez met secretly with the outlawed leader of the party, Santiago Carrillo. They reached an agreement in which, subject to the legalization of his party, Carrillo would accept the national flag, the monarchy of Juan Carlos, and the unity of the nation. The communist leader described the meeting as "one of the crucial events of the transition" and according to Gilmour, "the two men understood each other and established a relationship which contributed significantly, over the following few years, to social, as well as political, stability in Spain" (175). The government handed the judgement of the PCE's request for registration to the Supreme Court, which decided in March that such a decision was outside its jurisdiction. Without discussing his plans with his cabinet or the armed forces, Suárez announced the legalization of the communist party on April 9, 1977, to the dismay of many in his government. Gilmour writes:

Improvisation was the hallmark of Suárez's government, and frequently it paid off. But on this occasion his casual treatment of the

law, and his blithe disregard for the sensibilities of the armed forces, nearly led to disaster. In September 1976 Suárez had promised senior officers that he would not legalize the Communist Party; the following April he should at least have informed them that he had changed his mind. [. . .] The legalization of the PCE, which was a crucial step in Spain's progress towards democratic government, was also a seminal event in the army's disillusionment with the new regime. (177)

Although there was little doubt that the communist party had to be legalized for the process of democracy to continue, Suárez's manner of legalization cost him greatly. A number of senior ministers threatened to resign, and the army issued a document denouncing the legalization.

Suárez's decision to legitimize the communist party on his own was not the only example of his improvisation. As elections neared, he also needed to decide what role he would play. In spite of those who felt he should remain neutral and not run for election, he manipulated himself into an alliance with the centrist party, the *Centro Democrático*. In April of 1977 he announced that he would stand for election. The centrist coalition, under the title *Unión de Centro Democrático*, contained four social democratic parties, four liberal parties, and regional parties from Galicia, Murcia, Andalusia, Extremadura, and the Canary Islands, plus a coalition of a large number of *franquista* bureaucrats. Gilmour calls it a "motley collection of groups" (180).

The general elections of June 15, 1977, the first democratic elections since 1936, placed the UCD as the largest party in the parliament, with the PSOE, or socialists, as the principal opposition party, and Suárez as the first elected prime minister. According to Gilmour, it was a victory of the television image and of the young over the old:

His well-groomed appearances on television, coupled with his record over the previous year, carried the day. It did not matter that he headed an “entirely phantom party . . . without history . . . without programme . . . [and] without ideology.” The television image could defeat real parties, both on the Right and on the Left. Felipe González was also, in many ways, a creation of the media. [. . .] The result was also a victory for the young over the old. Neither of the winning parties contained a prominent figure either of the old regime or of the opposition. The *franquistas* and the *antifranquistas* had both been defeated. (185)

All of the older politicians who might have been expected to play an important role in the transition a year earlier now found themselves on the margins, either left without seats or in charge of minor parties. Avoiding a strong Left or Right, the voters of Spain chose a moderate option (185). Gilmour calls it a victory not for the Right over the Left, but for the moderate Right over the *frankuista* Right and the moderate Left over the radical Left (186). And Suárez received the mandate to continue the job he had begun the year before. The marginalization of certain sectors, the shifting identities, power struggles, and turmoil that resulted in the general elections of 1977

are also reflected in *El parecido*. The processes by which Pombo's characters negotiate new positions in relationship to the dead protagonist result in freedom for some, isolation, exclusion, and abandonment for others. In an equally difficult examination of the past, members of Spain's transitional government under Suárez, many excluded from positions of power under the dictatorship, were forced to reexamine their points of view. Separating the appearance of reality from reality itself, many conceded on issues or abandoned them completely in a political identity process that resulted in inclusion for some, exclusion for others, but eventually freedom and democracy for all of Spain.

In critical analysis, *El parecido* falls into the shadows of Pombo's collection of short stories and his later works. While no definitive study has been done on the novel itself, many include it in combination with other works in critiques of a general nature. Overesch-Maister discusses it in her stylistic study of three of Pombo's novels, concluding that *El parecido* shares a common theme of alienated personalities and illustrates the impossibility of truly knowing another human being (56). José Manuel González Herrán analyzes *El parecido* in his examination of the narrative conscience present in Pombo's first four works. In an exegesis of the representation of homosexuality in Pombo's two collections of short stories, Martínez Expósito refers to *El parecido* along with several of the author's other works. Weaver includes it in his book-length study on Pombo, discussing it within his chapter on the author's first cycle of works. Considering it from the point of view of man's encounter with the "other," he concludes: "*El parecido* es un gran círculo vicioso que empieza y

termina con la muerte. En el vacío creado por la muerte, sólo le queda al ser humano recordar al otro, no al muerto, sino a las personas que hemos sido y no volveremos a ser sin él” (59). In addition, Pombo mentions the novel in several published interviews.<sup>3</sup> While the theme of appearance versus reality consistently appears in critical discussions of *El parecido*, in this chapter I will explore how Pombo’s use of marginalized characters adds to the complexity of the issue in terms of identity construction and the representation and negotiation of power. In addition, I will analyze how these issues manifested themselves in the political and social struggles taking place at the national level in Spain during the years of the transition.

Just as Spain’s new life began with the death of its dictator, *El parecido* begins with the death of its protagonist, Jaime Vidal. Similar to the fade-in and fade-out technique of the cinema, the opening and closing shots, however, focus on María, the mother of the recently deceased Vidal. The identity of the storyteller is uncertain, as the voice of the omniscient narrator does double-duty as participant in and witness to the action of the story, in addition to providing insight into the hearts and minds of the characters. In much the same way that a television or radio commentator recreates a scene for the viewers or listeners, the narrator describes in detail the funeral of the well-known young man from Letona, a port city somewhere in the north. The emotion generated by the unexpected death of the vibrant Jaime in a motorcycle accident provides the town with a much-needed respite from the dull, dreary monotony of January, as everyone who is anyone has turned out for the funeral. The gossip reaches fever pitch. After the funeral, the focalization of the narration shifts to

that of the four characters whose lives are most affected by Jaime's death: his mother, his ex-fiancée, his uncle, and his mother's chauffeur. Each chapter offers the reader a different point of view, focusing on one of the four characters who contemplates his or her relationship with the deceased. The young man's posthumous influence on his survivors mirrors the invisible power wielded by Franco's memory on sectors of Spanish society in the years immediately following the dictator's demise.

Returning home after Jaime's funeral, María demands that everything remain the same. But her demands do not hold sway over the memories, her own and also those of Pepelín, Mati, and Gonzalo. As Pepelín prepares to go out for the evening, he reflects on the changes in his life since his employment with the family. He is a handsome young man, and his striking resemblance to Jaime, noted by everyone inside and outside the family, gives him added confidence. In an unexpected move, María gives Pepelín all of her son's suits, a gift that both startles and pleases the chauffeur. Escaping the somber mood of the house, Pepelín goes to a series of bars, where he eventually orchestrates an attempt to blackmail Nando Terran, the son of one the town's most "respected" families. Responding in anger or jealousy after a drunken Nando reveals that it was his motorcycle that Jaime crashed into the wall, Pepelín engages two young hoods in a fictitious homosexual encounter between the boys and Nando, too drunk to realize or remember the evening's events. After driving the boys and Nando home, the chauffeur returns to the house, his anger now turning into frustration with himself for the behavior. As he parks his car in the garage, he asks himself: "¿Quién era yo esta noche?" (33).

As Pepelín seeks his relief from the day's events in the bars of Letona, María contemplates them from the silence of her home. As she searches Jaime's closet for the suits she promised Pepelín, she is interrupted by a phone call from Mati, the young girl once engaged to Jaime. In an action that neither of them really understands, María invites her over, almost insisting that Mati come to the house, an invitation that the girl reluctantly accepts. Once Mati arrives, María remembers Jaime's control of the brief encounters with the girl before the couple's breakup. She begins to question how well she, as a mother, knew her own son. The women talk late into the night, and in their straightforward conversation these two, with nothing in common except their affection for Jaime, could only agree on one thing: neither of them knew who this charismatic young man was or what he wanted in life. Mati asks María: "¿Quién era Jaime, tu hijo Jaime, María? No sé quién era, quién creía que era," to which the older woman responds "Yo tampoco" (46).

Those living in the Vidal home were not the only ones who spent the hours after the funeral dealing with their memories of the deceased. Unable to return home, Jaime's uncle, Gonzalo Ferrer, a famous writer, walks the city as he wrestles with his grief. Gonzalo is plagued with guilt as he remembers how Jaime came to be so important to him and to his wife, Rosa. The vibrant young man made Rosa feel young again, while he awoke in his uncle an affection which became obsessive toward the end. With every step, Gonzalo relives his relationship with his nephew. Losing track of time and distance, he finds himself outside the city in the middle of the night. Befriended by a stranger on a black motorcycle who takes him to a secluded area,



Gonzalo passes several hours drinking gin and sinking even deeper into depression. Because Letona is a small town, it seems that the stranger knows not only the author, but also his deceased nephew and former girlfriend. “El Jaime ese . . . yo le conocía. Y era un cara” (83), the stranger told Gonzalo. It seems everyone had a different take on the young Jaime Vidal.

Eventually the motorcyclist takes Gonzalo home, where the author spends what is left of the night in his study. The next morning he awakes to a visitor, the victim of Pepelín’s blackmail attempt, Nando Terran. Assuring Terran that the blackmail scheme would amount to nothing and showing him to the door, the author sets out on another walk, the final one for the grieving man. On his way out the door, Gonzalo receives a letter that he does not take time to read, but places in his coat pocket. This time as he walks and talks to himself, his mood slowly improves, as he seems to come to terms with the life and death of Jaime Vidal. He stops at two more bars before he starts for home, which allows the police and the citizens of Letona to trace easily his last hours alive. Deciding finally to return, he takes a wrong turn and falls victim to two young, inexperienced muggers in a deserted park. As the thieves search his wallet and pockets, Gonzolo remembers the unread letter and tries to protect it, in case it was from Jaime. His cries for the letter bring his death, because the two thugs decide to silence him permanently.

As Jaime’s uncle walks toward his demise, Pepelín arrives home to the voices of Mati and María talking in the study. When Mati retires to Jaime’s former room for the night, the chauffeur visits her there. Pepelín had known Mati before her

relationship with the young Vidal, and is immediately suspicious of her presence in the home. Closing the door to avoid being overheard by his employer, Pepelín joins Mati on the bed, where they talk about the life and death of Jaime. Pepelín challenges the reason for Mati's visit, while she questions the sexual preferences of the chauffeur. Ultimately, however, their discussion focuses on the deceased, enigmatic Jaime Vidal. In an unexplained power play, Pepelín warns Mati to do his bidding, because María had lost control, and he intends to fill the power void.

While Mati and Pepelín discuss their relationship with Jaime, María retires to her room with thoughts of her son. She recalls her childhood, her marriage to the affluent businessman Joaquín Vidal, her pregnancy, her hatred of her husband, and her love for her son. Most of all, she recalls her solitude, her son's selfishness, and the similarities between mother and son. As she falls asleep on the night of the first day, she wonders if Jaime will rise again on the third, as if his death was his idea of an excellent joke.

On the second day, after dealing with complications involving the previous evening's blackmail attempt, Pepelín returns to Mati's bedroom. Although each tries to seduce the other, both fail in their attempts. The Jaime look-alike falls into a troubled sleep, from which he awakens in an altered state, a condition further aggravated by another threatening phone call from Manuel. As fatigue finally overtakes Mati in her room, something entirely different overtakes Pepelín. Now dressed in one of Jaime's suits, he enters María's room, where his resemblance to her son startles and yet comforts the woman. The dividing line between the real and the

appearance blurs as the mother recognizes her son in the body of the other, and the other assumes the identity of the much-loved Jaime. Tired and confused, María tries to separate the two images, but is drawn by the charismatic voice and the warm caresses of the pretender. Pepelín's attempt to become Jaime fails, however, as María eventually refuses to utter the name that would transform him, rejects his advances, and slaps him into reality. As the two recover from this dreamlike scene, Mati leaves the house as if fleeing an unknown enemy. María, again in full control of her senses, apologizes to Pepelín for giving him Jaime's suits and thus pushing him into being someone he was not. Pepelín wordlessly slinks away.

As the third day dawns, the police discover the body of Gonzalo Ferrer, and Letona again starts talking. Everyone from the police chief to the local gossip has an opinion about what happened to the town's famous author. Mati has gone home, Pepelín has disappeared, and María continues as if nothing has changed. Nothing, however, would ever be the same again. Jaime did not rise again on the third day. There is no rehabilitation in death, and María continues alone, as is her custom, sitting silently with her back to the door.

Appearing in the same year as his first collection of short stories, *El parecido*, along with Pombo's next three novels, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, *El hijo adoptivo* y *Los delitos insignificantes*, form part of a cycle developed from stories contained in his *Relatos*.<sup>4</sup> Pombo maintains that the characters in these works suffer from a lack of freedom that leads to what he calls a paralyzing self-centeredness: "Todos los problemas de mis personajes son problemas de interior [. . .]

y todos mis personajes hasta la fecha [. . .] han estado sumidos en el yo” (Morales Villena 19).<sup>5</sup> This inability to step outside of oneself, according to Pombo, creates a dangerous void:

[. . .] porque el yo, la autoconciencia o conciencia empírica de uno mismo, no es en cuanto tal directamente perceptible para nosotros. Quien se busca a sí mismo, o no encuentra nada en absoluto o encuentra un caos espantoso, o si es un santo, quizás encuentra a todos los demás, a Dios, es decir, al tú. Pero es un mal camino empezar por el yo para encontrar el tú, a los demás. (19)

In *El parecido*, this self-centered behavior seems to have paralyzed Jaime. It also manifests itself in several of the other characters, most specifically his mother María, his uncle Gonzalo, and the chauffeur Pepelín. Investigating the sources of each personality’s lack of freedom contributes to an understanding of the complexity of the individual identities and their particular interior and exterior power struggles.

Since his death precedes the life of the novel, the identity of Jaime Vidal must be reconstructed through the memories of his friends, family, and community. Each adds a different perspective, with the resulting image far less beautiful than what was purported as the original. His haunting of their recollections suggests a dialectic of presence and absence that Avery Gordon describes in *Ghostly Matters*: “If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign or the empirical evidence that tells you a haunting is taking place” (7). Although absent in

the flesh, Jaime's ghostly presence haunts *El parecido* in much the same way that Francisco Franco's presence/absence continued to haunt Spain during the years immediately following his death. As "ghostly ancestors," Jaime and Franco made incessant demands on the living which Gordon describes as a constituent element of modern social life: "The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course" (8). The invisible presence of both figures, what Gordon describes as the shape of their hands, acts on and even meddles in the power struggles and identity crises of their survivors.

The town of Letona is the first to offer evidence of Jaime's haunting presence in its midst: "—Todas lloramos muchísimo en la misa —ronroneó en Faustino's Chuli Herrera aquella misma noche—. Figúrate qué horror, sobre todo al final, lo guapísimo que estaba, la cara aquella de Cristo que tenía, ¡ay, morirse cuánto favorece!" (12). Everyone considered Jaime beautiful, physically, at least. The idea that, as the only heir to the Vidal family fortune, he would suffer from any lack of freedom seems incredible at first glance. Wealth and beauty, however, do not come without a price. In Jaime's case, growing up under the critical eye of the community made his every action subject to public opinion, even his death and funeral:

[. . .] el funeral aquel que, precisamente porque se seguía de todo lo anterior muy fácilmente, y no necesitaba demostrarse, permitía demostrar los sentimientos propios y juzgar los ajenos con plena libertad y regocijo. [. . .] La muerte de Jaime había dotado a Letona de

una reflexividad y gozosidad casi místicas. Provocado una reacción en cadena que en lúgubres proporciones de regocijo y moralismo, recubrió la ciudad como una planta trepadora. (13)

This chain reaction of moralizing moved through all levels of Letonian society, from Chuli Herrera, the town's expert on literature and tragedies of the soul, through don Fernando Terran, patriarch of Letona's most prominent family, to the ever-vigilant older citizens who let no detail escape their eyes and ears. Don Fernando considered Jaime a weight on the shoulders of the community: "—El pobre Jaime —había declarado don Fernando en el Círculo de Recreo la tarde anterior— era de muchísimo cuidado" (13). The elderly of Letona judged the young man typical of his generation. In his early twenties, Jaime represented those born in the waning years of the Franco regime who were just coming of age during the transition:

Se recordaba, en sigla, al niño, al Jaime de los once, doce, trece, catorce e incluso quince años. Se le veía con doña María en la modista, en misa, en silencio, inclinada la cabeza; cuánto había crecido en esos años, qué a compás de toda una generación tan bien alimentada, tan precoz, tan de vuelta de todo, tan proclive a la sensatez de la pereza, el tocadiscos, los medios, privados, de transporte, a cual más caro. (15)

Not having fought in any war, this generation of well-fed, precocious young people bore no scars that marked them. They possessed no defining characteristic except that of their classification as spoiled and irresponsible. Marginalized as they were from any centers of power, Jaime and his generation existed on the fringes of adult society.

Living his life as the focus of Letona's gaze limited Jaime's ability to form a unique identity. In fact, it forced him, as it did the dictator Franco, to form several, one of those being that which would meet the expectations of the viewing public. Under the examining eyes of the citizens of Letona, Jaime lacked the freedom to explore openly all the possibilities of his existence. This examining gaze, as described by Foucault, serves as a normalizing one for those who are its objects. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes it as a disciplinary power that limits, differentiates, and classifies:

[. . .] it refers individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed. It differentiates individuals from one another [. . .] It measures in quantitative terms and hierarchizes in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals.

[. . .] Lastly, it traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal [. . .]. The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it normalizes. (182-83)

Jaime is objectified, differentiated, and judged by the citizens of Letona: “—Ahora por fuerza —precisó una dama, cerrando de trallazo el albanico, inclinándose un poco hacia una amiga—. Ahora por fuerza ha de verse toda la verdad. —Hizo una pausa para tomar aliento—. De mazo en calabazo —prosiguió— cuanto más jóvenes,

peores” (14). Subject to this normalizing gaze, Jaime created his public identity. Also living his life under the examining eyes of the public, Francisco Franco created both a public and a private identity. As a fascist dictator, he crafted a panoptic state that controlled its citizens by the disciplinary mechanism of surveillance. In turn, he became a subject of that very surveillance, assuming an identity that would meet the expectations of the viewing public. Upon his death, the whole of Spain offered its opinion and shared its judgement on the public and private life of Franco.

Just as the normative power creates homogeneity, however, it also individualizes: “[. . .] within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences” (Foucault 184). It is within the shades of these individual differences where Jaime’s other identities lie hidden. Although wealthy and attractive, he lived a marginalized existence as a young man with no political power or direct access to his family’s money. Like those young people from aristocratic Spanish families who benefited from their parents’ wealth without having direct access to it, he depended upon the allotments of his mother’s money, which required contact with her and approval by her. Financially, he was powerless, subject to a relationship of dominator/dominated that affected his identity in a number of ways. In line to inherit the family fortune, he made an attractive catch for a desiring person. His ex-fiancée Mati admitted: “Lo mejor de Jaime eran, en realidad, sus sucedáneos. Su madre, por ejemplo. Eso merece un matrimonio. Su dinero. Será feo decirlo pero el dinero es el dinero” (44). In Jaime’s case, being an attractive catch did not result in a positive self-



concept, but rather, a feeling of powerlessness that resulted in an emotional marginalization shared by many of his generation. Being potentially wealthy apparently caused Jaime to live outside his means and forced him to find his money elsewhere. Mati suspects he had borrowed or stolen the motorcycle he was riding the night he was killed because she knew he had no money, and Nando Terran verifies it when he tells Jaime's uncle Gonzalo: "[. . .] tuve que prestarle mucho dinero. . . entre unas cosas y otras . . . me pidió prestada la moto, era el cuento de nunca acabar [. . .]" (102). The Jaime known by his peers presents a different picture from the public Jaime. It was not until his death, however, that those closest to him realized the extent to which he remained unknown even to them.

Jaime's life consisted of a series of dominator/dominated relationships that affected his identity formation. He was not, however, always the second in the binary pair. Foucault's assertion that power permeates all relationships especially applies to the life of this young man. He was both the exploiter and the exploited, produced and controlled by relations of power. His ex-fiancée Mati, perhaps the one most removed from his influence at the time of his death, occupied the inferior position in their relationship. She also, however, offered the most neutral and accurate, if not exactly honest, evaluation of Jaime's personality. One of the first to raise the question — "Who was Jaime?" — Mati is the only one of the characters to walk away from the Vidal home with her identity intact.

Belonging to the same well-fed and lazy generation as Jaime, Mati represents generational, class, and gender marginalization. Power permeated not only her past

relationship with Jaime but also her present one with his mother María and the chauffeur-butler Pepelín. To María, the girl represents two things, youth, and the lower class:

Cuando doña María piensa u oye decir ‘la juventud’, doña María piensa en Mati. [. . .] Lamentó que Mati fuera de otra clase social y, sobre todo, que adelantara continuamente ese dato acerca de sí misma en su conversación con doña María, un poco como quien a la vez se enorgullece y se disculpa de una falta o un error que los demás ya han olvidado. Era un lado cursi de Mati; un lado a la vez agresivo y flojo. Al fin quedó Mati, en la conciencia de doña María, sólo su juventud. (41-42)

Their meetings before Jaime’s death did nothing to establish Mati as anyone worthy of attention by the Vidal family in the eyes of María. She regretted the girl’s relationship with her son from the beginning, and she could not abide the shortcomings of “la novia de Jaime.” She did not, however, regret the couple’s breakup after the abortion of an unwanted pregnancy. They had not spoken in two years, and María admits that she would not have recognized Mati had she met her on the street. The unexpected phone call from the girl catches Jaime’s mother off-guard, but the even more unexpected invitation on her part to come the house startled them both. Once together in the home, they engage in a verbal sparring match and a subtle power play that leaves them both questioning not only Jaime’s identity, but their own as well.

Although Jaime was the object of both women's affection, he occupied the subject position in his affair with Mati. With Mati, as with the majority of women in the late seventies in Spain, relationships of domination form the pattern of her life. She is caught between what Anny Brooksbank Jones describes as the conflicting tensions between the traditional (patriarchal, Catholic, and family-centered) and modern (feminist, career-minded, or liberal individualist) values (387). As a child in the waning years of the Franco regime, Mati grew up in a Spain in which female identity was equated with motherhood, marriage, and home, while male identity was linked to citizenship, work, and politics (Enders 399). When she prepares to enter adulthood, however, the traditional roles are changing. With the end of the dictatorship, more women are joining the work force; with the 1978 Constitution will come legal guarantees against sexual discrimination and articles on marriage and divorce. Adultery and concubinage are decriminalized, along with the sale of contraceptives (Montero 382). The sexual revolution had begun, and Mati was in the middle of it.

In spite of her young age (she was only 19 when Jaime first brought her home), she is already a woman of experience, as Jaime was neither the first nor the last man with whom she has had a relationship. The ease with which she seems to move from one lover to another, nevertheless, belies the fact that in spite of her sexual freedom, she still bases her identity on the male/female binary. She is still subject to the patriarchal concept of male/female and dominant/ submissive paradigms as she allows her sexuality, and her identity, to be constructed by relations

of power. Evidence of her submission to Jaime's dominance appears in his introduction of her to his mother: "Mamá, aquí tu nuera, una menor —dijo al presentarlas— indebidamente uncida a las pasiones por falta de ideas claras y distintas. Mati, aquí la madre de tu pasión más inconfesable y flor de un día" (41). Jaime's words, which put María on edge, brought no reaction from Mati. To her, Jaime meant social status, sex, and the possibility of a better life. His mocking of her was part of their relationship. Her family, from a small town of minor importance, had no great expectations for Mati. In their minds, and in hers, her role in life was set:

Mati, pensaban con amplia solidez colectiva, su madre y sus tías reunidas en la trastienda de ultramarinos, el negocio familiar, sacudiendo con una cierta violencia el faldón de la camilla al pensarlo, mientras era leída la carta de Mati sobre el nuevo curso que tomada su vida —y que incluía, por cierto, referencia a Jaime Vidal como detalle socialmente estabilizador—, Mati no era, ni con mucho, pensable no acabando como sus otras dos hermanas casadas e instaladas ya, o como las previsibles [. . .] novias de sus hermanos y primos. (44)

The idea of being the daughter-in-law appealed to her. It wasn't, however, undying love that united them, but an unexpected pregnancy. And when Mati ended the pregnancy, the novelty wore off. "Jaime era raro." Mati tells Pepelín. "No debía quererle gran cosa. Yo me alegré que lo dejáramos" (63). Eventually, Jaime's idiosyncrasies became too much for the girl. After her abortion their relationship deteriorated, and they eventually separated. Mati tells Pepelín: "Ya te digo que me

gustaba. Era raro. Lo único. Por eso lo dejé. Lo dejamos los dos. Era todo hablar. Hablar, hablar. Estaba harta” (65). Apparently she did not mourn her breakup with Jaime. Just as she was with another man when she met Jaime, she was soon with another man after they separated. And faithfulness was not a trait she possessed, because as she talks with Pepelín, she tries to seduce him, seeing it in keeping with the deceased Jaime’s sense of irony:

Traicionar a Jaime —delante de Jaime y precisamente con un amigo de los dos— ¿no es, en realidad, lo que Jaime quería? ¿No contaba con eso Jaime? [. . .] Mati, mirando degustativamente a Pepelín, piensa que ha sido fiel a lo que Jaime implicaba mediante su ironía: “Una veta de infidelidad hace más dulce la natural fidelidad entitativa de los seres humanos”, había llegado a decir Jaime en una ocasión. Gracias a Jaime —piensa Mati ahora a la vez que extiende su pierna hasta tocar la cadera del chófer— he aprendido a sacar de mentira verdad. Pero a la vez no sé, de verdad, qué es verdad o mentira en cada caso. Y eso es lo que Jaime en el fondo prefería... (64)

In keeping with what Jaime supposedly preferred, everyone in the Vidal household struggled to extract truth from lies. Mati is not innocent of ulterior motives, though both María and Pepelín question her reason for calling. She claims curiosity impelled her to visit. But once she arrives, she is drawn in by the power and the possibility of the situation: “Además, soy la nuera; hoy en día se es nuera sin casarse, ya nos llegaríamos a casar, pensaba yo, por la Iglesia y todo el rollo, hay que ver primero si

te entiendes” (62). The possibility of taking advantage of a weakened María attracts the former fiancée. Initially planning only to stay the night, she realizes later it is like being drawn into a play where one is simultaneously part of the performance and part of the audience:

Mati se sentía —como los espectadores de una obra teatral— comprometida por la acción y, a la vez, al margen, a salvo de las omnívoras, plateadas complicaciones imprevisibles y reales que en cualquier momento podían desprenderse del argumento o de la imprevisible vida e intenciones de los personajes, los actores, comprometiéndola a ella misma. [. . .] Mati se sentía ya, de hecho alcanzada, complicada por la representación general —e inconclusa, quizá, por definición, para siempre— en que los tres —doña María, Pepelín y Mati— o, mejor dicho, los cuatro, porque sin duda Jaime, muerto o no, había de ser tenido en cuenta como parte como actor, en todo ello, se hallaban inmersos. (113)

Mati feels herself being immersed in the unfolding drama, mysteriously drawn by the power of the house. “Mati se sintió empujada con súbita violencia hacia la nubilosa culebra de su propio pasado. Sintió que resbalaba —ahora más velozmente que nunca— hacia aquel irresoluble trasiego en que, para Mati, había consistido ser parte de la vida de Jaime” (112). She struggles against María’s insistence that she stay, until finally she forces the older woman to admit her loneliness. Hearing this admission of need on the part of the one who has always dominated their relationship

seems to give Mati the strength she needs to reject finally and firmly the cold and controlling María. “Tú siempre estás sola, María. Siempre has vivido así. Yo no puedo ayudarte, de verdad. Te ayudaría si pudiera. Pero no puedo. No sabría por dónde empezar . . . me . . . me volvería loca —dijo Mati, casi susurrando”(114). In contrast to the other personalities pulled into the identity web of Jaime and his mother, Mati regains control and pulls away. Although drawn by the possibility that she could exploit María’s weakened position and tempted to stay and partake of all that being the daughter-in-law would bring, Mati separates the real from the appearance:

Tras tanta conversación y tantos recuerdos como habían ocupado la conciencia de Mati en poco más de veinticuatro horas, resultaba tranquilizador poder, de golpe, equipararlo todo ello a un ataque de locura [. . .] Un accidente —y ése era, en resumidas cuentas, el único lado inequívoco y firme de la historia— parece contagiar el universo entero con el abultamiento sin medida de sus detalles nimios.

Casualidades puras, coincidencias absurdas, marginales, se congregan, imantadas, en torno al accidente, cobrando significación por relación a él, insignificantes partículas de objetos reales e irreales simplemente adyacentes. “Nada tiene que ver nada conmigo,” concluyó Mati [. . .]

(140)

It has nothing to do with her; she has no stake in the game. The accident that took Jaime’s life was real, contrary to much of what she had experienced since. As she

dresses to leave, she decides that her role in the whole affair has become repugnant, “una repugnancia que, como poco antes, reflejaba a la propia Mati, descolorida, vieja, monstruosa, cerrada en un cubil, como una bruja, atenta a los ruidos de las bestias, los bultos, animados que al anochecer pueblan el bosque en torno” (146). Jaime’s identity no longer matters. It is more important now that Mati not lose hers. She escapes into the night with her identity intact, clearly separated from that of Jaime and his dominating mother. Like the young women of her generation with no political power, no personal assets, and no model for success outside that of marriage and family, Mati finds herself caught between the controlling power of traditional values and the liberating freedom of the sexual revolution. She chooses to leave the past behind, as did many Spanish women inspired by the possibilities, and walks towards an uncertain but promising future in the new Spain.

While Mati resists the power of the Vidal home, Pepelín surrenders himself fully to it. Like Jaime, Pepelín’s position within his personal power relationships shifts as he adjusts to different situations. As chauffeur for María, he finds himself at the economic and social margins of Letona, outside the power structure of the Vidal family. His presence on the fringes mirrors that of many of the politicians poised at the edge of the political structure in the initial stages of the transition. Rather than accept marginalization, they, like the chauffeur, manipulated others from their positions on the periphery, creating disorder and challenging the system. In the three years that Pepelín has served María, his subservient position has also allotted him a fair share of personal power. He occupies one of the guest bedrooms, he owns his



own car, his salary is almost double that of colleagues in other homes. Yet something more motivates him, a force other than professional responsibility that causes him to think as he does about the powerful woman:

Doña María es la única identidad de su propia vida. Su vida tiene una gran división: el antes y el después de entrar al servicio de doña María. Antes Pepelín —y sobre todo a raíz de acabar la mili, a raíz del asunto del alférez— había creído que se le iba la vida de las manos. “Acabaré en la calle, en la cárcel”, pensaba. Doña María cambió todo. Fue ella misma, esa es la verdad. No el empleo, ni el dinero, ni el MG, ni nada que doña María dijera expresamente. Fue verla. Pepelín nunca había visto a nadie así. (61)

From their first meeting, there has been a connection between them. He was drawn by her strength. She was drawn by his youth. Her son Jaime, however, suspected that his mother had found someone to be the son that he was not:

“Ahora ya tienes alguien que rellene los huecos,” dijo [. . .] “Parece hijo tuyo, además,” añadió Jaime. Doña María se quedó mirando fijamente a su hijo al oír eso. Por primera vez, al oír esa frase, había visto a Jaime pareciéndose a Pepelín o, al revés, a Pepelín no sólo, como en un principio, teniendo la misma edad que su hijo, sino pareciéndose a él. “Tiene más o menos tu edad, si es eso lo que quieres decir” dijo, por fin, doña María. “Es eso, sí... más o menos” había respondido Jaime.

[. . .] Jaime se fue a vivir con Mati al poco tiempo. (75).

Jaime was not the only one to notice the similarity between the two young men. The whole of Letona talked about it. María came to recognize it, Mati admitted it, and Pepelín reveled in it. So much so that, after Jaime's death, Pepelín began to lose himself in the idea of becoming Jaime. Much like Pepelín, many politicians fought to move into leadership positions, losing themselves in the idea of becoming Spain's new leaders with the support of the king. They, as Pepelín, failed to consider that their new positions would not be recognized.

The relationship between Jaime and Pepelín was never clear, and this ambiguity clouded their sexual identities as well. Both engaged in heterosexual sex with women: Jaime with Mati, Pepelín with the maid Josefa. But hints of homosexuality accompanied them both. Pepelín's included an "incident with the subaltern," his setup of Nando Terran, his fame in the homosexual bars of Letona, and his jealousy of Mati:

Pepelín recuerda [. . .] que tuvo celos de esa chica. Les vio un día a los dos, a Jaime y a ella, en una discoteca amartelado. Había otros muchos en el mismo grupo. Nada era, a la vez, tan inadecuado a la personalidad de Jaime, pensó Pepelín en aquella ocasión, como "aparecer amartelado" y nada más adecuado a su vanidad o su crueldad que martillear, apareciendo amartelado, en figura, en representación, en enigma, en la conciencia ajena, celos. (60)

Their mutual attraction seemed to run deeper than merely the similarity of their physical appearance, at least on the part of Pepelín. Their resemblance, in fact, created a self/other relationship in which the chauffeur sees both his “self” and his “other” in the likeness they shared. When Jaime met Pepelín, he commented on the similarities between them to his mother. Pepelín, proud of his physical attractiveness and resemblance to Jaime in life, takes even more pride in that likeness after his death: “¿Qué clase de gracia tenía Jaime? Gracia corporal, sin duda, Pepelín, sin embargo recordaba con mucha más precisión su humor sobrio y certero. Aquella guasa de Jaime como opacidad irreductible de un temperamento que Pepelín, en sus fantasías de recién llegado, había imaginado casi idéntico al suyo” (26). His fantasies and his desire to relocate himself from the margins perhaps color his point of view. The reality of his personality, however, does not match his image: “Pepelín no bromeaba nunca; le costaba trabajo, incluso, entender que alguien pudiera o fingiera reirse acerbamente de sí mismo. En Pepelín lo más parecido al sentido del humor era su habilidad para fingirse absolutamente desinteresado” (26). He chooses, nevertheless, to believe in the likeness they shared. And the more he loses control of his life, the more he seeks to realize his fantasies and become Jaime.

After Jaime’s death, Pepelín initiates an orchestrated move from the margin to the center. It begins with María’s gift of Jaime’s suits:

Esos trajes habían fascinado a Pepelín desde un principio. Se los había probado varias veces. Eran trajes muy corrientes; por eso es curioso que Pepelín, al vestirlos muy deprisa por miedo a que doña María le

llamara en ese instante, tuviera invariablemente la impresión de ser sustituido, ocupado o movido por la hueca modulación interna de esos trajes. [. . .] Por un momento pensó regresar a la casa. Dejarse, una vez, arrastrar por la modulación alteradora de aquella ropa; aquel poderoso disfraz movilizante, autónomo, que ahora le pertenecía. (27)

The power of the suits seems to set in motion Pepelín's gradual conversion from a likeness to what he hopes would be the original. Seeing himself in Jaime's clothing proves a turning point in Pepelín's identity shift. He believes that the doning of the suit moves him from his marginalized, lower-class position as servant to the coveted upper-class position of son. Of doña María he says: "Me quiere como un hijo" (27). Now that her true son was gone, in Pepelín's mind at least, he should become that son. Just as the ghostly presence of Jaime appears to influence the chauffeur's behavior, so did a similar haunting occur in the formative stages of the transitional government. Carr writes:

The resistance of the bunker to any political reform, however slight, was evident throughout 1976 and 1977. The Prime Minister himself, according to his Foreign Minister, was perpetually afraid of phantoms, obsessed by the supposed need to avoid a direct confrontation with orthodox Francoism. He tried to secure its neutrality through a policy of conciliation and concession. The experiment failed. The Arias reform proved unacceptable to the bunker and could gain no support from the democratic oppositions. (210)

Their resistance to reform and their staunch identification with the ghost of Franco inspired those on the right to believe erroneously that they would gain control by dressing themselves in the “clothing” of the deceased dictator. They did not count on the pressure that would come from Suárez, the king’s choice for second prime minister nor did they imagine that the current Arias government would not recognize their newly assumed position as keepers of the traditions and the faith of Spain.

As interchangeable representatives of self/other, Jaime and Pepelín became imitations of each other. According to Butler, however, “[. . .]the entire framework of copy and origin proves radically unstable as each position inverts into the other and confounds the possibility of any stable way to locate the temporal or logical priority of either term” (313). What may have been a game of appearance with Jaime becomes reality for Pepelín as his identity steadily destabilizes. He tells Mati: “Una persona que se parece a otra, llega a ser la otra cuando de verdad ya nadie las distingue. Dadas ciertas condiciones . . . eso sucede a veces. Jaime, el señorito Jaime se hacía pasar por mí y yo por él . . . en ciertos sitios. ¡Eramos uno mismo!” (144). Seemingly, he can no longer distinguish between the two. To him, the conditions are right for becoming the other.

Imitation and inversion are not possible, Butler writes. Neither is Pepelín’s assumption of Jaime’s personality. His first attempt at becoming Jaime is in bed with Mati. As he caresses her, his imitative act begins:

Mati tardó un instante en verlo claramente; luego, asombrada una vez más, advirtió que Pepelín, sin saberlo, acababa de reproducir casi

exactamente una de las más características bromas lúgubres de Jaime.

“Sólo eso era distinto cuando Jaime,” pensó Mati, secamente.

[. . .] Pepelín abrió de un tirón la bragueta de los vaqueros de Mati.

Desabrochó el cinturón—. “Desnúdate Mati, ¿eso te decía Jaime . . . ?

(142-43)

Mati, however, is not taken in by his performance. The unease of the situation ends with a phone call. Thinking him a lousy copycat, she has no desire for the seduction to continue. She locks the door as he leaves the room. “Es una confusión,” Mati concludes. “Este pobre tonto de tanto quererse parecer se ha confundido” (145). His first attempt at imitation fails. His second and final is about to begin. Much like Mati, the Spanish people, anxiously awaiting the new democracy, would have nothing of the imitative performances of the Arias government. Abandoning any belief in the prime minister, the public and the opposition pressed for true reform, ultimately forcing the pretender out of the political scene.

Pepelín leaves Mati’s room in an altered emotional state and enters María’s room as a changed personality. Surrendering his “self” to his “other,” Pepelín dons Jaime’s blue suit in hopes of recasting himself in a new role as son and heir to María Vidal. He conflates himself with his other to create his new identity. According to Bakhtin, the need for other is based on an essential lack of wholeness: “Like the ‘I,’ the Other cannot complete himself by himself. I need the Other to realize myself and vice versa, our mutual excess of perception and restless adventure of desire is made possible by our mutual recognition of an essential lack of wholeness” (24). This lack

of wholeness, explains Jeffrey Nealon, implies lacking control over one's circumstances, so the "I" must continually reinvent itself to cope with changing circumstances (5). Through a series of events, Pepelín's life is spinning out of control. In order to cope, he must reinvent himself, in the identity of his other, Jaime Vidal. As he appears before María in Jaime's blue suit, he cannot differentiate the copy from the original, and he hopes that she will not either:

—Es imposible no ver una imagen que se tiene delante —dijo doña María, sin venir a cuento.

—Exactamente. Es imposible que no veas que soy tal como soy.

—¿Y quién eres tú? Te veo tal como eres. Pero no sé quién eres. [. . .]

—Soy Jaime —dijo Pepelín. (151-52)

The imitation of reality, on the other hand, can never completely duplicate it. There is always, as Butler describes it, a difference inherent in the repetition. Pepelín did not plan on that difference. María, however, recognizes it, and when Pepelín demands that she call him Jaime, she rejects him:

A toda velocidad, a todo trance, con feroz impaciencia, se exigía de ella un nombre propio. Doña María se sintió forzada a adoptar lo sucedido que, a la sazón, como una criatura gimiente y trajeada, tenía entre los brazos. Había que nombrarlo por su nombre. Semejante solicitud le pareció un abuso. Es improcedente pedir el nombre a oscuras. Doña María de un papirotazo separó la cara aquella de su cara. (160)

María's slap lands Pepelín on the floor, and as he gets to his feet in a daze, she apologizes for encouraging his behavior. Thinking it was Jaime's suits that caused his behavior, she tells him: "Siento lo de los trajes, José. Fue incomprensible. No vi que te empujaban a ser quien no eres" (161). It was not the suit that caused him to behave as he did, but rather his belief that the imitation could pass for the real and his desire to find his own identity in that of the other. Just as Pepelín did not expect that he would be denied recognition by María, the conservative supporters of the Arias government failed to consider that their plan for continued Francoism would be rejected in the transitional process. In spite of his loyalty to Franco and the bunker, Arias lost the support of the king and his position as prime minister, and the hardline Francoists became marginalized witnesses to the reform process.

Pepelín's attempt to conflate his identity with Jaime's not only destroys him but also shatters María's unshakable belief in her power to control. Just as Pepelín's behavior parallels that of the *franquista* right, María's character suggests the Spanish aristocracy, and by association, the Catholic Church. As the only child of a wealthy, aristocratic Letonian, she has lived her life at both the center and periphery of society. Her wealth and her class privileged yet protected her, as it did both the aristocracy and the Church under the dictatorship. Perceiving herself to be, by nature, better than and removed from the citizens of Letona, she has become a cold and bitter woman. On the day of Jaime's funeral, the public's only view of the grieving mother is that of her eloquent back, the part of her that she presented most often to the outside world: "Dando la espalda a todos ahí estaba. Y de su bella espalda todo —y, a la vez,



siempre todo lo contrario— se seguía” (14). She neither inspires nor desires the sympathy of others. “Ahí sola, soberbia, ahí de espaldas, doña María no invitaba a pésames” (19). Her alienation results from both her position in society and a self-imposed barrier against intrusion from the outside world. Pepelín believes that, on the surface at least, she possesses an unscathed sense of identity and “pura continuidad sin variación o quiebro ninguno” (24). Unforeseen by others and completely unexpected by María, Jaime’s death begins to erode her confidence, and Pepelín’s desperate attempt to replace him destroys it completely. Likewise, the wealthy aristocrats and the Church, thinking themselves indestructible during the Franco regime, lost confidence and esteem with the death of the dictator. Refusing to acknowledge any political system other than “the Regime of 18 July” (Carr 215), the former power players lost control.

María sees everything in terms of her bitterness: “Enmascarar a todo trance sus sentimientos, o su falta de sentimientos —‘es igual’, piensa María—. Enmascarar, en cualquier caso, la confusión, la amargura” (69). She has been alone all her life. Her mother died when she was young, leaving her to be raised by her father, and she created for herself a world in which she occupied the center and she needed no one:

Doña María nunca tuvo íntimas amigas, ni confidentes de ninguna clase ni religioso ni laicos. [. . .] Se acostumbró a estar sola y de estar sola le vino la costumbre de hablarse a sí misma en voz alta. Inventó incluso nombres, masculinos algunos, para monólogos que

indispensablemente requerían una voz y unos gestos que no fueran en todo la misma voz y el mismo gesto de María. (123)

When she wanted company, she invented characters that appeared when she called them. Although the invention of two specific names, doña María and Jaime, might have been simply coincidental, it proved prophetic:

El uso de dos distintos nombres propios, uno de los cuales era el propio suyo con el añadido de aquel solemne tratamiento, y otro un nombre propio de varón, puede bien admitirla menos mágica y más llana interpretación posible: suponiendo que hubiera en la conciencia de la niña dos imágenes o series de imágenes, lo bastante continuas e identificables como para poder fingir que de verdad existían y llegar, de hecho, en mometos particularmente excitantes o terribles del juego infantil —el soliloquio— a convencerse de que vendrá si se las llama por sus nombres propios, [. . . ] (124)

The childish game of citing her imagined characters, Jaime and doña María, into existence did not end when she entered adulthood. Her attempts to transfer her childhood citational practices to her adult relationship with the flesh-and-blood version affected not only her identity, but also that of the real Jaime Vidal.

Growing up without a mother in the Spain of the 40s, the child María had no personal power over anything other than her mind. In spite of her beauty and intelligence, in spite of her family's wealth, she had no worth. Only through marriage would she inherit, and it was her father's duty to see that she married well:

[. . .] dentro de la clase a que su hija y él pertenecían, las mujeres se tienen que casar porque se quedan si no sin liquidez ninguna. Ya ni siquiera entonces estaba el dinero elegante para bromas. Las primeras familias de Letona, apellidos de siempre, vivían todas de un dinero caro. De quedar soltera, doña María heredaría más aspecto de rica que una decente renta anual. (128)

To the young María, it did not matter whom she married. The only thing she wanted from a man, she told her father, was the only thing she could not give herself, a child. The donor really was not important, so she let her father choose her mate. Because María never included a husband in her imaginings as a child, she did not need to do so as an adult either. She merely wanted to get on with her life, whatever that meant: “La verdad es que el ‘ir’ de doña María siguió siendo, lo mismo que en su infancia, un ir figureándose figuras: dos únicas figuras, cada día más exactas y privadas, ‘doña María’ y ‘Jaime’. Aparte eso la joven María no deseaba nada en absoluto” (129).

With Jaime’s birth, her husband Joaquín becomes an object of her hatred.

Marriage to Joaquín Vidal ensured that the wealth and status María experienced as a child would continue. She felt her father had chosen well, but the Vidal family, being of the business class, was socially inferior to María’s family, an inferiority which both felt:

Esforzarse es servil —pensaba doña María—. Una horrerada propia de los Vidal. (La familia de su marido eran “del comercio”, que decía doña María. Emprendedores y, claro está, fabulosamente enriquecidos

de dos generaciones a esta parte, pero en última instancia “dependientes”, nuevos ricos jubilosamente satisfechos de aquilatar el precio de todo a simple vista. Doña María evitaba siempre añadir a eso que su propio y distinguido padre —“un señor de toda la vida”, según se decía en Letona— había aprobado ese matrimonio precisamente en atención al obvio talento que el joven Vidal, ya a los veinticinco años, mostraba en la compra-venta de chatarra.) (74)

Her feelings of superiority, her refusal to need anyone, contributed to an unfortunate marriage in which neither partner was content: “Toda la capacidad negativa y crítica de doña María se consumió en afirmar —en silencio— que entre su marido y ella no había nada en común: ni siquiera el hijo” (74). Her capacity for negativity and criticism kept her from being close to anyone, even Jaime. On the political scene, a similar “marriage of convenience” occurred in the early years of the civil war, when monarchists threw their support behind Franco with full confidence that he would restore the monarchy upon his victory. Although he declared Spain a kingdom in 1947, he named himself as head of state and refused to name Juan de Borbón as king. He did, however, take the young son of Juan under his wing, assuming responsibility for the boy’s education and serving as his mentor. After years of a symbiotic relationship, the monarchists were rewarded when Franco named Juan Carlos, the son of Juan and the grandson of the abdicated Alfonso XIII, as his successor.

Despite her wealth and class, María, as a woman in Spain, had no value or worth outside the home. The freedom that Mati’s generation was beginning to

experience was slower in spreading to those of María's age. Rosa Montero describes the position of women in Spain before the end of the dictatorship:

[. . .] until 1975, the date of Franco's death, 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. On top of that, for the whole of the forty-year period contraception, divorce, and abortion were illegal. In addition, adultery was a crime for which a woman could be sent to prison, while concubinage (male adultery), though a criminal offense was treated more leniently. (381-82)

While never questioning this substandard treatment, María reacted to it by creating a world in which she alone had the power, the world of her imagination where she could cite characters into existence and no one entered without an invitation. By marrying, she converted from María to one of her favorite characters, "doña María." By giving birth to Jaime, she created the second person in her private world. Now her imaginary world had become reality. Also the power center of his universe, Franco sought to create an heir who not only would validate his existence but also would remain faithful to his ideology of a grand, glorious, and fascist Spain. He found what he believed to be that person in Juan Carlos, personally fashioning him in his own image and nominating him as heir and future king in 1969 (Carr 180). He, like María, filled his world with those he could personally cite into and out of existence.

In spite of an appearance of control in her imaginings, however, María could never count on any consistency in the performances of her characters:

Pronunciar habilidosamente el nombre, garantizaba una automática e instantánea presencia . . . disfrazada, a lo mejor, de lo contrario. Doña María siempre garantizó —ante sí misma, por supuesto, nunca hubo nadie más— la vida ardiente, la viveza y fuerza de todas las figuras que inventaba; jamás garantizó que figurarán con la misma figura al día siguiente. Tras figurarse, por ejemplo, “Jaime” la primera vez, ya luego “Jaime” se figuraba sus figuras solo. (124)

The same phenomena occurred in real life. Her attempts to control the word-made-flesh Jaime were as unsuccessful as her efforts to control the imaginary one, because each appearance differed from the one before it. The only thing she could count on was that inconsistency. She accepted it, and she expected no more or no less. That was the truth of their relationship. As dictator, Franco, too, created an image of Juan Carlos that the leader hoped would appear when the younger man assumed the throne at Franco’s death. The image of the king that emerged, however, did not at all resemble that of the fascist original. Just as María could not predict Jaime’s performance, neither could Franco, the old guard, nor the Church predict what would happen to Spain under the direction of the new king.

This inconsistency in Jaime’s performance is to be expected, according to Butler, because performance is not a singular act, but a reiteration of a norm or set of norms. This reiteration is in itself unstable:

For if the “I” is a site of repetition, that is, if the “I” only achieves the semblance of identity through a certain repetition of itself, then the “I” is always displaced by the very repetition that sustains it. [. . .] In other words, does or can the “I” ever repeat itself, cite itself, faithfully, or is there always a displacement from its former moment that establishes the permanently non-self-identical status of the “I”. [. . .] What “performs” does not exhaust the “I”; it does not lay out in visible terms the comprehensive content of that “I” for if performance is repeated, there is always the question of what differentiates from each other the moments of identity that are repeated. (311)

María never knew which performance to expect from the imaginary or the real Jaime. And even as a child she thought, “Jaime, desde luego, siempre, siempre será mucho más variable, mucho más cambiante que doña María, siempre será así” (125). No one but María understood this variable, changing identity that Jaime possessed. Because his instability was beyond her control, she bitterly forced upon herself complete stability. Also unable to control Franco’s performance, the monarchists and the nobility reacted to their disappointment with bitterness and resentment.

As she watched Jaime grow, María accepted her situation. It was, as she called it, a sad game. “A veces era un juego un poco triste. Y a veces muy triste: tener que conformarse con saber que Jaime había venido al pronunciar su nombre dulcemente y no llegar a verle bien del todo y ni siquiera un poco porque no se veía la figura sobrepuesta con que él mismo se figuró esta vez” (124-25). She expected nothing of

Jaime, he expected nothing of her. But expecting nothing is not the same as wanting nothing. Both doña María and Jaime wanted something of the other, just as the nobility and the Church wanted something of the dictator. None of the parties understood the expectations. When Jaime lashed out at her with his vengeful irony, she forgave him because it was so much like hers. When she went for weeks without seeing him, she accepted that it was his way. By the subtle alterations inherent with each of his repetitions, he undermined her authority and won freedom from her control, just as Franco's subtle changes distanced him from the control of the nobility and the Church. Jaime's death, however, was something she never imagined. She could not cite him back into existence, nor could she imagine anything after his death. By being unable to imagine, she began to lose control: "Doña María no puso en Jaime, sin embargo, sus ilusiones porque doña María no se hacía ilusiones. Puso algo más grave y mucho más engañoso que una ilusión o una esperanza: se puso a sí misma" (74). The gift of Jaime's suits to Pepelín represents a final, desperate attempt to recreate her son in the person of his look alike. When that attempt also fails, her loss of control is complete. Likewise, unable to imagine a Spain without Franco's protection, members of the aristocracy and the Church hoped to regain their control through their support of the dictator's hand picked successor, King Juan Carlos.

There were only subtle signs of María's loss of control, sensed first by Pepelín and noticed later by Mati: the slightest change in her routine, her desperate request that Mati stay, her admission that she did not want to be alone, all signs that things were different. For once, María did not know what to do:



Por primera vez en ¿cuántos años? Doña María no sabe exactamente qué hacer o qué quiere decir —ella misma o alguien distinta de ella misma— en el momento siguiente de su vida. Estando en casa o no, mientras Jaime vivía —¿cuántos días hace que Jaime ya no existe— doña María sabía exactamente siempre qué era lo siguiente: lo siguiente es lo mismo. Guardar igual lo mismo: eso es todo. Jaime sabe de sobra la verdad. (41)

María created for herself a world that centered on Jaime, either real or imagined. When he died, she lost her focus, her sense of purpose, her identity. She believes there is no God and no rehabilitation after death. When Jaime's image reappears in the body of Pepelín, she could have easily imagined him back to life. But speaking the name that would resurrect Jaime, the only human being she ever loved, proves impossible for her, and she rejects the impostor. Now she is truly alone, she has lost control, and she has absolutely nothing to say:

No cabe ninguna rehabilitación acá en la muerte. [. . .] A diferencia, sin embargo, de aquella vez en que doña María fue sorprendida, no se sabe por quién ni dónde exactamente, hablando sola con “doña María” y con “Jaime”, ahora doña María no se dirige a nadie al hablar sola. Ni siquiera con “doña María” habla ya doña María. Se ha quedado sin ningún nombre propio en los labios, sin ninguna imagen en la conciencia. El parecido se ha vaciado por completo. (199)

She can no longer cite anyone into existence, nor can she imagine a future. Now, with no God, no rehabilitation, and no son, there is no María. Now, there is nothing. To the aristocracy, the monarchists, and the Church, the loss of Francisco Franco meant the loss of their power source. The changes to the Movement that accompanied the change in leadership after his death left them feeling abandoned and betrayed, and they could not embrace those who assumed the new identity of a democratic government that was a clear betrayal of Francoist ideology.

Since she was a child, María defined herself in terms of Jaime, the imaginary and the real, by trying to control both his materiality and his performance. Jaime resisted by constantly altering that performance. Inasmuch as she seems to represent the aristocracy and the Church, the boy's uncle, Gonzalo Ferrer, has much in common both with the intellectuals of the time and with those struggling with their sexual identity in post-franco Spain. Also investing much of his personal identity in Jaime, Gonzalo as a writer sought to define and control the young man through his discourse. Reacting much as he did to his mother, Jaime at once reveled in and was repelled by Gonzalo's efforts. Such rebellion, according to Foucault, is inherent in all relationships of power: "These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellion or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistance, each of them a special case" (96). As with his mother, Jaime resisted his uncle's discursive attempts to control him by subverting the subject/object dichotomy of their relationship, converting his uncle into the object of both his affection and his

disdain. Similar contradicting emotions controlled many Spanish intellectuals during the dictatorship, secretly attracted by and supportive of the regime at the same time that they were repelled by it. This attraction/repulsion was also felt by those Spaniards during the transition who were experiencing full sexual freedom of expression for the first time in their lives. In light of the fragmentation and contradictions present in the society of late 1970s Spain, those who had hidden or struggled with their sexual identity under the dictatorship for fear of punishment began to experience emotions that were at once both liberating and frightening.

Gonzalo Ferrer loved his nephew Jaime, but like María, Pepelín, and Mati, he did not know the essence of the boy. He saw himself mirrored in Jaime, and took strength and pleasure from that reflection: “Jaime era físicamente atractivo y Gonzalo se sentía físicamente atractivo, él mismo, al contemplarse, al discutir con él” (51). Kaja Silverman writes: “The relation of the subject to its mirror reflection provides the fundamental framework for all possible eroticism since the object relation must always submit to the narcissistic framework and be inscribed in it. The subject originally locates and recognizes desire through the intermediary of its own image” (5). By Jaime’s submission to his uncle’s gaze, he willingly allowed his objectivization, which in turn allowed him to exploit that position in order to control Gonzalo:

Hubo un punto —difícil de precisar cronológicamente— en que cedió la verosimilitud de esta relación. Jaime no exhibía ya ante Gonzalo sus conocimientos de Literatura Universal, sino su encanto. Aferrado a la

idea de la previa verosimilitud, como quien retiene en las manos largo rato, los trozos de una porcelana rota, Gonzalo Ferrer se hundió poco a poco en la fascinación de ser espejo. Todo carecía de verosimilitud ahora excepto la deliciosa irrealidad de ser verificado por un muchacho de diecisiete, dieciocho, diecinueve años. Jaime verificaba, una ocasión tras otra, la ambivalencia emocional, sexual de Gonzalo Ferrer. (51)

The fascination Gonzalo felt turned into desire, and Jaime was able to manipulate his uncle by using the power inherent in his position as object of the gaze:

Semejante proceso de verificación introdujo entre ellos, una nueva suerte de distancia: eran cómplices; la condición de esa complicidad, sin embargo, fue la distancia nueva: Jaime sabía que Gonzalo no cruzaría nunca por sí solo el fertilizante espacio verbal —la nueva y brillante irrealidad— del sobreentendido donde ambos eran a la vez cómplices y no-ejecutores de acto sexual ninguno. (51)

Gonzalo never acted on his desire, but his admission of it implied a guilt on his part that steadily eroded the author's confidence and self-esteem. Like Gonzalo, those intellectuals who remained in Spain during the Franco years never openly admitted their attraction to the power of the dictator. As closet Francoists, however, they tacitly appeared to support the system that controlled them. Just as they came to depend on the regime, so did Gonzalo begin to depend entirely on Jaime, needing both his nephew's love and hate for his inspiration. He tells the motorcyclist: "Gracias a él yo

podía escribir todo el día entero . . .” (84). Jaime’s death represented the death of the author’s inspiration, the end of his purpose for being. As he walked the town after the funeral, his memories allowed him to express his grief and reevaluate his life.

A homosexual male in his 50s, Gonzalo Ferrer has hidden his frustrated sexuality and guilt behind the façade of marriage and literary success. According to Alfaya, this personality type appears frequently in Pombo’s work: “La sexualidad, tal como la viven los personajes de Pombo, siempre es más soñada que genuina y en el fondo es un reflejo de unas relaciones de dominación que parecen regir toda la vida humana” (54). While Martínez-Expósito claims that all the male personalities in *El parecido* experience homosexual desires, the character of Gonzalo appears to suffer the most from his actions, reactions, and failures to act. He feels guilt for his sexual ambivalence towards his wife and his sexual attraction toward his nephew. His infatuation with the young man became an unspoken presence between them. No one really knew the nature of his love for his nephew. Few, however, considered it “normal”: “Aquel su amor velado y paisajístico por un sobrino ageste y marfileño — the longest journey de una vida tonta y literaria—, con sus ecos dorados de Cambridge y E.M.Forster, graduados hábilmente al denominador común, concupiscente y fácil —aunque herético, por supuesto— de Letona y provincia” (17). What brought them together in the beginning was the power of the word. As a famous writer, Gonzalo was a master of his craft, creating with language. His success in literature, in his own opinion, came from his lack of success in his personal life: “Gonzalo Ferrer logró transformar en fecundidad narrativa su sexualidad

ambivalente. [. . .] Gonzalo pensaba, con frecuencia irónicamente, que su vida era estrictamente lineal y que no había en ella contradicciones reales: sólo ese desfase imperceptible de comportarse, como si amara a Rosa sin amarla” (50). Jaime changed life for his aunt and uncle, bringing a new vitality to their dull routines: “Jaime reavivó en Rosa un lado infantil, casi pueril, de colegiala, que Gonzalo Ferrer, por haberlo sofocado deliberadamente en sí mismo, nunca había percibido en su esposa” (51). The young man’s charm was contagious, and both Gonzalo and his wife found themselves attracted.

In role of narrator and uncle, Gonzalo occupied a position of power. As a writer, he created Jaime through his discourse, then sought to manipulate him through that very discourse. Jaime resisted, however, with cruel inversion, by creating his own discursive game that turns the tables on Gonzalo. Jaime insisted that his uncle play the song, “Killing me softly with your love,” each time he visited, and he played verbal games with Gonzalo in their meetings and exchanges of letters. After one visit, Gonzalo remembers Jaime’s cruel words: “¿Hablaba Jaime de otro modo? —piensa Gonzalo Ferrer—. ¿Advertía Jaime que, por brillante que resulte, es preferible no subrayar ciertos detalles de nuestros rostros envejecidos y cansados?” (49). But Jaime never concerned himself with kindness when he dealt with his uncle. Just as Foucault describes the domination inherent in the power of the word and the subjectivation of the gaze, Jaime inverted his object position to one of control, manipulating his uncle with his verbal games and his letters, and playing on his uncle’s feelings of guilt:

De hecho y visto desde dentro, Gonzalo Ferrer se quedó solo: se enamoró de su sobrino. Pero, tal y como su sobrino había adivinado, sin poder, por sí solo, ni regular —describiéndola, por ejemplo— la creciente irrealidad en que vivían, ni negarla —acostándose con su sobrino, por ejemplo, o mandándole al cuerno— y pensar en otra cosa. (52).

Jaime's death left Gonzalo alone with his grief and his guilt. Walking late into the night allowed him to explore those feelings in his attempt to come to terms with what had happened and to discover some part of him that could survive his nephew's demise.

As the man grieved, things begin to take on a different perspective. He calls it an examination of conscience, and he appears convinced that he has found the strength to go on:

Así también, ahora Ferrer, encaminándose, ya con paso más firme, hacia la Plaza Nueva, sabe de sobra que mañana será martes y que, tras dormir diez, doce horas seguidas, tras desayunar, como de costumbre, sobriamente, cabrá proseguir con mal disimulado regocijo adelante. El fatal desenlace de la figura de la vida de su sobrino Jaime es un tema elegíaco. Y eso, sencillamente, es todo. (173)

He has moved from thinking that he had destroyed both his wife and Jaime, and that they, in turn had destroyed him, into a conscious awareness that he will always love

and write for Jaime. He believes he has found the final piece of the completed figure of his nephew and begins to walk with resolve.

Something happens, however, to turn his resolution around, and he loses himself completely, both mentally and physically. As Gonzalo remembers the letter in his pocket, the vision of Jaime draws him back into his guilt. He remembers his last visit with his nephew, and suddenly the thoughts and desires expressed then by the boy and now by Gonzalo merge into one. The dividing lines blur between subject and object as one voice says:

[. . .] hice trampa contigo, primero hacías trampa tú y luego yo, los dos hacíamos un poco de conciencia y representación del otro, luego yo con otros, gestos muy desiguales, sitios muy desiguales, fascinantes, era por recobrar la fascinación primeriza, tú parecías ido, arrepentido de quererme, de no sé qué, de querer ser como yo quizá, [. . .] ; Yo mismo quería ser igual que tú para que pudieras adorarme fácilmente! De verdad quisiera saber qué te detuvo. (177)

Ferrer's voice and Jaime's intertwined as he walks: "[. . .] por mucho que te extrañe, no pude remediar acariciarte [. . .] Llegué a aborrecerte porque te limitabas a mirarme con ese dulce, cobarde gesto de impotencia con que miramos todas las cosas de cuya caricia y peso y realidad hemos huido. . . [. . .] Luego perdí pie con todo el mundo a la vez [. . .]" (177). Seen from a distance, Gonzalo appeared disheveled and tired, yet walking with a purpose: "Viene a dar igual que la voz de Ferrer y la de Jaime se mezclaran en la última parte de la caminata. El final de los dos visto de lejos, cuando



no sea noticias el notición de hoy martes, será también más or menos igual, ligeramente grotesco en ambos casos” (179). The outward account of the rest of his walk comes from witnesses who talked with the gentleman in the bars or those who saw him at different points during the night before he met his death in the park.

After reaching the end of his examination of conscience, Gonzalo also reached the end of his life. And just as thoughts of Jaime controlled much of his existence, they also played a large part in his death. As the two young thugs attack him, he remembers the letter that could have been from Jaime, and his shouts bring his permanent silence. As the police and the people of Letona reconstruct the crime, they have access only to that letter and to the testimony of the witnesses to the writer’s final walk. His death ends the novel, just as Jaime’s death began it. The two letters, one from Gonzalo found on Jaime’s body and the one possibly from Jaime found on Gonzalo’s body, only add fuel to the speculation of the public. Accidents, murder, love, homosexuality, appearance, reality, everything, and yet nothing, is clear. “A juzgar, empero, por la carta hallada ensangrentada a pocos pasos de la víctima, el parecido que se busca es el de Jaime. En claro, los que se dice en claro, sólo queda claro que a ‘Jaime’ tiene que corresponder un Jaime y sólo un Jaime —siendo las circunstancias lo que son y el conocimiento empírico los que es— ”(193-94). The “parecido” is Jaime, and yet, ironically, there was never only one Jaime who corresponded to the name, but rather repetitions with a difference. In Gonzalo’s words: “La verdad es que Jaime antes vestía un traje doble, casual, donde . . . similitud y disimilitud se intercambiaban. El parecido era y no era el mismo.

Mediante su nombre propio a la vez se hacía y no se hacía referencia al propio Jaime” (173). Now his name, his likeness, his life and his death, along with Gonzalo’s, would eventually be forgotten. There are no resemblances now, there is nothing but the void.

Thus four characters closely involved with Jaime Vidal react to his death. Each offers a different point of view, and by altering his or her position to see the object more clearly, each comes to view the deceased in a different light. The ghost of Jaime Vidal haunts the characters in *El parecido* in much the same way that the presence/absence of Francisco Franco influenced Spanish politics and society after his death. If the Jaime/Franco duality represents the center, those surviving on the periphery must renegotiate their positions in order to define an identity separate from the respective power centers. Haunted by the controlling hand of the past, the younger generation searches for a viable sense of selfhood at a time in Spain in which traditional authority is no longer a stabilizing function. Mati, recognizing that she has nothing to gain by aligning herself with the past, abandons herself to the freedoms of a rapidly changing present. Pepelín, along with those of the *franquista* right, gamble on constructing a new identity by assuming a past one, and consequently meet with failure. María, like the aristocratic, Catholic Spain of her generation, tries unsuccessfully to continue as if nothing has changed. Discovering their identities completely tied to the past, however, and feeling themselves betrayed by those entities in which they had placed their trust, the old guard and María Vidal cannot function after the death of their respective idols. Gonzalo Ferrer, successful in his career but unhappy in his life, deals with his sexual identity from a position of guilt,

like many homosexuals beginning to write publicly after years of repression. His secret admiration for his nephew mirrors a similar hidden support that many intellectuals harbored but never expressed for the dictator. After Franco's death, the respective political factions underwent a similar reforming of self as they decided where they could and would fit within the structure of the new government. Those from the "bunker" refused to alter their loyalty to Franco and thus lost influence in the new political system. The Francoist supporters who wanted to participate in the transition to democracy adapted and eventually accepted the proposed changes. The *antifranquistas*, by conceding much, also won for their parties some participation in the future of Spain. In *El parecido* as well as in Spain, none of the changes came without reevaluating past relationships and separating reality from its likeness in an effort to see truly the object in question.

The new political system forged by agreements among the various factions set in motion Spain's successful transition into a democratic nation. The new constitution in 1978 and the general elections of 1982 that brought a change of leadership to the country signaled that democracy had truly arrived. In Chapter 2, the fictional political context turns to the 1950s (the actual context, of course, is the 1980s), as the analysis of *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* suggests a connection between a young boy's coming-of-age in the 1950s and that of Spain's teenage years as it prepared itself for the economic and social adulthood of the 1980s.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In a 1984 interview with Gregorio Morales Villena, Pombo says: “Yo escribí *El parecido* en Londres. Y cuando el libro se publicó en 77, en Santander se pensó que el personaje de Jaime estaba inspirado en uno real, en un señorito de allí. Pero en absoluto había ocurrido de ese modo” (19). In my interview with him in April of 2004, however, he clarified the publication date by saying that although he began writing *El parecido* in London in 1977, it was not published until he returned to Spain in 1979.

<sup>2</sup>In the same Morales Villena interview, the interviewer suggests to Pombo that one of the characteristics of his novels is their non-temporality, to which the author responds: “Todo lo contrario. Trato precisamente de reflejar mi época” (19).

<sup>3</sup>See articles and interviews by Morales Villena, Javier Alfaya, and José Luis L. Aranguren.

<sup>4</sup>Pombo also tells Morales Villena: “Efectivamente, los relatos y las cuatro novelas siguientes constituyen un ciclo, el ciclo de la falta de sustancia. Es un ciclo de cinco partes, y es clarísimo que hay un desarrollo progresivo que creo culmina y termina con mi última novela, *Los delitos insignificantes*, donde el relato se concentra en dos personajes acabados, sin futuro. De esta forma, se agota, por lo menos de momento, este ciclo de la falta de sustancia (19).

<sup>5</sup>In his description of his characters, Pombo cites San Agustín and Cartesian philosophy: “Es, digamos, una investigación del *Noli foras ire. In te ipso redi, quia interiore homine habitat veritat* de San Agustín, es decir, *No quieras salir fuera*.

*Vuélvete a ti mismo, porque en el interior del hombre habita la verdad. Es lo mismo del cartesianismo: pienso, luego existo; siento, luego existo; tengo emociones, luego existo” (Morales Villena 19).*

## Chapter 2

### *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard: Games and Coming of Age*

While the ghosts of Jaime Vidal and Francisco Franco haunt the pages of Chapter 1, games structure the text studied in Chapter 2, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* (1983). Winner of the first Herralde prize for a novel, Álvaro Pombo's second narrative is set in the 1950s Spain of the author's childhood. Although at first glance it appears to resemble a traditional *Bildungsroman*, the instances of betrayal, disillusionment, and deceit experienced by the characters signal more than just another coming-of-age story. A detailed reading of the novel reveals *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* to be a masterpiece of storytelling in which games represent more than merely child's play. With a hero who subverts traditional hierarchies of authority by manipulating adults through play, this novel of formation investigates the potential for tragedy when the rules of the game are mistaken for the rules of life. Excluded from the center of his parent's world, the young protagonist forms a world of his own in which he exercises ultimate control. In this exploration of the growing pains, attitudes, and behaviors of an adolescent in Spain of the 1950s, Pombo's narrative also reflects the coming of age of the generation of Spaniards who would become the neophyte political and social leaders of the democratic decade of the 1980s.

The marginal characters that inhabit the mansion of *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* (1983) represent different social classes, age groups, and

sexual orientations. The protagonist, Kus-Kús, spends much of his time alone or in the company of his English governess Miss Hart, his aging Aunt Eugenia, and a bisexual butler named Julián. The English governess and the aging aunt are excluded from society based on their gender and their status as single women. In addition, both women face a secondary marginalization, as Miss Hart's nationality and social class separate her from those around her, while Aunt Eugenia inhabits the periphery because of her age and her sexual behavior. Julián's bisexuality, which he reveals to the young Kus-Kús in a moment of confidences, isolates him from the heterosexual center and contributes to his victimization at the hands of the protagonist. The adolescent Nicolás (Kus-Kús) feels threatened on all sides. Himself marginalized by age, the pubescent boy-man is at once attracted and repelled by what Butler calls the uninhabitable zones that Julián and Aunt Eugenia occupy.<sup>1</sup> Each character living in the mansion reflects a similarly marginalized sector of Spanish society in the 1950s, struggling for recognition and representation in a country still stifled by the Francoist dictatorship. Because of Spain's many years of self-imposed isolation, foreigners such as Miss Hart were a minority. Desperately clinging to her elite and socialite upbringing, Aunt Eugenia represents those Spaniards struggling for identity after having experienced first-hand Spain's monarchy, its republic, and its two dictatorships (1923-29 and 1939-75). The class distinctions of the 1950s are reflected in the relationship between Kus-Kús's grandmother and her friend María del Carmen Villacantero, as are the attitudes toward sexuality represented in both Julián and Kus-Kús while they interact with each other and with the outside world. Just as those

living on the margins within the mansion experience success or failure in their attempts to influence the young Nicolás, securing for themselves an improved position in life, so did those marginalized in the larger society experience similar successes and failures in their efforts to affect a realignment of the margins and centers of 1950s Spanish society.

After winning the first Herralde prize for a novel to be awarded by the publishing house Anagrama, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* received a number of critical reviews in the years immediately after its publication. As they did with *El parecido*, both González Herrán and Overesch-Maister include *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* in their critiques of the author's early works. While Ana Rueda examines it in her analysis of the role of the comic superhero in Spanish narrative, Dieter Ingenschay describes it as a modern novel of formation, and Martínez Expósito refers to it in his examination of the representation of homosexuality in Pombo's collections of short stories. Weaver also includes it in his book-length study of the author's narrative, analyzing it as part of Pombo's first cycle. He states that the characters, unable to see anything outside their own world, either attempt to dominate the "other" when they encounter it or allow themselves to be completely subjugated by it. (61). Although several critics mention it as an apprenticeship novel, few define or analyze it in great detail. In this chapter, I will examine how *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* traces the coming-of-age of the young protagonist, documenting how childhood games and fantasies mask the power plays inherent not only in the boy's maturation process, but also in that of Spain



during the 1950s. As with Kus-Kús, those adolescents who developed their attitudes toward class, gender, and sexuality during these years would be adults in the 1980s. Through Kus-Kús, Pombo reflects on his own generation's growing pains, allowing the reader insight into the physical, psychological, and sexual development of those Spaniards who in their 40s would become the social and political leaders of the new democratic Spain.

The 1983 publication date of *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* situates it within the first year after the PSOE pulled a landslide victory in the general elections of 1982. The years between the 1977 elections, the first popular elections in the country since 1936, and this socialist victory, however, were difficult ones for Spain. With his UCD win in 1977 Adolfo Suárez became the first elected prime minister of the democracy. In 1978 voters approved a constitution which, although vague on contentious issues such as abortion, clearly outlined the new democracy. According to Carr:

Where there were disagreements over fundamental questions, the wording was deliberately ambiguous: for example, the “indissoluble unity” and “territorial integrity” of Spain was difficult to reconcile with the right of autonomy of all “nationalities and regions” within Spain. But the constitution was clear on the main outline of the new democracy: a bicameral parliament, a powerful executive, a non-confessional state, and the recognition of the rights of regional nationalism. (275)

King Juan Carlos signed the new constitution on December 27, 1978, and new general elections were set for the spring of 1979. In spite of the freedoms obtained by the Spanish people, however, they began to express dissatisfaction and disenchantment (*desencanto*) with the government, which Gilmour traces to unreasonable expectations:

People were undeniably disillusioned by the behavior of politicians during the first year of democratic government. They had expected a great deal from democracy – open government, political morality, the participation of all – and they discovered political reality: the incompetence of government, the low standard of public debate, the midnight pacts in smoke-filled rooms. Just as *franquistas* had believed that democracy would lead to disaster and the break-up of Spain, many Spaniards had expected it to cure their economic, political and social problems. And of course it did not. (202)

This disenchantment grew as the economic conditions of the country failed to improve, unemployment increased, and incidences of political terrorism became more frequent. Many felt the system to be fundamentally flawed, believing that life was better under Franco. Gilmour, however, takes exception to these statements:

Separatism and political terrorism were present through much of the dictatorship and increased towards the end. The economic crisis was caused largely by the international recession of the middle seventies. Besides, the main economic problems which Suárez had to deal with

had their roots in the *franquista* epoch. Inflation and unemployment both tripled during the last five years of Franco's life; the balance of payments deficit was at its highest during the years either side of his death. (204)

Regardless of who was to blame for the current state of affairs, the election campaigns centered on this apparent failure, putting extreme pressure on Suárez and his centrist coalition to perform. Involved in their own internal struggles to redefine the party, members of the UCD battled to reach a political balance that would put them in an advantageous position to win the 1979 elections.

In a light voter turnout, the March elections returned the UCD and Suárez to power. The problems facing the government proved difficult to solve, however, and the ruling party and its prime minister struggled to maintain their leadership. According to Carr, the UCD intended to govern Spain in accordance with its political philosophy, however, things did not go as planned:

The most pressing and thorny problem was to complete the "process of autonomy": to transform Spain from a rigidly centralized state of fifty or so uniform provinces into a nation of autonomous communities, and to determine the processes by which such regions should be established and the powers that would be transferred to them. The implicit risk was the disintegration of the Spanish state by radical administrative decentralization accompanied by a political decentralization all the more hazardous given the weakness of the

Spanish national parties – both the UCD and the PSOE – in the Basque Provinces and the UCD in Catalonia. (249)

Suárez's solution to the regional problems did not win him or his party the support they sought. According to Carr, the regional policy of Suárez appeared more a subject of controversy than a settlement proposal. There was no halt to Basque terrorism, causing the prime minister and the party to lose credibility: "The government's prestige, eroded by the failure to deal with terrorism, to evolve a clear foreign policy or to solve the problems of recession and unemployment, was at its lowest in the late summer of 1979. Suárez own star was in eclipse" (252).

As fast as the Suárez star fell, that of Felipe González rose. Sensing the opposition in crisis, González worked to strengthen his own position and that of the socialist party, the PSOE. In 1980 Spain suffered its worst year of terrorism, its highest unemployment figure yet, and its largest balance of payments deficit (Gilmour 249). At a time when the country needed his leadership, Suárez failed to deliver. In January of 1981, after four and one-half years in power and receiving criticism from all sides, including from within his own party, he agreed to resign from the both presidency and the party. Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo was chosen to succeed Suárez as prime minister.

Before the vote by the Congress to name Calvo-Sotelo as the new leader , however, Spain's fledgling democracy experienced its toughest challenge yet, that of the attempted coup of 23-F. On February 23, 1981, as leaders gathered to elect the new leader, a detachment of the civil guard led by Lieutenant-Colonel Antonio Tejero

stormed parliament: “At just twenty past six, Tejero and his subordinates burst in to the *Congreso*. He shouted ‘Everyone on the floor,’ and one of the policemen began firing his gun into the ceiling. Every deputy disappeared under the seats except Suárez, who remained immobile [. . .]” (Gilmour 242). According to Carr, only prompt action in defense of democracy by the king, as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, persuaded other military conspirators to withdraw from the action (276). After telephoning the country’s military leaders to assure them that he did not support the coup, King Juan Carlos appeared on a national television broadcast to assure the people of Spain that “the crown would not tolerate any attempts which ‘aimed at interrupting by force the democratic process determined by the constitution and approved by the Spanish people by means of a referendum’” (Gilmour 244). The coup failed while Spain’s democracy prevailed, and the king won the respect of millions of Spaniards.

As Suárez’s successor, Calvo-Sotelo could not resolve the problems that plagued the country. Although his government did negotiate Spain’s entry into NATO in May of 1982, increasing terrorism, growing unemployment, the chaotic state of the autonomous regions, and other scandals continued to plague him. As a reflection of its loss of credibility, the UCD began to lose in the autonomous elections, while the PSOE, under the leadership of González, gained in strength and in seats. The UCD eventually collapsed because of internal bickering, with its members moving to other political parties. Gilmour writes: “Calvo-Sotelo realized that he no longer had the authority to govern and decided to call a general election. The loyalists of the UCD,

under their new president Landelino Lavilla, fought a courageous campaign, but nobody could take them seriously. The party that had governed alone through the transition had destroyed itself” (265). Marginalized under the government of Adolfo Suárez, the socialists, under the leadership of González, would remain in power for the next 14 years. In 1982, as Pombo started to write and prepare his second novel for publication, Spain began adjusting to the ideology and economic policies of its new socialist government.

Changes were also taking place in Spanish fiction during the early years of the 1980s. According to Robert Spires, many Spanish authors during this period turned their focus from subverting Francoist discourse to examining the ideological forces that facilitated the creation of a fascist state (106). He describes it as a decentralizing trend, a moving away from centric reasoning and a shift in emphasis: “the focus switched from totalitarianism as an institution to some of the underlying elements such as power hierarchies and gender attitudes from which political absolutism draws its life force” (151). From his marginalized position as an outsider within his own country, Pombo witnessed the turbulent years of the transition. The economic and social freedom of the 1980s, combined with this shift toward ideological exploration, allowed him to revisit the years of his childhood in a novel that examines the attitudes that affected the formation of the adult generation of which, in the 1980s, he was a part.

Similar to Pombo’s childhood spent in Santander, the young protagonist of *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* lives his formative years in the 1950s in a

northern Spanish port city. When asked by Morales Villena in a 1984 interview about the specific setting of his second novel, Pombo replied:

Trato precisamente de reflejar mi época. Por ejemplo, puse mucho interés en que en *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* se percibiera la sociedad santanderina de los años cincuenta, cuando yo era niño y tenía aproximadamente la edad de Kus-Kús. Y eso está reflejado mediante el lenguaje de la gente de Santander y en los monólogos de María del Carmen Villacantero o de Tía Eugenia. (19-20)

Of the direct connection between Pombo and the protagonists Kus-Kús, however, the author stated in an interview that same year with Javier Goñi:

Kus-Kús es un personaje poco real, pero posible, es una especie de concentración de calamidades, de atracción de desdichas. En Kus-Kús hay algo que me interesa, es el origen del mal, la naturaleza del mal, ese tema de la inocencia, del pecado. Por lo demás nada tengo en común con él, bueno, sí, tal vez el lenguaje, Kus-Kús habla como hablaba yo o quizás como hablo todavía yo. (7)

Regardless of how intentional Pombo's resemblance to the protagonist might be, his recreation of the setting, the characters, and their interactions reflects a historical period and experiences shared by his generation of Spaniards. And the fictional world that Pombo creates through his narrator's reflections serves, as Spires proposes, "as a register of events, trends, ideas, attitudes and artistic styles" (5) of the non-fictional world, in this case Spain during the 1950s.

If adolescent years are marked by their transitory nature, by their “in-between-ness,” the decade of the 1950s could be described as Spain’s “teenage” years. Finding life less desperate than the first postwar decade, but yet before the economic growth of the 1960s, Spaniards in the 1950s began to desire more than the Francoist system could give them. Just as the events of these in-between years unsettled the lives of Kus-Kús and the other marginalized characters in *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, they also upset the *status quo* in Spain itself. The desperate economic situation in which the country found itself at the beginning of the 1950s required the regime to rethink its policy of autarky, or self-imposed economic isolation. According to Sebastian Balfour:

Franco reshuffled his cabinet to permit a timid liberalization of the economy. Diplomatic isolation also came to an end in 1953. In that year the Vatican signed a concordat with Spain, and the United States, keen to extend its Cold War defenses, signed a pact with the regime allowing for the creation of US military bases in Spain in exchange for financial aid amounting over six years to some \$625 million. Two years later, the UN voted to readmit Spain. (268)

These attempts to liberalize the Spanish economy did not bring overnight success. With record inflation nationwide, illegal strikes spreading across the country, and growing tensions within the Falange party itself, Franco was forced to make changes. Balfour writes: “Against his will, Franco was persuaded in 1957 to sack his ministers and appoint a new cabinet with more pliant Falangists and an economic team made up



of neo-liberal technocrats linked to the Catholic lay organization, the *Opus Dei*” (268). The Stabilization Plan of 1959 generated by these technocrats set in motion Spain’s economic recovery. Feeling much of the same anxieties experienced by Kus-Kús as he faced the new and confusing emotions of adolescence, the Spanish people also found themselves enticed by the possibilities of adulthood in the form of long-awaited technological advancement, infusion of foreign capital, and inclusion in the United Nations. And just as with the frustrated teenager, this new state of being did not come without growing pains. That difficult period of transition for Spain and for the protagonist in *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* can best be described as the “coming of age” of each.

Pombo sets his formation novel in an affluent home in a port city. The description of the house that initiates the story and is repeated with only minor variations at the novel’s end, serves not only to frame the work, but also to locate it:

Aquella casa, de aire francés, con mansardas enormes que asomaban entre macizos de chimeneas. Estatuas de bronce, grandes y pequeñas, que añadían elocuencia al balconaje. Y los seis miradores destellantes, encaramados muy por encima de los árboles de la plazuela de San Andrés, tan elegantes y casi tan audaces como los mástiles de los veleros fondeados frente al Club de Regatas, al socaire del puerto. (7)

The enormous mansards, bronze statues, and yacht-club location signal the setting as a wealthy neighborhood of the city. According to the manager of the local hotel, a position in the home was “una colocación con postín” (7). As the story begins, the

manager has arranged just such a job for a friend who had been working for her in the hotel, a man named Julián with a past that he wants to forget. The plot revolves around his relationship with the young master of the house, Nicolás (Kus-Kús). Joining the household as the new butler, Julián unknowingly becomes the object of the adolescent's affection, usurping the place of honor held formerly by imaginary male figures. Owing to the frequent and lengthy absences of his wealthy and class-conscious parents, Kus-Kús has learned to entertain himself by becoming a master at playing childhood games. His vivid imagination is his best playmate. His upbringing has been the responsibility of the females in the household, who, until Julián arrived, have consisted of a British governess and the boy's aging Aunt Eugenia, with occasional interference by his grandmother and his grandmother's best friend. The presence of a male figure in the mansards not only upsets the balance of power, but also serves as a catalyst for change in all the relationships within the mansion.

Moving into the predominantly female household proves no problem for Julián. As he becomes more and more comfortable in his role as butler, he begins to relax and adjust to the slow, dreamlike existence within the home. At the same time, Kus-Kús increasingly turns his attention away from his childhood toys, finding even his favorite imaginary games with his Aunt Eugenia to be less and less entertaining. Julián becomes the one with whom he prefers to spend his time. He invents new games to play with his new masculine playmate, even imagining a way to poison his governess because he now deems her useless to him. Enjoying the job that fate and

the hotel manager have provided him, the butler is at first unaware of the boy's adulation.

After three months of idyllic existence, the past that Julián had sought to escape catches up with him, first with an unexpected phone call, followed by the appearance of a former lover. Julián panics. In an unguarded moment during a midnight visit to his room by Kus-Kús, the butler shares the details of his sordid past with the boy. Although Julián considers him a child who understands nothing, Kus-Kús proves much more adult than the butler realizes.

At the same time that Julián's life begins its destructive spin, the boy's Aunt Eugenia begins a new relationship that ultimately proves fatal. She, like the butler, chooses to confide in her young nephew, who, on the brink of discovering his own sexuality, at first seems innocently uninterested in his aunt's sexual dalliance with the grocery store delivery boy. His interruption of the couple's love making, however, startles and embarrasses all the parties and proves to be a tragic turning point both in the boy's development and in his relationship with his favorite aunt. Julián and Eugenia realize too late that their trust in Kus-Kús, or their belief in his naivete, is mistaken when they each find themselves unwilling players in their confidant's new game, that of blackmail.

Julián's past closes in on him. The reappearance of two former lovers threatens his idyllic existence. When Esther reveals that she is the sister of the grocery store delivery boy who is having sex with the aging aunt, the coincidences overwhelm the butler. Blackmailed by Esther and her lover Rafael, also an ex-lover

of Julián with whom he is still infatuated, the butler steals money from Kus-Kús's parents. When he appeals to the boy for protection, he again places a mistaken trust in the young master because Kus-Kús manipulates all the players as if they were pieces in a board game. Confused and angry with his aunt for what he childishly feels is a betrayal of their relationship, Kus-Kús threatens to reveal her secret to everyone unless she hides the butler in her apartment. An encounter in the stairwell with the grocery store delivery boy once again leaves Kus-Kús vulnerable and betrayed, whereupon he calls the police, subsequently revealing not only the hiding place of Julián but also the secret of his aunt's sexual relationship with the delivery boy. Unable to handle the scandal of the situation and her feelings of betrayal at the hands of her nephew, Aunt Eugenia commits suicide. The story ends with the narration of her funeral by the voice of the now adult Kus-Kús and the repetition of the description of the mansards, the bronze statues, the yacht club, and the port.

From an emotional distance, the mature storyteller relates his adolescent experiences. The presence of this masculine, adult voice as narrator is one of the characteristics of a *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation. Indeed, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* bears many of the characteristics of an apprenticeship novel and has been labeled as such by a number of critics.<sup>2</sup> No study, however, fully develops the criteria used to define a development novel nor delineates specifically which of these qualifying characteristics can be found in the work. Moreover, no work addresses the sociopolitical implications of this coming-of-age story. *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* evidences traits of the traditional *Bildungsroman* not

only on the personal level, but on the national level as well. In an inverted version of the classic genre, the hero, already adept at the art of game playing, becomes the manipulator of his environment in order to achieve his goals and adapt to the changing world around him. At the same time, this inverted *Bildungsroman* serves as a vehicle for pointing toward the political coming of age of the country, a process in which its leaders play their own games in orchestrating Spain's entry into a new era of social and political maturity.

Defined interchangeably as a novel of formation, an apprenticeship novel, a coming of age, a life story, or an education process, the *Bildungsroman*, according to Randolph Shaffner, poses a linguistic problem because the English language lacks an exact expression for the German concept. The equivalent that Shaffner, in his study of the genre as a regulative type in western literature, finds most valid is that of the apprenticeship novel (3). According to Shaffner, Wilhem Dilthey coined the term in 1870, and Dilthey's description of its characteristics remains the basis for most comparisons (3). That description states that the apprenticeship novel, or *Bildungsroman*, "visualizes a regular development in an individual, whose every step has actual inherent value and simultaneously constitutes the foundation of a higher step. The apprenticeship novel as a whole presents the path toward personality as the final form of human existence" (qtd. in Shaffner 13). Shaffner offers a checklist of some of the distinguishing traits of an apprenticeship novel: the idea that living is an art the apprentice may learn, the belief that a young person can become adept in the art of life and become a master, a striving for knowledge of the world, the presentation of an individual development, a consciousness in the attempt to achieve

a recognizable typical goal, and the attainment of the goal of formation prior to death (17-19). In her study of the genre, Susanne Howe finds a distinct pattern in all *Bildungsromane*. She says:

The adolescent apprentice on the path to self-formation sets out on his way through the world, meets with reverses usually due to his own temperament, falls in with various guides and counselors, makes many false starts in choosing his friends, his wife and his life's work and finally adjusts himself in some way to the demands of his time and environment by finding a sphere of action in which he may work effectively. (4)

Inasmuch as *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* traces the crucial steps of its protagonist on his path to self-formation, the novel indeed displays some of the distinguishing traits of a *Bildungsroman* as defined by Dilthey and Howe. Kus-Kús, however, in his attempts to become more adept at the “art-of-life,” becomes a master of the “game.” His striving for knowledge includes an overwhelming desire for power that makes his formation, his *Bildung*, unique.

The traditional apprenticeship novel “presupposes as fundamental the idea of becoming, both in a definite sense and with a definite goal in mind” (Shaffner 8). For Kus-Kús, that definite goal is power, and the “idea of becoming” involves a shift from the margins of his world to the center. The choices he makes, the games he plays, and the power he wields over others during his apprenticeship reflect his development as he seeks to become a more powerful player in his changing world. At the beginning of the 1950s, Spain also set out on a path of self formation as it took its first steps toward economic liberalization. The choices made by the regime and the

games played by those both within the inner circle and those on the periphery set Spain on its journey toward becoming a more powerful player in a world from which it had previously isolated itself. At the same time, the young people of the protagonist's age watched the political maneuverings of the adults, learning by example the rules to the games they would be playing as Spain's leaders of the 1980s

The relationship between the narrator and the hero of the novel is one characteristic of the traditional *Bildungsroman* found in *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*. According to Michael Minden, the hero, unsure of himself, relies on the narrator to tell his story:

To that extent, this is the configuration of autobiography, in which a mature and accomplished voice recounts the vicissitudes of the less complete person he once was. [. . .] The *bildungsroman* makes the shortcomings of the individual, the very "false starts and wrong choices" of the dictionary definition of the genre, the driving force of its narrative. In the character of the protagonist, in his "false starts and wrong moves," there is an open-ended idea of self-authorship, an individual's own attempt to realize his own potential. (5)

Interestingly, the identity of the narrator in *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* remains unclear until the end of the novel. With the focalization changing from character to character in the chapters, the reader receives no hints as to the relationship between Kus-Kús and the narrative voice. In the description of the funeral of the protagonist's Aunt Eugenia in the final paragraphs of the work, the subtle conversion of the narration from third to first person catches the reader off-guard: "Estaban fuera los señores. Se consideró un fallecimiento de postín. La

mañana del funeral era del todo de verano. Fuimos todos de punta en blanco. La iglesia parroquial estaba llena; no faltaba un detalle; no faltó nadie; nos conocíamos todos. Yo presidí el duelo. Al final, me daban a mí el pésame” (204). The “I” who led the mourning and to whom “they” expressed their condolences could only be Kus-Kús, thus revealing his identity as the storyteller. The “mature and accomplished voice” as described by Minden finally presents itself, and in retrospect, the reader recognizes the relationship between the narrator and the hero. This mature and accomplished voice recounting the “vicissitudes of the younger, less complete version of himself” reveals all the shortcomings of the boy, thus making his selfishness, his jealousy, his cruel misuse of power, and even what Pombo himself describes as the boy’s potential for evil, the driving forces of the narrative (Goñi 7).

While this identification of the narrator as the more mature version of the young hero forms the first link between the traditional *Bildungsroman* and *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, a second shared trait is the concept of formation, the idea of “becoming.” According to Shaffner, the apprenticeship novel portrays life as a development, a series of interconnected links in a chain, developments with which the protagonist must come to terms. Kus-Kús, as apprentice, fits into this model:

[ he ] profits from the lessons of the world. From the beginning of the novel he has changed into a different entity by the end. In the apprenticeship novel, events mark the hero, definitively forming and crystalizing his character [ . . . ]. The hero in the apprenticeship novel strives for a goal that he has assigned himself and, in doing so, forms himself. (10)

As story time moves from autumn through winter, from spring into summer, the



protagonist passes from the end of his childhood into the summer of his adolescence. He is clearly a different entity by the end of the novel, as the occurrences within the mansards force Kus-Kús to react. The manner in which he comes to terms with these character-forming events is what makes his apprenticeship unique. As the hero of the *Bildungsroman*, he is marked by the interconnected links that move the action. In *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, however, the protagonist's behavior calls into question the very meaning of the word "hero." Kus-Kús, in contrast to the traditional apprentice, inverts the power paradigm that structures his life, seizing control of his own formation by manipulating those around him. The art of which he becomes master is that of game-playing, and as he acquires more knowledge of the world, he also acquires more power to control it. The first steps in Spain's process of "becoming" can also be read through the story. As advisers to Franco seize control of the country's economic formation by convincing the dictator to alter his previous policies and adopt new ones in order to set Spain in a new direction, they play games with each other, with outside investors, even with Franco himself, in an effort to maximize their power within the regime and the country's power within the world economy.

The games of which Kus-Kús becomes master begin as the simple ones of childhood. Kus-Kús's parents, "gente de mucha posición" (7), spend very little time at home; consequently, the boy depends greatly on the governess and the others in the household. But the English woman, according to the manager of the Hotel Príncipe Alfonso, is merely a companion for Kus-Kús's games: "Que jugaba solo todo el día, acompañado del gato y de la *miss*, con una división de soldaditos de plomo y un escuadrón de cazabombarderos, todo eléctrico. En un cuarto de jugar de ventanales

góticos” (8). In spite of the manager’s implied criticism of the boy’s behavior, game-playing in children is not an unusual activity. In fact, it allows them to escape from the rules and regulations of the adult world. According to Mamta Chaudhry-Fryer, it is through games that children create a second life, outside the official one of grownups:

Adults seldom realize that even though children may need looking after, they also have their own society and their own code of jurisdiction. Children’s games challenge the world of adults, puncturing the pompous shams of authority through play. Their games resist colonizing by grownups: the moment adults want to join in, children change the rules. In the struggle between life’s serious work and childrens games, subverting authority thus becomes power play.

(1)

By his games, Kus-Kús challenges the adults in his world. As he moves through the different phases of his *Bildung*, the nature of the games changes. The serious work of Kus-Kús’s childhood play leads to the blackmail, deception, and betrayal of his former playmates.

Along with his toy soldiers, his story books and his imagination, Kus-Kús had as his first playmate his governess, Miss Adelaida Hart. Although the most responsible adult in the child’s life since his birth, Miss Hart is still a foreigner, and even though she does her job well, she knows her place within society. Kus-Kús’s family, of considerable social standing, “gente de mucha posición, lo mismo la familia de la señora que la familia del señor. Emparentado con la más exclusivo de Bilbao” (7), represents the class of Spaniards who in the 1950s formed part of the

banking and industrial oligarchy. According to Gilmour, this group formed the elite of Francoist society and as such admired the British educational system. “What they most esteemed about Britain were its field sports and the discipline of its public schools. During Franco’s rule the Spanish upper classes often sent their children to British schools or hired British governesses to raise their children”(42). But admiration for foreigners and acceptance of them as equals are not the same and, as Miss Hart well knows, her employment in the home does not guarantee her equality within the household.

The marginalization of the governess is clear from the beginning, when María del Carmen Villacantero, the best friend of Kus-Kús’s grandmother Mercedes, criticizes the governess at a family gathering:

menudas listas las inglesas como quien no quiere la cosa, que lo tenían hablado ya Mercedes y ella, que menudas exigentes y menudos humos que venían a España para niños con unas exigencias que no tenían por qué, porque no tenían por qué porque a ver de qué las iban a tratar en su país como aquí se las trataba, que Mercedes y ella, las dos, siempre lo decían [. . . ] (25)

Always remaining separate from the family, her responsibility as governess involves being the nearly-constant companion to a child emotionally abandoned by his family. That also irritates María del Carmen, who resents the non-Catholic Miss Hart for the time she spends with Mercedes’s grandson:

Figúrate, un nieto lo que es y todo el santo día con las *misses* que, lo que pasa en el extranjero, en la práctica, con el protestantismo no se tiene nunguna religión, tratándose del nieto de Mercedes [. . . ] ¿a

quién quería más Kus-Kús, a ver a quién, a los papás o a la *miss*? ¡Qué lo dijera él, la pobre criatura, que lo dijera él, siempre solo entre institutrices sin Dios! Y ¿a quién iba a querer el pobre niño? ¡Pues a la *miss*! ¿A qué si no? Y pensar que un nieto de Mercedes . . . !” (25).

While the idea of a grandson of Mercedes being raised by a British *miss* rankles María del Carmen Villacantero, Miss Hart meets with the approval of the boy’s parents. Although the hotel manager considers her to be “una *miss* amojamada, que según tenía entendido la gobernata, no probaba el pan ni la legumbre” (8), Kus-Kús relies on her for everything from notes excusing him from school to comfort when he is ill. She has become his accomplice, a true playmate. When age begins to slow her down and he feels himself outgrowing her, it appears that a darker side of the boy emerges. He plots the elimination of his companion so that she can move on to a better life. His failure to achieve his goal not only frustrates him but also marks the first change in the nature of his games. As he matures, the innocence of his childhood is compromised by an irresistible need to control. On the national level, as Spain outgrew Franco’s policy of autarky, his advisers plotted its elimination so that the country could move on to a better life. Their plan, like that of Kus-Kús, met with initial failure. The dark side of the situation emerged as frustration surfaced from many levels. Workers and students threatened strikes and tensions grew within the Falange party itself, causing Franco to release his ministers and appoint a new cabinet. With growth came new evils. Fast-forwarding to the 1980s, as the socialists embarked on an economic recovery plan for Spain, the neophyte leaders also found themselves battling both the good and the evil inherent in such sociopolitical maneuverings.

For Kus-Kús, helping Miss Hart go to her final rest seems the kindest thing the boy could do, because it is clear that she is losing her usefulness:

Estaba clara que Miss Hart estaba muy cansada, cosa natural después de tantos años. Se empeñaba en acompañarle todavía por las mañanas al colegio y se quedaba un poco retrasada subiendo las cuestas y bajándolas. A la más mínima se la veía ahora sentada, dando cabezadas tiasas sobre la labor a media mañana o sobre su elegante edición de las novelas completas de Jane Austen, por las tardes. Era evidente, después de tantos años, que merecía pasar a mejor vida. (26-27)

And his plan was simple: “Bastarían dos gotas de sulfanilato de cinc, disueltas en el té. Seguidas, quizá, de una segunda aplicación, cuatro horas más tarde, en el vaso de agua de por la noche. . . . Miss Adelaida Hart, no en vano súbdita de Su Majestad Británica, no sentiría nada en absoluto. E iría, de este modo, pasando a mejor vida dulcemente” (27). To help him arrange her passing, he first needs to enlist the aid of his new playmate, Julián. He enters the butler’s room late at night to explain his plan, sure of Julián’s compliance. Julián, however, refuses to take the boy seriously, thinking the plan an innocent childish game. Although Kus-Kús insists on the need to send the governess to her final rest, his definition of “her final rest” remains ambiguous. As he shares his plan with Julián, his true intentions remain unclear: “— Pero, vamos a ver, ¿tú es que la quieres envenar o qué es lo que quieres? Julián no estaba aquella noche a la altura de las circunstancias. Parecía distraído. Muy poco interesado en si Miss Hart tenía o no que pasar a mejor vida. No, no se trataba de envenenarla. ¿De qué se trataba entonces?” 34). The question “Of not a poisoning, then what is it?” is something that Kus-Kús cannot answer, and Julián’s insistence on

clarification frustrates the boy:

—Ah, bueno, siendo un juego es otra cosa —dijo por fin y volvió a repetirlo antes de que Kus-Kús añadiera nada, cambiando únicamente un poco el orden de las palabras—. Es otra cosa siendo un juego. . .

—¡No es un juego! —exclamó Kus-Kús entonces con cierta brusquedad. [. . .]

—¿Cómo qué no? ¡Entonces, qué es! ¡Ya me dirás tú qué es si no es un juego! Una de dos . . .

—¡Pues no es un juego, no es jugar a nada, es otra cosa . . .! [. . .]

—¡Pues, a ver qué es, dígame usted, caballero, a ver qué es un envenenamiento que no es ni un asesinato ni una broma!

—Pues otra cosa. (36)

Kus-Kús's insistence that it is not a game nor murder nor a joke, but something else, leaves both parties frustrated. Julián's adult insistence on a clear explanation nearly brings the boy, "un crío en pijama" (36), to tears. Kus-Kús cannot define his game, perhaps because, by definition, play is characterized by make-believe. According to Gellner: "The word *game* is a pejorative sound, suggesting triviality, unimportance, arbitrariness. ('It is *just* a game.')(50). To Kus-Kús, there is nothing trivial about his plan. Foust writes: "the synonymy between game/play and triviality is a misunderstanding of the term, for as Michel Beaujour says, 'Game[s] or play are not to be taken as opposed to the serious pursuits of life'" (97). Games form a very serious part of Kus-Kús's life, and he does not consider them trivial. Julián's challenge frustrates him because, as still a child, he cannot formulate an adult answer. Rather, he gives no answer at all, which is the childlike thing to do. Julián, in turn,

refuses to play:

No, Julián no facilitaría las cosas a Kus-Kús al día siguiente; no bajaría a telefonar al bar, no se prestaría al juego aquel que no podía ser otra cosa más que un juego. En este pensamiento –y como si el sueño autoriza un cierto grado de rencor– se entrecruzaba abstractamente el deseo de que el niño de la casa jugara solo y sin envolver a Julián en el movedizo territorio de los significados de sus juegos. Porque Julián estaba persuadido de que los juegos, como los disfraces, invariabilmente significan algo y califican implacablemente a quien se interna en ello. (37)

Kus-Kús's first attempt to control Julián ends in failure because the boy lacks the emotional maturity to respond. He allows Julián, as the adult, to take charge. As time passes, Kus-Kús advances on his path of self-formation, and he becomes more adept at manipulation. Because games are not child's play to Kus-Kús, but rather the serious work of subverting authority, he never gives the butler control again. In much the same way, Franco's new cabinet took the game of economic recovery very seriously. As they subverted the dictator's authority, they put in place a stabilization plan that devalued the peseta and opened Spain to outside investment. The reality of their plan hit home when student and worker protests increased and anti-government solidarity became more widespread. As the young people and the labor unions gained political maturity, they also became stronger in subverting the authority of the dictator.

Although Julián refuses to become involved in the boy's game, his Aunt Eugenia not only likes to play, she helps invent the games. Living in an apartment in

the mansards of the boy's home, the overweight and aging aunt is the protagonist's partner in adventure and object of his affection. He has learned his lessons on life and love from Aunt Eugenia's stories, especially those of her adventures in San Carlos de Bariloche with her Argentine lover Giacomo Gattucci:

Lo chic es despedirse un poco por encima, sin decirlo mucho y sin pronunciamientos teológicos finales; irse, como en Bariloche, sin *s* en el adiós. Porque lo verdaderamente chic era considerarlo todo antepenúltimo, jamás del todo irreparable, jamás del todo cierto; era saber estar y dar conversación pase lo que pase, como si lo ocurrido, por el simple hecho de ser ya inevitable, fuese siempre una *gaffe*, una expresión indecorosa o deforme. (19)

Not only is Eugenia his reference on how to behave, she is also his favorite playmate. She is, in fact, his first love. As the novel opens, the two reenact one of their favorite games as the older woman comes to visit the boy in his playroom:

Empujó con el pie la puerta del cuarto de jugar, procurando que pareciera cerrada. El picaporte había desaparecido hace siglos. Y el agujero que quedaba –y que los días de diario hacía de tronera para espiar al gato y asomar las bocas de los arcabuces–, ahora se hallaba cuidadosamente taponado en honor de la ilustre visitante. Para que tía Eugenia hiciera la gracia acostumbrada. Permaneció en pie junto a la puerta, sin rozarla, con las manos en las caderas, como un capitán de fragata. [. . .] –y ahora es hora de separarse de la puerta– un taconeo sofocado, acelerado, parado. Ahora, por fin, no se oye nada. Tía Eugenia acababa de llegar. (14-15)



Routinely, when Aunt Eugenia comes downstairs to visit the boy's parents, she escapes to the playroom to spend time with Kus-Kús. Their play follows a specific pattern, a routine that is very important to the game they play:

Reinara un gran silencio. Era una pausa que, desde tiempo inmemorial, ambos protagonistas dedicaban a la reflexión. Luego, como un bichito, ascendió por capilaridad hasta en montante de cristales. Luego tuvo uso de razón. Después, resplandeció rápidamente. Por fin apareció el coche oficial: dentro, tía Eugenia iba deslumbrando por sorpresa a toda la marinería uniformada. Entonces, el silbato de ordenanza. Un buen silbato firme y largo. Se cuadró el marinero al pie de la escalera. Y entró tía Eugenia. Deslumbrante. (15)

The games shared by the boy and his aunt form the basis of their relationship. There are rules to follow, with each party expecting the other to play his or her assigned role. And just as her visits to his playroom followed a routine, so do his visits to her apartment follow an expected pattern, one in which he plays more the part of a suitor than a young nephew:

“Entre las cinco y las seis,” había dicho tía Eugenia, y ya se sabía que eso quería decir “mejor a las cinco que a las seis y aún mejor a las cinco menos cinco que a las cinco.” En Bariloche lo elegante era citarse con la realidad y el deseo separados por un interludio de una hora. No hay gigoló un poco de buen ver y un poco fino –iba pensando Kus-Kús mientras se ajustaba la corbata, una corbata acusadamente barilochea, de seda azul oscuro con puntitos blancos, regalo de tía Eugenia, y llamaba al timbre— que no sepa que lo suyo es llegar cinco

minutos antes de la hora y saludar diciendo “cuantísimo lo siento, Eugenia, estás preciosa, haberme retrasado de este modo” [. . .] El resto era, a partir de aquí, también siempre lo mismo. (40-41)

Both find comfort in the shared world of the game. As Kus-Kús moves toward adolescence and Eugenia declines in health and mental capacity, their routine is disrupted. One matures, the other ages, and the two accomplices move apart. The nature of their play changes, and in the new game, Kus-Kús challenges and resists any attempt to subvert his authority.

As Kus-Kús’s first love, Aunt Eugenia represents warmth, trust, and childhood innocence. His time with her always involves some imagined adventure. For Eugenia, the impressionable and precocious Kus-Kús is her escape from a lonely existence and her only source of affection. In spite of her money and social class, she is the most marginalized character in the novel. Based on the information provided by Kus-Kús, his aunt was a teenager during the waning years of the monarchy of Alfonso XIII, making her now in her early 50s. She has never married, and the stories of her youth captivate her nephew. He not only idolizes her, he admires her independence:

No se casó porque no quiso. Si quisiera, mañana mismo se casaba con el más rico de España. De joven se hablaba de ella en todas partes. Siempre con unos chicos repeinados, pretendientes, en aquellos descapotables amarillos de los álbumes. Guapísima, flaquísima, peinada a lo garçon, jugando al *tennis* y en los bailes, los veranos, cuando venían los Reyes, las Infantas, los Infantes, no se hablaba de otra cosa . . . (15)

Eugenia had enjoyed her socialite life, summering with royalty, travelling all over the world. Prohibited from marrying the rich South American boy with whom she had fallen madly in love (her father considered him to be “medio mestizo y un negrero que le olía el aliento a sangre humana” 43), Eugenia spent the rest of her life loving all men. Kus-Kús admits that she does not have a very good reputation: “Sí, de tía Eugenia, [. . .] se decía de todo: que si no fuera porque eran quienes eran sus parientes, sería una perdida, que si era natural con la educación que había tenido porque su padre fue republicano y se murió en un chalecito con jardín en las afueras de Toulouse, negándose a rezar el Padrenuestro . . .” (43). Eugenia’s father, “lo descreído y volteriano que era” (43), set the pattern for his daughter’s non-conformism. His involvement in politics before the civil war required him to abandon the country, although he never compromised his principles. Apparently, the wealth and influence of his family was sufficient enough, nevertheless, to allow his daughter to live comfortably after the war. Safely ensconced in the upstairs apartment of the mansard, she could be ignored, if not forgiven, for her transgressions. She and her father represented the family’s “skeletons in the closet,” and in Francoist Spain of the 1950s, it was better to overlook her and make very little mention of him.

The independence that Eugenia’s nephew so admired came at a great cost to her. For most of her life, her family tolerated her lifestyle, looked the other way because of her wealth and status. At the same time, however, her behavior isolated her from family and friends. Kus-Kús, repeating what he had heard from her and others, explains her situation in simple terms: “Que si todo provenía de que la picaba donde la picaba, como a todas, no iba a ser ella especial y que lo que hubiera debido hacer, cuando había tiempo —que ya no la tenía—, era casarse y que ahora se había

puesto así de gorda de comer y comer sin verse harta para consolarse de la falta de lo otro. . .” (43). She had paid a great price for being different. She found solace from her unhappiness in food, drink, and sex. As she explains it: “porque, claro, eso sí, la fantasía y el estar lleno de vida y el tener ocurrencias maravillosas como Kus-Kús y ella, eso se pagaba con la soledad, aquí en provincias . . .” (131). Kus-Kús’s explanation of Aunt Eugenia’s behavior reflects the gender attitudes shared by the majority of Spanish society during the 1950s. Although liberalization had begun on the economic and political fronts, the status of women remained marginal and their role traditional. Aurora Morcillo Gómez writes: “Although chastity was the road to absolute female perfection, marriage represented the ultimate goal for the Christian woman, allowing her to achieve motherhood” (56). In keeping with the Francoist construction of “ideal womanhood” as the fundamental guarantor of social stability, a woman’s identity remained equated with motherhood, marriage, and home. Eugenia understood the equation and resented its implications:

Y que aquí se vivía en el año de la polca pensando todavía que lo suyo es casarse o meterse monja y que estaban mal vistas las solteras, nada más que por eso, porque aquí se era de provincias hasta la vida perdurable y había que chincharse o irse y que no se entendía a las personas como ella, tía Eugenia, o como él, Kus-Kús, que habían vivido en otros sitios y habían visto otras cosas y tenían puntos de comparación y tenían fantasías y tenían imaginación y tenían ocurrencias y se les ocurrían siempre cosas que hacer y que decir y que pensar diferentes de las ñoñerías y las pesadeces que pensaban las chicas que habían sido amigas suyas de solteras, algunas bien

pendientes todavía de que si se lleva esto o lo otro y de mirar los figurines de invierno y de verano y que en eso se quedaban sin pasar a más porque no daban más de sí, y que lo que llamaban todas ellas una buena chica era una cobardía, era miedo, [. . .] miedo a verse solas.

(130)

Although she criticized others for their fears, it appears that Eugenia's years of being alone were beginning to haunt her. Because of her wealth, she had been able to live a comfortable life without conforming to society's norms. Still, after years of loneliness and non-conformity, the woman's resistance to the criticism of others begins to break down. She appears more vulnerable than in the past, and this, in part, contributes to the deterioration of her relationship with her nephew.

In Kus-Kús, Aunt Eugenia found love and acceptance. With him, she could share and imagine. Although she is an adult, playing with her nephew allowed her to escape the loneliness of her existence. In listing the characteristics of play, Caillois writes:

it is an activity freely entered into by each participant [. . .]; it is both temporally and spatially separate from daily activity; its outcome is uncertain [. . .]; it is unproductive (in the sense of creating wealth); it is governed by rules (indeed, the rules *are* the game itself; the conventions, once accepted are binding for the duration of the event); and it is characterized by make-believe, "by a special awareness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as against real life." (9-10)

Freely entered into by both parties, the relationship between Aunt Eugenia and Kus-Kús is truly characterized by make-believe. When pretense collides with reality,

however, conflict occurs. As the boy matures, so do his needs. She is the first to notice the changes in him: “¡Qué pena que ya no juegues ahora a nada! Claro, vas siendo ya mayor, qué pena, ¿no? Cada vez que te veía de pequeño, estabas siendo alguien distinto, te figurabas ser miles de cosas. [. . .] Ahora jugarás al fútbol horrible, dando gritos que os ponéis todos horribles . . .” (16-17). As he grows older, his responses to her change, and Julián’s presence in the household has lessened the boy’s need for her. When she does not receive the expected response from Kus-Kús, she behaves childishly.

Kus-Kús’s journey of self-formation could not have begun at a worse time for Aunt Eugenia. After years of tolerance, it appears that her world is beginning to reject her. Her nephew notices the difference when he visits her apartment: “Kus-Kús tuvo la impresión de que el pelo se le había desteñido y los ojos oscurecido como si algo, en el interior de la vivienda [. . .] la hubiera enfurecido primero, y luego entristecido desproporcionadamente” (44-45). He senses her unhappiness and seeks to comfort her, but cannot:

—Nadie me quiere ya, Pichusqui, me he confundido —dijo por fin tía Eugenia.

—Te quiero yo, tía. ¿En qué te has confundido?

—Ya no es lo mismo que antes. Todo el mundo ha cambiado por aquí. Ahora se me echa en cara cosas que antes . . . las mismas cosas que hice siempre ahora son delitos, ahora me echan en cara hacer las cosas y decir las cosas . . . que hice siempre.

—Yo no te echo nada en cara.

—Tú, no. Pero tú eres un niño. (45)

Indeed things are changing. People are no longer willing to look the other way. Nevertheless, at this moment, she could not have said anything more hurtful to the boy poised on the edge of manhood. Yet in direct contradiction to her own statement, she proceeds to confide in Kus-Kús as if he were an adult, a confidence that proves to be her undoing. In a similar shift in affection, the relationship between the monarchists and Franco deteriorated in the 1950s. As the dictator continued to delay his promised reinstatement of the monarchy, each party become less enamored of the other, less tolerant of weaknesses, and less willing to look the other way.

As a child, Kus-Kús was unable to distinguish between the real and the make-believe. Approaching adolescence, he questions his aunt's behavior as she shares her secrets with him. He begins to see her differently: "Era una tía Eugenia ensombrecida y ronca [. . .] y Kus-Kús la sintió muy cerca, sintió muy cerca *otra* tía Eugenia que nunca había advertido" (45-46). Overwhelmed by a need to unburden herself, Aunt Eugenia tells her nephew about her relationship with the grocery store delivery boy, whom she confuses with her former Argentine lover (and the imaginary object of both their affections). For the first time in their relationship, the boy challenges the behavior of his aging aunt: "¿Quieres decir que empezasteis a besaros, venga y venga, así por las buenas? [. . .] ¿así de pronto os dieron ganas de besaros a los dos al mismo tiempo en toda la boca como Josefa y Errol Flynn?" (50). And although his initial reaction to his aunt's new lover appears childish, the entrance of a new Giacomo Gattucci in her life proves the turning point in their relationship.

At the same time that Aunt Eugenia becomes involved with her new boyfriend, Kus-Kús turns his attention to the recently-arrived Julián. The presence of the male butler changes the dynamic in the household as Julián quickly begins to

replace Miss Hart and Aunt Eugenia in the boy's life. As Kus-Kús begins his journey of self-formation, his needs and interests begin to change. Like many children poised on the edge of puberty, he is pulled in two directions. Inasmuch as he seeks to leave behind his childish ways, he also clings to the comfort of his boyhood memories. With Julián's arrival in the household, however, Kus-Kús feels he no longer needs Miss Hart, and prefers to spend his time with the new butler:

Porque con Julián había tiempo para todo. Para cambiar las pilas de la linterna o para liar un pitillo todo por igual, duro como un balín, mejor que a máquina. A diferencia de Miss Hart, que ya no era la misma; que se quedaba atrás, que se empeñaba en cruzar cogidos de la mano; que no fumaba, que no tenía un llavero adornado con una bala de fusil, como Julián; que no padecía de conjuntivitis, ni siquiera eso. ¡Pobre Miss Hart, como una pasa, que sa daba un colorete color rosa! (14)

Julián quickly becomes a companion and comfort for the boy, whose life was beginning to change for reasons he did not yet understand. Until the arrival of the butler, Kus-Kús's only male role model had been the imagined figure of the Argentine Giacomo Gattucci or Gattuccio: "quien se escapó por toda la Pampa con tres millones de pesos en talegas de cuero con el logotipo del Banco de Entre Ríos para ir a visitarla a Bariloche" (25). Although still finding comfort in his imaginary games, the boy now prefers to spend his time with Julián, whom he finds handsome and romantic:

Hacía tiempo ya que no pensaba en Giacomo Gattucci. Julián le había sustituido con ventaja. Pero ahí estaba todavía, vivo de sobra, con su sombrero negro y su pipa humeante y todo su desesperado destino.



Siempre fue imposible hablar de Gattucci con Miss Hart. Miss Hart no era romántica, según tía Eugenia. Al nieto de Mercedes le aparecía romántico, en cambio, Julián quien, incluso por las mañanas en mangas de camisa, recordaba a Gattucci en el perfil y en el pelo reluciente y ondulado. (26)

Kus-Kús found Julián so attractive that he imagines him the perfect lover for his Aunt Eugenia, and he cannot wait to discuss the idea with his aunt:

El jueves, en casa de tía Eugenia, ya habría tiempo para discutir el parecido de Julián, si recordaba o no a Giacomo Gattucci, como Kus-Kús opinaba, de perfil; o si Julián era, en conjunto, bastante más alto y ancho de hombros que el amante de tía Eugenia y, puesto que de ése nada había vuelto a saberse, si Julián –aun sin haberse fugado todavía al galope con la pasta– no sería un amante preferible. Kus-Kús estaba dispuesto a asegurar y jurar por lo más santo el próximo jueves que le constaba por experiencia propia que Julián, comparado con el desaparecido Gattucci, era el mejor amante de los dos, con mucho. (27)

Kus-Kús's innocent admiration for Julián and his desire to share him with his aunt reflects the unexpressed love he feels for his aunt and the extent to which he is bound to her by their imaginary games. Both adults, however, fail in the boy's eyes as they choose their own interests over his. He, in turn, fails in his early attempts at adulthood by responding to their rebuffs in a very childish manner. The arrival of Julián in Kus-Kús's life coincides with that of Manolo in the life of Eugenia. Both newcomers serve as catalysts for change in the household. Similar outside influences spurred new developments within the Spain during the 1950s after the regime abandoned its policy

on autarkism. The establishment of United States military bases brought in much-needed financial aid along with American cultural influences. Inclusion in the cabinet of the technocrats of *Opus Dei* set in motion the economic recovery plan, and increased foreign investment sparked the beginning of a tourism industry that flooded the country with much-needed capital and more-progressive, European attitudes. Spain, like Kus-Kús, struggled to balance its loyalty to its traditions with the temptation of the new as it reacted to the rapid changes taking place on both the political and the social levels.

Julián did not seek to be a role model for anyone. In fact, he wanted anonymity rather than adulation. He accepted the position at the house with hopes that it would allow him to start a new life: “Al alcance de nadie ya; inimaginable ya para todos ellos, como un puro desconocido. O como el azar. Fuera incluso del alcance, bien intencionado pero humillante, impaciente, de la gobernanta. Y dentro de pocas horas, en la nueva casa, desaparecido y salvado . . .” (11). He expresses his feelings of alienation as he leaves the hotel to take his new position. Suffering from conjunctivitis that causes his face to swell and his eyes to water, almost disfiguring him from time to time, Julián is accustomed to not belonging:

Una idea absurda, de la cual no deseaba desprenderse. Que su padecimiento se interpusiera entre sí mismo y los demás como se interpone una máscara. Que aquella desmesura irreprimible, aquel llanto, como un fastuoso don de lágrimas, fuera, de hecho, su máscara. Estaba persuadido de que todos los disfraces dicen algo profundamente verdadero de los disfrazados. Era como haberse ajustado en broma, un buen día, en su juventud, o antes quizá, mucho

antes, de niño, la invisible piel dormida de una cara ajena que ahora, al ir envejeciendo, gesticulaba por cuenta de otro corazón, de otra vida.

(9)

The other life that Julián refers to reveals itself through the course of the novel, unmasking a dubious sexual as well as professional identity. As a former actor, he too is accustomed to inventing. Inasmuch as acting is a form of mimicry, his life has been a series of performances. Caillois writes: "Mimicry is incessant invention. The rule of the game is unique: it consists in the actor's fascinating the spectator, while avoiding an error that might lead the spectator to break the spell"(23). Masks and games form a part of the butler's life. When Kus-Kús, as spectator, breaks the spell, Julián finally drops his disguise, revealing the person behind the mask. In spite of his arrest by the police, Julián feels genuine remorse for having failed the child Kus-Kús when he needed him the most.

Entering the household with limited information, Julián discovers the work to be quite satisfying and his life, finally, seems enjoyable. Existence had not been kind to Julián nor had he made wise decisions. He calls himself simply a "bad lot." Behind his mask as a butler with conjunctivitis exists an individual who has survived on the margins since he was a teenager. Representing that part of society that hovers on the periphery, Julián had been moving from job to job for years. Leaving home at 16 after the death of his mother, his first job was as a bellboy in a hotel, where he worked for six years. He has been actor, and he has spent time in jail. His job as butler clearly separates him from the upper-class existence of the family, aligning him with the maid and the cook and a step below the governess. He does his job well, considering himself to be a professional. But when his past catches up with him, he forgets his

professionalism. He loses everything by submitting completely, first to the control his two former lovers and later, to Kus-Kús. Unsuspected by everyone, Julián's play is masked. When the spell is broken, his game is revealed.

Julián's performance begins to fade after he receives a phone call from Esther and Rafael. Everyone in the household notices. As the story of their history unfolds, the butler's weaknesses become evident also. His role playing began with a theatre group, where he met Esther and Rafael. He fell in love, first with Esther, then with Rafael. Since that time, he has been a victim of their emotional blackmail: "y él –el otro él– había sido seducido mientras seducía a su esposa. Fue como una venganza que nadie había proyectado. Una venganza de la situación misma, que funcionó a espaldas de los personajes envueltos en ella. . . . él y él y ella . . . Los tres monstruos de una fábula que no parecía terminarse" (62). Now, after two years, they had found him. Rafael needed ten thousand pesetas, and they expected Julián to get it for them. At first he refuses, but their power to seduce him remains stronger than his power to resist. Esther still arouses him, as do the memories of Rafael. She baits him: "Rafael te quiere ¿sabes? A su manera, mucho. Yo lo sé. Yo no me aparto nunca de su lado, un instinto maternal, supongo que será. Sé que te quiere. Te entiende, Julián. Te entiende, Julián, ¿no me entiendes? Y tú no eres una persona fácil, medio impotente como te has ido quedando por desuso" (66). The emotions she stirs in him disturb his sense of well-being. He needs to think. Overwhelmed with memories of Esther and Rafael, he returns to his room where, as he had done before, Kus-Kús enters late at night: "Era enternecedor, en cierto modo. Y debió enternecer a Julián de algún modo; quizá Kus-Kús, sencillamente, apareció justo en ese punto quebradizo, doliente, de nuestras vidas en que para no ahogarnos de tristeza nos desahogamos con cualquiera"

(70). The butler tells the boy everything, his interview with Esther that morning, her demand for the money, everything: “lo contó como un ciego, como quien huye de lo que cuenta y lo cuenta y lo cuenta para huir de ello, sin volver la cabeza y sin poder recordar, ni por lo más remoto, al acabar de contarlo, si contó todo lo esencial o sólo una parte o si se comprometió demasiado abiertamente ante un interlocutor irresponsable” (70). Kus-Kús, the audience to whom he bares his soul, appears innocent. And as he did with the confession of Aunt Eugenia, the boy responds in a childlike manner. “¡Julián, que tienes madre!” (70). As the butler takes in the boy’s response, he in turn realizes the absurdity of the situation:

Era niño. Julián vio la situación de pronto, como en realidad era. Había estado contando a un niño, con esperanza de ser aconsejado, cosas acerca de las cuales un adulto no hubiera sabido qué decirle. Era un niño que, además, no había entendido nada en absoluto. ¿O le había entendido y se burlaba de él? Parecía un elfo ahí de pie, en pijama. Un gnomo finamente dibujado y coloreado, en esmalte, saltado de una porcelana, dejando incompleto al saltar un pequeño trocito de una equívoca escena pastoral, subterránea. ¿Qué le habré contado? No creo haberle contado todo, pensó Julián y añadió, repitiéndolo inconscientemente, lo mismo que tía Eugenia. –Lo que te acabo de contar, oye, es un secreto. Es un secreto . . . (71)

At first, Julián is relieved at the boy’s reaction to his revelations. But the more Kus-Kús talks, the more unsettled the butler becomes:

–¿A quién quieres tú más, Julián, a Esther o a Rafael? –preguntó el niño. . . ¿Cómo es?, es, así, guapo, como Giacomo Gattucci o así?,

para ser gigoló hay que ser guapo; dice tía Eugenia que yo voy a ser un gigoló muy bueno de mayor, eso dice ella, porque para eso hay que ser guapo, ¿soy yo guapo, tú crees? Tú sí eres guapo [. . .] ¿Os besáis Rafael y tú? Tía Eugenia le dio un beso al chico de la tienda, el martes pasado, dice que no pudieron remediarlo ninguno de los dos.

–¿Cómo le voy a dar un beso a un hombre? Yo no he dicho nada de eso, me oyes, yo no he dicho eso, es una guarrería . . .

–No veo por qué. . . si tanto le quieres –dijo Kus-Kús. (72)

Now Julián begins in earnest to question his previous perception of the boy, if he is genuinely innocent or if he will prove to be more evil than anyone could imagine, “un gnomo a última hora, un elfo maligno y poderoso o, casi peor, lo contrario: un inocente, la única criatura inocente del relato” (72). He does not have to wait long for the answer.

Unable to think of any workable and legal way to obtain the necessary money, Julián resorts to theft of the money from Kus-Kús’s parents. It seemed too good to be true, an opportunity he could not pass up. When asked by the master and the mistress to go to the bank and cash a check for twenty thousand pesetas, he simply disappears with money in hand. The boy knows immediately what had happened: “Kus-Kús pensó desde un principio que Julián, como Giacomo Gattucci, se había largado con la pasta. Lo pensó sin malicia, pero también sin duda alguna, aunque no dijo nada [. . .]” (87). After the initial shock, however, people seem to forget about the butler who had betrayed them. For the most part, life continues on its course for the household, now absent the services of Julián. With each day that passes, Kus-Kús takes another step in his maturation process, growing taller, making friends, spending less time at home.

And as part of that process, he begins his sexual awakening, experiencing his first sexual false starts and wrong moves as he moves toward full development. It starts with Aunt Eugenia and Giacomo Gattucci.

Unable now to talk to Julián, Kus-Kús feels an overwhelming need to confide in someone. Not having heard from his aunt for several weeks, he decides to make an unannounced visit to her apartment in the mansards. Things have been changing in the household. Discussions about his aunt end quickly whenever Kus-Kús enters a room. He feels very alone, and it seems to be the fault of the woman upstairs: “Una gran marea censoria parecía haberse apoderado de todas ellas, con gran sacudimiento de dedos índices y oscilaciones negativas de la cabeza cada vez que convenía ilustrar mediante el gesto ‘no puede ser, no puede ser’ provocado por noticias frescas (77). What he encounters when he enters her darkened apartment puzzles him at the same time that it arouses his curiosity:

Todas las luces dentro estaba apagadas, menos una luz encima de tía Eugenia. El aspecto de tía Eugenia era espantoso. No parecía la misma, esta vez sí que parecía *otra* mujer, desgrefñada y en bata. Una pantorrilla descomunal, una pierna y un pie descalzos, sobresalían como un golpe estruendoso sobre el brazo del sofá. Parecía una escena teatral. Compuesta con deliberada exageración para provocar al espectador. El niño se arrepintió de haber entrado sin llamar. Dio un paso atrás, incluso. Pero ya había sido descubierto. (78-79)

He finds his favorite childhood playmate engaged in a very adult performance. It proves embarrassing for everyone involved, and Kus-Kús feels guilty about the intrusion. Aunt Eugenia tries to recover her dignity as she introduces her nephew to

Manolo, the delivery boy everyone is talking about:

Tía Eugenia no parecía dominar la situación, pensó Kus-Kús. Gran parte de su gracia dependía de una como perpetua infracción menor de reglas y ademanes aceptados sin discusión por todas las personas entre las cuales tía Eugenia habitualmente se movía. Con el chico aquel delante, sin embargo, tía Eugenia no resultaba ingeniosa realmente, sino, pensó Kus-Kús, como relamida o remilgada. (80)

It is a tense situation that goes from bad to worse. Kus-Kús feels as if he is on a roller coaster and overwhelmed by a fear of falling. He wonders if his aunt shares that same fear. Finally, overwhelmed by alcohol and the guilt of the situation, Aunt Eugenia lashes out at her favorite nephew:

qué creía que pasaba aquel estúpido, eh, vamos a ver, que qué creía que había visto, el peor de toda la familia, el más sucio, el más chismoso, más falso que ninguno, [. . .] el peor de todos el niño que iba con cuentos a su abuela, a las criadas, a cualquiera, con tal de contar algo, con tal de hacerse el personaje era capaz de cualquier cosa, cualquier crueldad servía con tal de parecer interesante, ahora todo se volvía poner cara de pena, echar la culpa a los demás, [. . .] que no la mirara con aquellos ojos, que no faltaba más que eso ahora, que hiciera pucheros, que llorara, que todavía hiciera más daño del que hacía echándose a llorar para que su tía se sintiera más puta todavía, ¿lo oía? (81-82)

Kus-Kús, in fact, is listening. And his aunt's tirade, more than her behavior with Manolo, signals the end of their relationship. This Aunt Eugenia was certainly not his



childhood playmate. But hidden among her cruel words lay the clue to her bizarre behavior, something overlooked by the nephew whose heart she has just broken. “Ella no había creído que se enamoraría tan así como se había enamorado, pero no duraría mucho, que le quedaba poco” (82). Aunt Eugenia is dying. No one knows it, except perhaps Manolo. Kus-Kús’s sadness at his aunt’s behavior turns to bitterness, and Manolo, Aunt Eugenia, and Julián soon pay the price for his pain.

After Julián’s disappearance and Aunt Eugenia’s betrayal, the boy Kus-Kús turns his attention from the household to the task of growing up. For the next three months, as winter turns to spring, he grows taller and his interests begin to change. Without warning, however, Julián appears and sets in motion a series of events that allows Kus-Kús to move from apprentice to master manipulator of his personal *Bildung*. The butler, in dark glasses and raincoat, stops him after school one rainy afternoon to ask that the boy hide him in the mansion until he can successfully escape to France. The boy immediately begins to play a new game with Julián, one with much higher stakes: “Kus-Kús corrió sin parar hasta llegar a casa. Nunca se había sentido tan terriblemente exaltado. Ahora aparecería el héroe profundamente oculto, pensó. Giacomo, el héroe” (89). He develops a plan to hide the butler in his aunt’s apartment in the mansards. Unlike the last time they planned a game, this time Kus-Kús is in complete control. It is an exhilarating feeling:

No hacía falta disfrazarse esta vez. Esta vez nadie, ninguno de los dos, ni Julián ni él podían hablar de una tercera alternativa entre jugar a esconder a un fugitivo de la justicia y esconder a un fugitivo de la justicia. Kus-Kús recordó el tonillo triunfal de Julián al proponerle el dilema con ocasión del frustrado envenenamiento de Miss Hart.

Ahora, pensó, verá que era un dilema impropio porque . . . [. . .] ahora verá que era una falsa distinción la que él hacía, porque yo estoy jugando . . . ¡Yo estoy jugando!” (90).

The game begins. For Kus-Kús, it is the ultimate power surge, because he finally has complete control.

Convincing his ailing aunt to hide Julián in her apartment proves easy. He simply blackmails her. His words are cruel and hurtful: “Te echaba en falta, tía. Sin ti no sé jugar a nada. Ahora no juego a nada, porque tú no me miras, por eso. . .”(93). When he produces Julián from the hallway, his aunt is shocked and the butler embarrassed, but the boy gives them no time to react: “Tendrás que esconder a Julián un poco por encima, sin dar demasiada importancia a todo esto, unas cuantas noches, hasta que llegue el giro y pueda largarse a Francia con la pasta, como cualquier gigoló tuyo, ¿no? Julián te va mejor que el tipo grosero de la otra tarde, hacéis mejor pareja los dos juntos, sabe hacerlo todo igual, en cuclillas lo mismo, lo que sea, ¿qué hacía el tipo aquel agachado junto al sofá cuando yo entré” (98)? When his Aunt Eugenia threatens to call the police, the boy reacts with a threat of his own:

—Lo siento, tía Eugenia. Dicen en el colegio, es una cosa que he oído contar a los mayores, que a las mujeres os gusta que os chupen el coño entre las piernas, eso dicen los mayores, que hasta hicieron un dibujo de una gorda con las piernas abiertas y un tío debajo, está dibujado con carboncillo muy bien en los váteres de quinto, ¿es eso lo que te hacía el tipo de la tienda el otro día? Me llamaste por teléfono para que subiera a veros haciendo eso, si tú llamas a la policía o a quien sea, yo digo todo lo que me enseñasteis los dos aquella tarde, no es broma, si

tú me denuncias, te denunció yo primero y es más grave lo mío, no sé si lo sabrás, ¿dónde va a dormir Julián? (96)

Without further comment, Aunt Eugenia prepares a room for Julián, and the two of them never discuss the subject of calling the police again. Kus-Kús has successfully won the first round of his new power game. Hiding a prurient interest in his aunt's behavior, the boy pretends to be scandalized. This hypocrisy echoes that of the regime in its championship of Christian values while it unofficially condoned prostitution.

With Julián safely ensconced in his aunt's apartment, the boy's life enters a new stage. "iba sintiendo que cambiaba y sintiéndose cambiado, desfigurado e irrecuperable unas veces, embellecido otras, mil veces mejor que antes" (103). Like many youngsters making the transition from child to adolescent, he is euphoric one minute, sad the next. He misses his former life, his childhood and his relationship with his aunt. A peace settles over the household. On his parents' next visit, they note the change in him, so much so that for the first time in his life, they talk with him and treat him almost like an equal. This new relationship makes him feel more adult but at the same time more vulnerable because, without his childhood, he will be even more alone when his parents leave again:

A lo largo de toda aquella noche, sin embargo, pensó Kus-Kús, olería la habitación como ahora olía a humo de cigarros, a la colonia fuerte que su padre usaba, a la súbita camaradería iniciada entre ellos y, paradójicamente, a la privación fulminante de todo ello en el círculo soñoliento de su casa de siempre. Aquella noche, en el ámbito dubitante y oscuro del despacho, creyó distinguir las señales de una

posibilidad tan nueva como equívoca y pensó, rencorosamente:

“Tengo que arreglármelas yo solo.[. . .] yo soy el único culpable.

Tengo que arreglármelas yo solo, igual que siempre.” (114)

Again needing someone to confide in, Kus-Kús returns to his aunt's apartment to talk with Julián. Practicing his art, the boy plays verbal games with the butler about turning him in, about the whereabouts of the money, even about the poisoning of Miss Hart. Kus-Kús tells Julián that his father knows of his presence in the attic and resents it when the butler doesn't believe him. Julián responds: “–Creo que es verdad que se lo has dicho porque creo que decirlo era para ti muy importante, era muy importante para el juego. Pero no sé si te han creído o no, porque no sé si los señores, ni nadie, sabe bien a lo que juegas. Yo creo que ni la señorita Eugenia lo sabe bien del todo. Ella lo sabría, de saberlo alguien” (126). To which the boy replies: “–Era la única que lo sabía, antes de que vinieras tú a trabajar a casa, durante muchos años, la única persona que sabía de verdad a lo que juego. Pero se ha terminado. No somos tan amigos. Ahora nadie lo sabe” (126-27). The truth of the statement becomes clear to everyone when Kus-Kús finally decides to phone the police.

As the boy tries to solve his problem on his own, his mood becomes blacker and blacker. Julián discovers that Esther is Manolo's sister and that she knows of his presence in the mansards. She comes to visit and she, in turn, blackmails the boy's aunt. Things start disappearing from the apartment, Manolo continues to visit, and Aunt Eugenia's health continues to decline. Kus-Kús's loneliness and guilt increase since the unpleasant ending of the relationship with both his former playmates. His aunt finally asks him to visit, because she needs to ask his forgiveness. Things go badly again. The dark side of the boy controls the conversation:

–Perdonarte, ¿por qué? ¿Has hecho algo malo? [. . .]

–No sube ya Manolo. Le he dicho que no suba . . . Era lo mejor . . . Lo mejor que podía hacer, lo mejor para los dos. Y para ti también.

–¿Para mí, por qué? A mí me da lo mismo que Manolo suba o baje.

¿Por qué le has dicho que no suba? ¿O es que le habías dicho antes que subiera? ¡Menudos trajines que te traes, tía Eugenia!

Era como cerrar una puerta violentamente. Tía Eugenia pareció, de pronto, demacrada. Parecía, pensó Kus-Kús, bastante más delgada que antes. Como chupada, color ceniza. Pero ahora, además, le pareció a

Kus-Kús que se le salían los ojos de las órbitas, como a una loca. (150)

His aunt says no more. For the rest of the spring, Julián remains hidden in the apartment and Kus-Kus stays away. As rumors spread about things disappearing and the strange behavior of Eugenia, the nephew feels more and more abandoned.

As Kus-Kús's guilt increases, so does his unhappiness, which converts into his cruel treatment of others. The power he wields over the butler and his aunt becomes too much for the boy-man. No longer a child, yet still not an adult, the false steps he takes increase. In much the same, the young socialist leaders in the 1980s found themselves overwhelmed by their inexperience and frustrated in their attempts to move from a neophyte political party to an experienced political force. In frustration, Kus-Kús lashes out at everyone, but especially his once-beloved aunt. He feels pressured to do something: “¿Qué iba a pasar ahora?, ¿qué tenía que hacer?, ¿qué es lo siguiente?, ¿qué paso era el siguiente?, ¿habría un paso siguiente? Se sentía desazonado, angustiado y confuso, como si de él dependiera la creación del mundo. Lo curioso es que se sentía fuerte, al mismo tiempo. Capacitado e incapacitado, a la

vez, como Dios” (173). The next step for Kus-Kús is to visit the mansards to talk with his aunt. Unfortunately, she again mentions Manolo, swearing she does not see him as often, and the boy reacts violently:

–¡Joder, no jures; me estás hartando ya, me tienes harto, harto, ¿lo oyes?, harto harto harto, cállate de una vez, muérete de una vez! – chilló Kus-Kús, de pie, muy pálido, echaba atrás los brazos, a la vez los dos y los dos puños enloquecidos que parecían piedras; el chillido al final, al decir que quería que se muriera, se le volvió un gallo, doble vuelco la voz que ahora le cambiaba lo mismo que la ira. (176)

When his tirade is interrupted by a visit from the police, Kus-Kús calms down, but he does not mellow. As he listens to his aunt lie to the police about the butler, who has mysteriously disappeared during the visit, his resentment grows even more. His need to hurt her as much as she has hurt him overwhelms him. After the police leave, finding no trace of Julián, Kus-Kús resumes his attack on his aunt, accusing her of using him since his childhood to talk about her sexual adventures with men. His words cut:

dejaba de prestarte atención, siempre lo mismo a vueltas con lo mismo, menos mal que los padres del colegio no lo saben, el padre Espiritual ése sí, ése lo sabe todo ce por be, confesando se lo tuve que contar, o sea, lo que tú cuentas, sobre todo lo de las piernas que te gustan y las que no te gustan luego a mí me vienen tentaciones, claro, como yo lo que tú digas lo aplico a rajatabla, pues luego, claro, las tentaciones, no sé si lo sabrás, no creo que te importe mucho, [. . .] el padre Espiritual dice que sin pureza ni se crece ni se desarrolla uno del

todo, dice que como empieces demasiado pronto, ya que Dios te ampare, y mi edad es la peor, yo todavía no estoy en edad, tú tenías que saberlo, para esas cosas que cuentas,” (181).

Even though his Aunt Eugenia begs his forgiveness, it does not soften her nephew’s bitterness. His hypocrisy again echoes that of the regime as it preached spiritual values that it did not practice. He has now lost any resemblance to the boy he used to be. Julián also believes he has, somehow, let Kus-Kús down. But the fugitive also sees the boy for what he has become, “un hijo de puta” (184).

Finally, the routine is broken. After a week of absence, Kus-Kús returns again to the apartment. Julián notices his growth and the beginnings of a beard on his face. The sight of him revolts the butler. This time, the meeting with his aunt starts with an apology on the part of Kus-Kús. His aunt, however, appears very disoriented and confused. Once again she makes the mistake of mentioning Manolo in her conversation. Her nephew cannot contain his jealousy. His need to hurt returns, and he accuses the delivery boy of being queer. This time his aunt fights back: “–Eres un niño cruel, no sé si te das cuenta, no sé si tienes tú la culpa, o quién la tiene; pero lo eres. Eres muy cruel [. . .] Los dos se miraron. Por un instante pareció que nada ocurriría. Pareció que Kus-Kús iba a decir sencillamente adiós desde la puerta. E irse. En vez de eso, dijo: –Ahora lo vas a ver, lo cruel que soy, ahora mismo” (190). He needs to avenge himself of her betrayal of him with Manolo. Before he can soften this need, the reason for it appears on the landing of the stairway. On the steps leading from Eugenia’s apartment, Kus-Kús collides with the source of his jealousy, Manolo the delivery boy. Their encounter pushes the boy over the edge.

Trying to treat Kus-Kús as a grown up, Manolo asks if they can talk man to

man about Aunt Eugenia. The boy plays with Manolo also, or tries to. But the delivery boy sees the situation clearly. He tries to approach the subject of Aunt Eugenia, but Kus-Kús continues his attack: “-¿A qué subías ahora? Te lo pregunto porque me interesa saberlo. ¿Qué es lo que primero haces con las tías? Uno de Séptimo estaba contando que lo que él primero hacía, antes que nada, lo primero, era enseñarlas la polla. ¿A que es eso lo primero? Te lo pregunto en serio, ya ves. Estamos en confianza, ¿no?” (194). The boy cannot stop. He feels the need to talk with someone, to ask another man about women. He temporarily forgets his need for vengeance. Moving very close to Manolo as he talks, he feels himself attracted by the handsome boy’s presence. As he confides in Manolo about a sexual encounter with a fisherman on the wharf, the older boy becomes uncomfortable. Kus-Kús’s immature misreading of the scene causes him to over react:

Sintió prenderse la ternura otra vez en sus miembros, las ganas de tocar a Manolo como antes; se sintió excitado. Era parecido a querer, en clase, masturbarse y correrse. Era divertido aquel estado de ánimo, como una fulgurante exaltación instantánea. Agarró con las dos manos el brazo de Manolo; sintió el movimiento rápido de la musculatura, la bola de Manolo; pensó que luego, cuando estuvieran juntos en su casa (Kus-Kús sentía ahora la necesidad vehemente de llevarse a Manolo a su propia casa, a su propio cuarto de jugar, de dormir), cuando se vieran solos ellos dos, en confianza, le diría que sacara bola, como en el colegio; (199)

Kus-Kús is intensely attracted to this male in whom he confides. Manolo, however, does not respond as Kus-Kús had hoped. He refuses to feel sorry for the boy because



of an encounter that to him is not uncommon. “Eso les pasa a muchos. Tú es que te crees que porque tienen cuartos en tu casa, todo Dios se pone firmes . . . y no. Les pasa a muchos” (199). His rejection of the boy seals his fate, and that of Julián and Aunt Eugenia. Instead of choosing Kus-Kús, Manolo chooses Aunt Eugenia, and the boy can never forgive either him or Aunt Eugenia for that choice.

The phone call to the police comes the next morning. Throughout the night, as he ponders his next move, he thinks about the heroes of his childhood stories, the winners of his childhood games, and he creates his own definition of hero: “a lo mejor el heroísmo de algunos, pensó, consiste en no poder por más que se empeñen, engañarse y yo soy de esos y el heroísmo mío no consiste en creer que tía Eugenia es buena, sino en la entereza de creer lo contrario y vivir en consecuencia; yo soy, yo soy, yo soy. . .”(201). Kus-Kús’s heroism involves informing the police of the whereabouts of Julián and turning Manolo in for the theft of the items from Aunt Eugenia’s apartment. As the hero of his own apprenticeship novel, he makes many false starts and wrong moves along the way to realizing his potential. His last meeting with his aunt before her death forces him to face the consequences of his latest game:

tía Eugenia le miraba fijamente. Kus-Kús recordó ahora, en aquellos rasgos demacrados, el parecido de la tía Eugenia que había amado. Únicamente los ojos reflejaron la profunda transformación de sus vidas. Los ojos que le miraban, claros, tenebrosos, desde el fondo de la habitación, desde aquel rostro familiar y extraño al mismo tiempo, eran los ojos de una loca. [. . .] lo más curiosos y lo más terrible, era la dulzura con que le miraban. . . (203)

They found her body the next day in the water. As she had continuously promised

him, “Cuando yo vuelva a Bariloche, no voy a volver más. Esta vez no” (204). The embarrassing Aunt Eugenia will never return. The Franco regime also buried its past as it abandoned its policy of autarky and opened its borders to technological advancement, foreign investment and the influences of the world economy. As the political leaders of the 1980s looked back on their formative years, they would recall those in the 1950s who fell victim to the political games played by those within the regime who sought to bring Spain out of its childhood and into full adulthood as a nation.

With the death of Aunt Eugenia, the recounting of Kus-Kús’s coming-of-age ends, although the process of his self-formation will continue. As with any apprenticeship novel, his *Bildung* remains open-ended. (Shaffner 27). It leaves him on the edge of manhood, having moved through a series of events that have, indeed, changed him. The steps that Kus-Kús takes on his path of development are marked by the games that he plays with his governess, his aunt, and the butler. As a child poised on the edge of adolescence, his games at first are child-like and innocent. Then, reacting to the changes within and around him, he alters his game plan. In many ways, the story of his formation resembles that of the traditional, nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman* as defined by experts of the genre. In other, and perhaps more important ways, his apprenticeship is marked by its own unique characteristics. The process of coming-of-age, however, is not unique, but a journey shared by other Spanish youngsters of the 1950s, who between the ages of ten and thirteen move from childhood through adolescence. By creating a protagonist like Kus-Kús, Álvaro Pombo creatively explores this difficult age in which children mature, drawing attention to how each forms his own attitudes toward issues that affect society. In *El*

*héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, the actions and interactions of the characters serve as registers of time period. As Spain's years of in-between-ness, the 1950s represented the country's movement from Francoist repression to economic independence. Children like Kus-Kús, growing to adulthood during these years, became the social and political leaders of Spain as the country moved from transition to full democracy. Kus-Kús learned to subvert authority by becoming a master of the game, a skill that could prove very useful to those adults participating in the Spain of the 1980s. Just how useful those skills become to the neophyte leaders of the socialist party in the early years of their government (1983-1986) becomes evident in the next chapter, *Los delitos insignificantes*, when the fictional political context returns to the 1980s and the early years of PSOE rule.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For more information on these zones of uninhabitability, see Butler's *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

<sup>2</sup>In his review of the novel, Luis Suñén writes: "Porque a su manera esta novela es un *Bildungsroman*, un relato de aprendizaje en el que el héroe va construyéndose al hilo de la realidad, van construyéndole los acontecimientos, quienes le rodean, los sucesos de una vida diaria en la que irrumpe lo insólito, en la que lo cotidiano es inquietado por la excepción" (5). Rueda, in her article on comic superheroes, also describes the novel as a *Bildungsroman* in which the protagonist "descubre su identidad homosexual a través de su relación con Julián" (359).

### Chapter 3

#### *Los delitos insignificantes*: Self Definitions and Fatal Attractions

In contrast to the child's play analyzed in Chapter 2, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, nothing childish nor childlike surfaces in the text of this chapter, *Los delitos insignificantes* (1986). Dealing with adult themes of sex, power, and domination, the novel criticizes the grown-up behaviors involving psychological and physical abuse, exploitation, and victimization. Rather than a novel of formation, this work is better described as one of disintegration. It documents not the steps of a young boy on a path toward self-development, but rather the struggles of two individuals on a journey toward self-destruction. Set in Madrid during the first term of the PSOE government, Pombo's fourth novel exposes the loneliness and isolation of those marginalized individuals lost in the fast-paced and rapidly changing Madrilenian society of the mid-1980s. While the socialist government under the leadership of Felipe González attempted to redefine Spain in terms of its economic power and its position within the European community, Spanish citizens experienced their own identity crises as the economic recovery plan of the PSOE brought hardships as well as benefits to the country. Many Spaniards, like the personalities in *Los delitos insignificantes*, found themselves for the first time off-center, unbalanced by new economic and social marginalization. The individual searches for identity that structure the narrative represent the collective struggle of the nation for self-definition and stability during the first half of the 1980s, unstable years of rapidly changing

social and political values. By repositioning, renegotiating, and redefining their power relationships, the characters in the novel, like Spain itself, encounter varying degrees of success in their efforts to alter their marginalized status and become fully participating citizens of a larger community. Pombo's fourth novel thus serves as a register of the political and psychological changes in Spanish society during this period.

As with *El parecido* and *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, the characters in *Los delitos insignificantes* lead marginalized existences. Although outcast for different reasons, the two male protagonists, Ortega and Quirós, live on the periphery, with a mutual need for acceptance serving as the common ground in their relationship. Ortega, a 40s-something bank clerk and closet homosexual, is a frustrated writer. Quirós, a handsome but unemployed twenty-four year old, lives on the money he receives from his mother and his girlfriend. Both men suffer from the psychological effects of failure, although Quirós at first considers himself successful in his apparently purposeless life. Quirós's widowed mother, without economic or social power, survives on her husband's pension and spends her days entrenched in her apartment watching television and gossiping with her neighbors. Cristina, the girlfriend who supports Quirós in exchange for his sexual services, represents the younger generation of Spanish females forging new ground in the male-dominated work force. Rejecting the traditional male-female relationships of the past, she dedicates herself to financial success and economic independence. Each character's attempt to define him or herself according to the changing parameters of society in

the 1980s mirrors efforts by similarly marginalized sectors of Spanish society as a whole and Madrid society in particular to deal with the simultaneous forces of economic penury and prosperity that accompanied the socialist recovery plan.

As Pombo's fourth novel in ten years, *Los delitos insignificantes* closes a thematic circle opened with the author's 1977 collection of short stories, *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia*. Pombo has said that this 1986 novel combines the lack of substance present in his earlier works with the lack of hope, thus producing characters who have lost all sense of worth. He writes:

Mis tres novelas posteriores, *El parecido*, *El hijo adoptivo* y *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* son descripciones, una vez más, de carencias, de agujeros, de vacíos y, en este sentido, *completan*, sin llegar a cerrarlo, el círculo narrativo abierto en los relatos. Mi última novela *Los delitos insignificantes* es, creo yo, *el cierre* de ese círculo. La falta de esperanza coincide ahora con la falta de sustancia. Y los delitos de los protagonistas son insignificantes porque se ha consumado el círculo de la pérdida de la vergüenza, de la pérdida de la significación y del valor. Por eso, ambos protagonistas terminan violentando la realidad irreal que les rodea y que sencillamente no comprende: la violencia confiere momentáneamente significado a la insignificancia de sus vidas. (68)

Paradoxically, at the same time that *Los delitos insignificantes* closed a narrative cycle, it opened the author to negative reviews not only in terms of style but also in

terms of content. Critiquing the novel in *El Urogallo* in May of 1986, Ana Salado describes it as “aburrido y petulante”:

Es como si los hechos hubieran de ir acompañados de una constante explicación, como si no hubiera bastante con ellos solos. Los diálogos se rompen mil veces con intercaladuras filosóficas, estéticas o poéticas que el lector, ávido de llegar por fin a la respuesta del antagonista, llega a aborrecer. Y cuanto más interesa lo que sucede en el libro, más molesta resulta todo ese comentario del autor. (66)

The portrayal of homosexuality in the novel was also criticized as negative and stereotypical (Ingenschay 159). According to Martínez Expósito, the Salado review provoked such a polemic that Pombo felt obliged to defend his work and “su actitud ante la cuestión homosexual” in the same edition of the magazine. In spite of (or because of) its controversial reception on publication, little critical work on the novel exists (92). Ingenschay refers to it in his analysis of *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, and Fernando Vals mentions it in his study of Pombo’s short stories. Martínez Expósito cites it in his examination of the theme of homosexuality in the *Relatos sobre la falta de sustancia*, citing the age difference between the protagonists in the novel as one characteristic of Pombo’s development of homosexual personalities. Weaver also includes *Los delitos insignificantes* in his book-length study of Pombo’s works, considering it as the final work within author’s first narrative cycle. He concludes that the dramatic tension of the novel results from the inability of the two protagonists to adapt their individual ways of life to the demands



of the other, resulting in their inability to coexist in spite of their mutual attraction (83). In this chapter, I will examine the relationship between the two marginalized protagonists as one in which the individual's search for identity engages each in a power struggle that results in abuse, exploitation, and domination. More than a story about homosexuality, *Los delitos insignificantes* is a tale of the destruction that can result from a lack of communication and a fear of failure. In a similar vein, on the national level, the government's fear of failure in solving the country's economic crises, coupled with a lack of communication with its constituents, resulted in a corruption, abuse, and exploitation of power that eventually destroyed the leadership capability of Felipe González and the PSOE.

The struggles for power inherent in the complicated relationships found in *Los delitos insignificantes* reflect the complexity of life in the city in which the novel unfolds, a vibrant and changing Madrid. The specificity of the novel's setting suggests again a close correlation between the struggles of Pombo's characters and those of Spanish society, in this case the Madrilenians of the mid-1980s. Pombo states: "Sea como sea, yo soy un escritor realista. Algo así como Henry James. Henry James describe perfectamente el Boston de su época, que todavía puede visitarse hoy. Yo, en *Los delitos insignificantes*, lo hago con Madrid. Trato de describir la fisonomía del Madrid de los años 80: sus calles, cafeterías, tipos" (Morales Villena 20). Like the country itself, the city evidences the results of the socialist economic recovery plan. After their landslide victory in the general elections of 1982, the socialists led the country on a journey of transformation. Spanish democracy had

survived the attempted *coup d'etat* of February 23, 1981 and was in the throes of a deep depression when the party took office. In the words of John Hooper:

The PSOE did not need to promise to change anything because its voters were already convinced that they were going to change everything. Just by being who they were – young men and women unencumbered by the intellectual baggage and ballast of a totalitarian past – they would be able to bring about a revolution in Spanish society when they applied to the nation's affairs attitudes regarded as normal in the rest of Europe. Alfonso Guerra, Felipe González's lifelong friend who became his deputy Prime Minister, caught the spirit of the moment when he promised the Socialists would change Spain "so that even its own mother won't recognize it." For a while it seemed as if they would. (51-52)

According to Peter McDonough, the PSOE was a party whose time had come. "The organization had undergone a doctrinal makeover. A moderate leftism dominated the mainstream of public opinion. The PSOE took its electoral cues from this central fact, and the socialists came to power in a crescendo of common sense" (87). This common sense would be needed as the socialists set out to put Spain on its course of economic recovery.

Nevertheless, the new future promised by the PSOE did not arrive as planned. By 1984, average real incomes in Spain were fractionally lower than they had been in 1975 when Franco died. The austerity policy designed to create new jobs instead

caused the unemployment rate to rise from 16 percent in 1982 to over 22 percent at the beginning of 1986. Hooper writes: “In a society with virtually no tradition of saving and in which entitlement to unemployment pay was severely limited, the effects were dire. The fall from relative prosperity to utter deprivation could take months, or even weeks” (52). Modernization and progress were accompanied by a loss of jobs and self-esteem, but balanced by a program of social reform. This combination of boom and bust resulted in an almost schizophrenic behavior in Spanish society as the disillusionment of the unemployed was bolstered by the promise of a better future. Helen Graham and Antonio Sánchez write:

It is scarcely surprising, then, that Spain’s most recent history and contemporary national identity are defined as the products of hugely accelerated development. It is precisely the breathtaking speed of many of the changes which accounts for the uneven results and the “schizophrenic” tendencies in contemporary Spanish culture. (407)

The prosperity that eventually resulted from PSOE belt-tightening and restructuring of the economy was especially celebrated in Madrid, where the schizophrenia resulted in the phenomena called the *movida madrileña*.

The *movida madrileña*, a sociocultural phenomenon that could be said to represent Spain’s attitude toward life in the 1980s, began with the country’s young people. Teresa Vilarós traces its development to the pre-1975 postmodern vanguard movements in Barcelona that spread to other parts of the country:

Son minorías subterráneas, marginales, compuestas de joven que no estaba abrumada por ningún compromiso intelectual contraído previamente a la muerte de Franco. [. . .] En Madrid, la nueva generación que se quiere a sí misma vanguardista surge sobre todo en los últimos años setenta y pone en marcha lo que más adelante se llamó la “movida madrleña. [. . .] La movida de Madrid —así como también, en menor escala, las movidas de Vigo, de Murcia, de Sevilla, etc., de los mismos años—recoge el espíritu de urgencia, de poesía práctica y del momento del movimiento de Barcelona. (25-26)

Expressing more interest in social than political parties, the generation of young people active in the *movida* inhabited the nightspots of cities and manifested what Vicente Cantarino describes as a decadent elegance:

Elegante, sibarita, despreocupada y, de una manera u otra con medios económicos, sus adeptos viven al margen de los problemas y necesidades de la sociedad mayoritaria de la que no se sienten parte. Como una de sus más conocidas representantes respondió al ser interrogada en una entrevista si se interesaba por la política: “más me interesa tener una cita con un político que votar por él.” (430)

This generation contained youth who expressed their attitudes toward life in their music, their film, their art, and their behavior. The movement itself converted into a social phenomena without precedent: “Madrid, como los demás centros urbanos, grandes y pequeños, incorpora, expande y lleva a su término un germen que, aunque

localizado en el tardofranquismo en Barcelona, estaba ya el aire y nos pertenecía a todos y a todas” (Vilarós 26). The rhythm of life in Madrid affected all its citizens, and the characters in *Los delitos insignificantes* reflect that influence in their behaviors, attitudes, and interactions with each other within the novel.

The wave of the *movida* had begun to subside by 1986, the year in which Spain gained acceptance into the European Community. With this admission came the economic prosperity promised by the socialists who, although losing strength, won re-election in that same year. During 1986, the rate of growth in the economy averaged 3.3 percent, and it was accelerating as the year drew to a close (Hooper 57). Along with this growth came the need to redefine the country’s goals in light of its new position in the European community. Spain, like the characters in *Los delitos insignificantes*, faced an identity crisis. The government’s leaders were now forced to determine how much they were willing to surrender to be included in the larger community. Spires describes it as a paradox, a centrifugal/centripetal polarization:

If on the one hand the liberals saw this centrifugal process as an opportunity to create a new, long-overdue value system, they could not ignore the paradox that they were advocating national decentralization at the same time that they were sponsoring membership in a centralized international organization. For their part, the conservatives felt disenfranchised as they witnessed Spain reaching so far outward to be accepted in the European Community that it surrendered a great

deal of its national identity and values in addition to much of its economic autonomy. (155)

The opposing forces of centralization/decentralization at the national level that disturbed the balance of power within the Spanish government also was evident within society, as each generation now questioned both old and new value systems. Existing on the fringes of society, the characters in *Los delitos insignificantes* attempt to negotiate new identities in a changing world. Failure to maintain the correct balance between autonomy on the one hand and surrender on the other shifts the power relationship between the dominator and the dominated. This inversion results in drastic consequences at the story level and exists as a constant threat at the national level as well.

The destructive relationship that develops between the two protagonists in *Los delitos insignificantes* unfolds during the stifling heat of a Madrid summer. It is a steamy story of mutual seduction that begins with a casual encounter. Having reached middle age, the former writer Gonzalo Ortega is a clerk in a financial institution. The twenty-four-year-old César Quirós is unemployed. The older man's attraction to the younger is immediate. Their conversation stimulates them both, and they agree to meet a second time. The omniscient narrator sums up the encounter: "El verano en Madrid siempre es muy largo. La vida humana siempre corta. Y así empezó todo" (12). This first meeting sparks a heated relationship that eventually consumes them both.

Although for different reasons, their second meeting proves equally satisfying for both of them. After several hours of enjoyable conversation, they agree to meet again the next day. Ortega, frightened by his intense attraction to the young man, decides that he will not show. Quirós, believing his own uniqueness to be reflected in the frustrated writer, feels a rush of power that comes from his perceived control of this new situation. While Quirós builds his relationship with Ortega, that with his mother begins to change. He learns that after years of being a widow, she is considering remarriage. Dependent on his mother for part of his support, Quirós does not yet realize the repercussions that her remarriage will have on his life. Instead, he forgets the matter, thinking rather of his impending meeting with Ortega.

The third encounter between the two men, a short one, starts off badly. Ortega arrives over an hour late and in an agitated state after arguing with himself about the need to bring an end to these meetings. Ortega struggles with conflicting emotions. On the one hand, he hopes Quirós will not show, but on the other hand, he hopes to find him waiting. He cannot conceal his excitement at seeing the young man, but his inability to make the right decision frustrates him. Quirós, however, has no such reservations. He remained confident that Ortega would show because, "they always do," he tells him. But as they take leave of each other, the older man notes a look of malicious disillusionment on the young man's face. Although they make no definitive plans to meet again, Ortega gives Quirós his telephone number, thus surrendering control of their future relationship. Contentedly living in a state of unemployment, Quirós depends upon his mother and his girlfriend, Cristina, for financial support. His

relationship with this attractive lover, five years his senior, now is showing signs of deterioration. When they met three years ago, they agreed that theirs would be a relationship without commitment. Cristina liked Quirós's youth, intelligence, and attractiveness. He liked her independence, her cynicism, and her money.

Companionship and sex for her, sex and money for him had created a perfect arrangement for the two of them, with Cristina in control. But just as with his mother, the relationship with his girlfriend was changing. His dependency on her benevolence has become less appealing, and he begins to lose confidence in his future. Again his thoughts turn to Ortega.

Eventually his mother asks him to meet the man she plans to marry and to think about how their lives will change. Quirós, although feigning approval of his mother's liaison, is far from pleased. "Esto se me viene abajo," he says to himself. "Esto se va a la mierda" (55). As he feels his control slipping, Quirós remembers Ortega, who could not have come along at a better time. With things going badly with his mother and his girlfriend, Quirós turns his attention to Ortega. Confident in his good looks, he knows he physically appeals to the older man. He heads for Ortega's apartment. The older man, believing his earlier fears to be unfounded, is pleased with Quirós's presence. He expects a very satisfying relationship. On the surface, at least, that is what develops. Appealing to the frustrated man's loneliness, Quirós works his seductive magic. Ortega falls under his spell and opens his home to the young man, an invitation that comes at a perfect time for Quirós.



As he gains Ortega's confidence, Quirós loses the support of both his girlfriend and his mother. At a party Cristina reveals him for the gigolo that he is, and his feelings of inferiority overwhelm him. He feels humiliated by his dependence on her. What matters most now, Quirós thinks, is that he make a good impression on Ortega and that he be allowed to continue coming to his home. The visits by the young man to Ortega's home continue on the pretext that the two men have much in common and can benefit mutually from their friendship. Quirós gains more confidence in his ability to control the older man. As each day passes Ortega falls more under the young man's spell. He finds himself incapable of seeing any flaw in Quirós's character, justifying any misbehavior or mistreatment, ignoring any evidence of cruelty or imperfection. He finally, joyfully admits that he has fallen hopelessly in love. Quirós feels similarly joyful, but for different reasons. Aware of Ortega's homosexuality, the young man feels again a certain power over the older one. He must do all he can to keep the man enchanted with him for as long as possible. For Quirós, his drug of choice is power, and he gets his "high" from feeling himself the object of Ortega's increasing affection. Spaniards during these years, like Ortega, appeared completely enamored with the socialist party and its promises. Likewise, the leadership of the PSOE felt empowered from the vote of confidence it received in its overwhelming 1982 election victory. Maintaining the affection of the public as they enacted their reforms proved to be a balancing act for party leaders, especially when it became evident that some were using their positions of political power to enhance their personal lifestyles.

As Ortega's attraction to Quirós increases, the situations with the young man's women worsen. His mother announces that he will need to find another place to live while she and her new husband honeymoon at home. Cristina spends less and less time with him, and he resents his dependence on her more and more. Furious with his mother for her treatment of him, Quirós shows up at Ortega's apartment hurt and angry. His violent behavior disturbs the older man, but not enough to keep him from inviting the young man to stay with him during his mother's honeymoon. Incredulous that Ortega has allowed himself to be trapped so easily, Quirós continues to manipulate his friend's emotions. Pushed to the point where he loses his self-control, the older man confesses to Quirós that he cannot live without him. Now confident that he controls Ortega, Quirós moves into the second stage of his manipulation of the older man.

Playing on Ortega's guilt over his emotional breakdown, Quirós asks for a loan of five thousand pesetas. The older man cannot deny the request, but he also knows that to agree to the loan is to submit himself to even more humiliation. He begins to suspect Quirós of blackmail, but he still cannot bring himself to admit it. He knows the money will not be paid back, that he must consider it a gift and not a loan. He tries to see the situation in a good light, but finds no success in his attempt. On a national scale, while the socialist government attempted to convince Spaniards that the increasing instances of corruption were isolated events, those incidents became more and more difficult to overlook. Ultimately, a scandal involving Juan Guerra, the brother of Deputy Prime Minister Alfonso Guerra, resulted in the resignation of

Felipe González's life-long friend. The alleged "influence trafficking" by a family member of such a prominent socialist eroded the legitimacy of the González government (Edles 149).

A fight with Cristina leaves Quirós feeling sorry for himself, yet sexually aroused. Wanting to hurt someone to avenge himself of her mistreatment, he begins to drink at a local bar. Several hours later, drunk and empowered, he arrives at Ortega's home. His host offers him more alcohol, and as both men continue to drink, Quirós deliberately taunts and then begins to seduce Ortega. As a master manipulator, he convinces Ortega that the older man is really the seducer. By pretending victimization, he in fact becomes the victimizer, a position from which he draws even more power. While he thinks of the two women who have treated him unfairly, his anger increases. He invites Ortega to give him oral sex, which he receives with pleasure. The next morning, after the older man leaves for work, Quirós searches his apartment. Finding nothing of value, he leaves for home, where he remembers that he must have lunch with his mother's fiancé.

The luncheon encounter with his soon-to-be-step-father proves disastrous. Jealous of his mother's affection for her boyfriend and resentful of the man's suggestion that Quirós look for work, the young man argues and leaves the restaurant. Needing money, he returns to Cristina. Although they enjoy an evening of titillating sex, the next morning Cristina holds back in giving Quirós his usual amount of money. This change in her behavior frightens him. The possibility of losing her as a source of income, coupled by the loss of his mother's support, paralyzes him with

fear. For the first time in his life, he loses his confidence. Then Cristina calls from work and orders him to leave her apartment. He knows the end is near, and he must find another source of income quickly. He returns to Ortega's apartment.

At the same time that Quirós's request for money radically alters Ortega's affection for him, it also awakens him to the reality of the situation. He feels trapped. He knows he must end the relationship, but he lacks the resolve to follow through. Quirós, on the other hand, reeling from the humiliation suffered at the hands of his girlfriend and his mother, desperately needs to feel himself in control. Returning to Ortega's apartment, his psychological manipulation again brings Ortega to tears. The resulting power rush feeds Quirós's ego. For a second time, he encourages the older man to engage in oral sex, but this time Ortega refuses, begging Quirós to leave him alone. Ortega's rejection snaps the boy's control, and he drops any pretense of tenderness. Threatening to kill Ortega, Quirós now demands twenty thousand pesetas. Not having that much money in the apartment, Ortega agrees to withdraw it the next morning from his bank account. If he fails to do so, Quirós will reveal Ortega's homosexuality. As the young man takes possession of the bedroom, the older man falls asleep on the sofa. In the early hours of the morning, Quirós awakens Ortega and brings him to bed, where after kissing Ortega like a lover, the young man almost apologizes for his behavior.

The next morning, each asks the other's forgiveness, but everything has changed. Ortega knows he must rid himself of Quirós in order to survive. He withdraws five hundred thousand pesetas from his bank account to buy his liberty.

For Quirós, the violence of the night before not only surprises him, but also stimulates him. The terror he instilled in Ortega rejuvenates the younger man, making him believe he had the courage to confront both Cristina and his mother. That evening, however, the older man gives him the money and asks him to leave. Forgetting his former confidence, Quirós again loses control. His anger at being rejected a third time turns to violence, and he rapes Ortega. There is no affection or warmth, only violence and possession. Afterwards, Ortega again blames himself. Quirós taunts him with insults, accepts the envelope of money, and leaves. Ortega calmly walks to his balcony, climbs the railing, and lets himself fall to his death, “como un saco de noventa kilos de carne” (199). His fall brings a silent end to the passion, the manipulation, and the victimization. Ortega’s ultimate act perhaps anticipates what would happen in Spain in the 1996 elections. Voters, disillusioned by the scandals and betrayed by the behavior of the leadership in whom they had placed their trust, brought an end to the abuse by ousting the PSOE, replacing the socialists with the conservative *Partido Popular* under the leadership of José María Aznar. The emotions expressed in the novel, in a sense then, serve as a register of a much larger frustration created by the political situation at the national level.

Disillusioned by a lack of meaning in their lives, Quirós and Ortega come together out of mutual need. As displaced individuals, marginalized members of Madrid society, they reflect the fragile and potentially destructive nature of humanity. Representing different generations, they share many traits, among them a search for meaning in their lives. Although critics reproached Pombo for what they considered

his repetition of the stereotypical exploitation of an older man by a younger one, the juxtaposition of the two allows a closer look at the social and psychological differences not only of the individuals, but also of Spanish society of that time. In the characters of Ortega and Quirós, Pombo brings together experience and youth in order to highlight the universality of human needs. The role that each plays in the destructive relationship reveals much about the dynamics of personal interactions and the unstable nature of power relations between individuals.

The presence of Ortega as a homosexual protagonist in *Los delitos insignificantes* follows a Pomboian pattern begun in the author's first collection of short stories. According to Martínez Expósito:

Álvaro Pombo es uno más de los no pocos autores españoles que a partir de la reinstauración de la democracia en España comienza a introducir motivos y personajes homosexuales en sus narraciones. Lo hace con mayor decisión que la mayoría y sin una petición de principio explícita, sin pedir permiso ni justificarse. Lo hace de manera constante, asidua, con la misma naturalidad con la que trata la heterosexualidad. (93)

In Ortega, Pombo introduces a character who has experienced firsthand the changing status of homosexuality in Spain. An examination of those changes explains, in part, Ortega's personality. According to Emilie Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith, the history of homosexuality in Spain is unique, as it follows a reverse movement to that of the United States and the United Kingdom: "Under the Napoleonic Code of the

nineteenth century, homosexuality was not a crime. It was, ironically, under the Penal Code of the Republic that male homosexuality was made illegal, when combined with “public scandal” or “corruption of minors” (10). Under the Franco regime legal repression became progressively harsher. The *Ley de Vagos* (1953) subjected known gays and lesbians to security measures. Bergmann and Smith write:

Justification for the supposed increase in vice in the period was based on the “recruitment” of young men to the queer cause by “foreigners and artistic celebrities,” the effeminacy of male clothing, and the “virilization” of urban women incorporated into the work force: right thinking males were advised to be suspicious of female shop assistants who showed insufficient deference to them. (10).

By the 1960s, as gay liberation began to flourish in Britain and the United States, penal camps, euphemistically known as “homosexual centers,” were established in Madrid, in which deviants were subjected to solitary confinement and medical examination. The *Ley de peligrosidad social* of 1970 raised penalties to a maximum of three years for a single offense. Changes to these laws came with the transition to democracy in the late 1970s. Lesbians and gays received equal rights, and anti-discrimination clauses appeared in the constitutions of the autonomous regions. (10).

Bergmann and Smith claim that in spite of what appeared to be a liberal environment, Spain failed to produce a public sphere for homosexuality: “A paradox remained, however. In the eighties it was not tolerant Spain but the repressive U.K. and the United States with their hostile rightist governments which continued to

provide the example of a visible lesbian and gay community and a viable public sphere in which it could write and speak. Why was it that Spain failed to produce that public sphere, even under the most propitious of circumstances?" (10-11). As a gay man in his 40s in Madrid, Ortega could theoretically live his life unencumbered by legal need to hide his sexual preference. This lack of a visible community and a viable public sphere, even in the Madrid of the *movida*, implies that the Spanish government was more tolerant of homosexuality than was society and Ortega himself.

Ortega appears to be a man who has lost all sense of self-worth. At forty-six, he lives alone in the home he inherited from his parents. His age places him in the first generation born after the Spanish Civil War. As a child, he experienced both Spain's years of hunger and its years of penitence. Much like Kus-Kús from *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard* (as well as Pombo himself), Ortega developed his concept of self during these difficult and disciplined times. With the country's transition from dictatorship to democracy, he now enjoys both political and social freedom. He lacks, however, a positive self-image, and is marginalized from the mainstream by his sexual orientation. Ortega's identity is closely tied to his upbringing under the repressive Franco regime, which refused recognition of those not conforming to the ideal of the perfect Spanish citizen. According to Foucault, this repression operates as "a sentence to disappear, [. . .] an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence [. . .]" (Vol. 1, 4). These prohibitions controlled Ortega's development of self, with his identity construction predicated on the concept of nonexistence. The end of the dictatorship signaled the beginning of new freedoms,



but a new self-concept did not automatically follow. While Ortega was now free from the repressive power structure of the dictatorship, he could not free himself from the feelings of guilt and the injunction to silence that such a structure had imbedded in his psyche. Although now middle aged, he still lacks the courage to communicate and to commit. In effect, Ortega is a coward, and his cowardice, not his homosexuality, marginalizes him and causes his destruction.

Anonymity reigns in the life of Gonzalo Ortega. A writer in his youth, he considers himself a failure, “un novelista fracasado” (19). In spite of his intelligence, education, and political awareness, he defines himself in terms of what he is not. He is not successful, he is not young, he is neither attractive nor interesting. He tells Quirós: “A mi edad ya no hay nada que buscar, nada nuevo que encontrar. Ya no hay islas desiertas. Es sencillamente autocomplacencia. Debería uno callarse” (23). A desire to remain unnoticed structures his activities, to the point that he never eats dinner twice in the same restaurant: “el anonimato como un refugio, el no ser reconocido, como una invisibilidad activa y voluntaria, casi una gracia” (31). In his invisible existence, Ortega takes no risks. He has not written anything in 15 years, the end of his career coinciding with the enactment of the *Ley de peligrosidad social* and, ultimately, the final years of dictatorship. Kirsten Thorpe maintains that Ortega dedicated his past “to protest against the political and cultural stranglehold of the dictatorship”(6). She proposes that the loss of the culture of protest coincides with the protagonist’s inability to write or form any lasting relationships.<sup>1</sup> Although there is no evidence that he wrote protest literature, the timing does imply that his discourse

stemmed from repression (what Foucault describes as deliberate transgression), and ceased when the prohibition disappeared. For 15 years, Ortega has been silent, both professionally and personally. For whatever reason, he has lost his inspiration.

Ortega fears communication of any sort. He implies that the pressure to describe things accurately paralyzes him, resulting in his inability to write: “Es difícil decir exactamente cualquier cosa, *decirla* siempre es un tormento. Por clara que la veas, por cerca que la tengas . . . Cualquier actividad humana es más fácil que el decir sencillamente una cosa . . . Por eso dejé de escribir hace quince años” (10). Once he gained the freedom to express himself without concern for reprisal, fear became his new censor. He tells Quirós:

Hay que perder temprano el miedo a la imperfección muy temprano, casi antes de haber escrito nada, por paradójico que suene y por peligroso, por trivial que en muchos casos resulte. Que conste que lo que digo no es un salvoconducto para ser mediocre. Sí, hay que perder temprano el miedo a contemplar cara a cara la desproporción entre lo que quisiéramos decir y lo que por fin, después de muchas vueltas, vemos escrito en nuestros folios. (20)

Cloaked as a loss of inspiration, for Ortega this fear of writing converted through the years into a fear of living. After 15 years of self-imposed silence and isolation, however, he sees his chance encounter with Quirós as the possible return of that inspiration: “Se sentía inspirado aquella tarde. ¿Había llegado tal vez aquella tarde la inspiración por fin, la buena suerte?” (8). The thought of actively engaging in life

again attracted and yet repelled Ortega. He anticipated and yet dreaded further encounters with his new friend.

Charged with unexplainable electricity, their encounters leave both wanting more. Ortega describes the camaraderie between them as “una bebida refinada, fría, intoxicante, cuyo gusto peculiar, no del todo familiar, como el de un aguardiente de un país extranjero, encubre el hielo, sobre todo al principio”(19). He confesses to being attracted both physically and mentally to the young man:

Le había alegrado advertir en Quirós una inteligencia despierta que, con entera independencia de su buen aspecto físico (Ortega encontraba a Quirós francamente guapo aquella tarde), le hacía valer al muchacho por sí mismo. Y por más que Ortega se recordaba a sí mismo que no debe uno dejarse poseer por una irremprimible alegría, una sobria alegría, *sobria ebrietas*, le poseía aquella tarde. (20)

Although he recognizes the risks, Ortega cannot avoid the sense of euphoria that accompanies his conversations with Quirós. A companion to his happiness, the sobering voice of his subconscious soon warns him of the risks of involvement. Fear then compels him to end the encounters:

Por eso esta noche no sentía lástima de sí mismo, sino sólo perplejidad; una perplejidad burlona, amarga, ante la súbita emoción que había sentido hablando dos tardes seguidas con un joven desconocido en plana Gran Vía. Decidió no volver más. Y esta

decisión, como un ensalmo, le tranquilizó y le llevó a la cama a sus habituales siete u ocho horas de sueño. Todo estaba terminado. (34)

Nevertheless, his decision not to return to the restaurant on the Gran Vía is short-lived. Although he lacks the courage to avoid the meeting altogether, he gathers enough strength to arrive late to the appointment. Even when Quirós defiantly confesses that he lives off the handouts he receives from his mother and his girlfriend, Ortega fails to heed the warnings: “No estaba en condiciones de percibir los síntomas negativos de una personalidad como la de Quirós. Las apariencias le engañaron una vez más aquella tarde” (24). After only two encounters, he is totally and irrevocably enamored with Quirós. As with the people of Spain, in spite of hints of scandal surfacing within the governmental ranks, opinion remained high, and the public maintained its adulation of Felipe González.

Moving their meetings from the safety of a public place to the privacy of Ortega’s apartment changes the nature of the men’s relationship. It allows more intimacy, which serves as an invitation for misreading on the part of Ortega and abuse on the part of Quirós. While the reader senses the potential disaster, Ortega remains unaware, or chooses to overlook, the warning signs:

Ortega sonrió, no atreviéndose a seguir. Le agradaba aquel chico, tan joven, que parecía hallarse milagrosamente allí, haciéndole compañía a aquella hora melancólica y cálida del atardecer. Y que el chico pareciera a sus anchas, sentado en el butacón que solía ocupar el propio Ortega, le pareció una muestra inequívoca de que aquella

relación había de ser más clara y más satisfactoria que ninguna de las anteriores. Las pocas que había tenido. Y le parecieron también sus temores infundados, sacados de quicio por la soledad en que vivía.

(58)

Almost imperceptibly, Quirós succeeds in his first power play with Ortega, a move of which the older man remains completely ignorant. The invitation to the young man to visit whenever he wants provides the opening Quirós needs to set his plan into action. Although the young man superficially tries to warn Ortega of the potential dangers, “Pero muy en el fondo, no te fies demasiado” (63), the warning goes unheeded, as the lonely man imagines Quirós to be the perfect companion, in effect, his muse: “a lo mejor contigo, viéndote por aquí, me vuelve a venir la inspiración, la gana de escribir, la voluntad de autohipnotizarme que me hace falta para escribir relatos” (64). In much the same way that Ortega clings to the hope that Quirós will prove to be the catalyst for change in his life, citizens of his age in Spain looked to the younger generation to solve the social and economic woes of the country. Much like Ortega, blind faith in the leadership of the PSOE caused the believers to overlook or ignore the warning signs of potential disaster.

In the days that pass before their next visit, Ortega has time to relive the recent events and to resign himself to the fact that the young man would not call. The unexpected arrival of Quirós at Ortega’s doorstep brings the older man great satisfaction:

Al abrir la puerta de la casa, Ortega tenía la sensación de haber llegado al final. A un final que, ciertamente, no podía ser el final de nada concreto. Quizá, únicamente, el final de su reserva. Al abrir la puerta de su casa y percibir el olor caliente, familiar, de los libros amontonados, Ortega tuvo la sensación de que ahora, por primera vez en quince años, abriría la puerta de un lugar de reposo. [. . .] Tuvo la sensación de hallarse de viaje y de que, al abrir la puerta de su casa, daba paso a un desconocido, un aspecto nuevo que siempre había deseado explorar y que nunca había explorado. (85)

After several hours of conversation, Ortega admits to himself how much he wants to continue seeing Quirós: “Y una idea no se le iba a Ortega de la cabeza: la idea de que, de pronto, casi por pura casualidad, estaba a punto de tener lo que durante tantos años había deseado: un compañero más joven con quien pasar las tardes dulcemente” (89). Quirós wins even more favor in Ortega’s eyes when he asks to read one of the older man’s books. The former writer cannot believe that he has found someone in whom he has enough confidence to allow a reading of his books, opening himself to criticism that he has avoided for the last 15 years. He again envisions in Quirós a second chance, “la segunda oportunidad de Gonzalo Ortega” (97). Rather than making a personal change, Ortega, like many of his generation, looks to others (especially the government) to solve his problems.

The presence of Quirós in Ortega’s home fills a void in the lonely man’s life. He believes he has found at last the perfect companion in this young, intelligent,

attractive man. The mistrust of his self-imposed isolation fades away with each conversation, making each visit better than the last, until Quirós turns the conversation to sexuality. Then, Ortega's sense of euphoria begins to fade and his confidence in Quirós begins to waiver. Quirós baits him by comparing Ortega's abandonment of writing with never having been with a woman: "Parecen un poco lo mismo las dos cosas: tu haber dejado de escribir y tu no haber, no sé, estado nunca con mujeres. Tu virginidad" (102). The young man even goes so far as to ask Ortega if he has ever slept with a woman, to which the older man responds: "A lo mejor incluso has acertado. . . Pero, en general, no veo yo la relación. Más de la mitad de nuestros grandes hombres de letras son maricas, y no por eso dejan de sacar un libro al año. Al contrario, más bien parece que lo que no les sale por un lado revienta por otro" (102). In spite of the honesty of his answer, Ortega feels insulted by the question. His need to believe in Quirós, however, causes him to justify the insult, to cloak it as an innocent question on the part of the young man:

"¿Es que no hubiera yo, en su caso, preguntado lo mismo, sugerido lo mismo?" Y daba Ortega vueltas y más vueltas a la melodía de las frases y del gesto de su nuevo amigo con ternura, porque quería verlas elevadas al dulce reino de lo natural, lo lógico, lo que *cualquiera* hubiera sugerido, y se negaba, el pobre hombre, a considerar la evidencia en toda su evidencia, a ver la viga en el ojo ajeno. Ortega prefería ver la paja en el propio. (103).

Ortega prefers to revert to his life-long habit of self-deprecation. His lack of confidence in his own judgments, his fear to speak the truth, and his enchantment with Quirós keeps him from being angry. “Si es que ha acertado, el muy cabrón, el pobre crío. Si es que me ha dicho la verdad. Me ha preguntado lo único que hay que preguntarme a mí: que qué me falta. Y eso es lo que me falta: un par de huevos. Y esto no es una vulgaridad: es la verdad” (103). Quirós has guessed correctly that Ortega is homosexual, knowledge that proves the undoing of their relationship. The older man’s desperation is such that he prays for the continuance of the friendship:

[O]h virgen madre de la nada, así que tengo tiempo todavía, no mucho, un poco. Lo bastante para querer vivir, querer aprovechar esta oportunidad que viene ahora, segunda, estoy seguro de que este chaval no va a engañarme, no es una obra de mis manos, no es idolatría, no estoy deificando imágenes inútiles de piedra o de animales, no estoy tampoco soñando, por ejemplo, fantaseando, estoy dejándome llevar por la ternura. ¿Qué tiene eso de malo? Ya es hora que reviente o que renazca, una de dos: o todo esto es verdad, mi nuevo amor, o yo no debo de seguir viviendo [. . .]. (104)

In essence, Ortega’s prayer is answered in that his relationship with Quirós continues. The either-or situation, however, does not result in his favor, as the young man not only deceives him, but also manipulates, humiliates, and destroys him.

After so many years of living alone, Ortega’s self-imposed isolation now appears intolerable to him. Like countless others in Madrid, he had grown



accustomed to filling his days with solitary activities like walking, reading the newspaper, and going to the movies. Since meeting Quirós, however, those activities seem to magnify rather than pacify his solitude. His frustration with himself and his life increases with each hour he spends alone:

Se sentó en un banco. Una tristeza innumerable, un tedio incalificable que parecía provenir de los setos de boj y de los árboles sin nombre a espaldas suyas. El sentimiento de su insignificancia, que momentos antes le había regocijado, le oprimió ahora como una violenta acusación. Sin darse cuenta se le habían hecho ya las diez de la mañana. Todo un largo domingo de soledad por delante. Ortega se desabrochó el cuello de la camisa, se aflojó la corbata, empapado de sudor, consternado, aterrado por el perfil monótono de su invencible soledad. (122)

Suddenly, the anonymity with which he had shielded himself from life becomes a burden on him. His pattern of silence and invisibility now seem intolerable. He knows that his intolerance and frustration come directly from his encounter with Quirós, and his conscience warns him not to rely too much on the young man: “No puedo convertir a este chico en un consuelo, en un antídoto contra mi soledad que es sustancial y no hay quien la deshaga” (123). But the more he thinks about himself and his life, the more he longs for the company of Quirós. Slowly emerging from the isolation of the Franco regime, Spaniards in general both feared and anticipated their entrance onto the world stage. Resenting their past economic and cultural stagnation,

they longed for active participation in the European Community at the same time that they feared the drastic changes such involvement would bring.

Full of both hope and fear, Ortega's prayer expresses the desperation of his existence. As if in answer to that prayer, Quirós returns to the apartment. For the first time since the beginning of their relationship, however, Quirós appears in a bad humor. Ortega senses that things are not right and is concerned by the violence that his friend displays. Quirós is incensed that his mother has asked him to leave home so that she and her new husband can honeymoon in private. Ortega does not see the tragedy in the request, and Quirós does not see the humor in the older man's response. Overwhelmed by his affection for the young man, feeling for the first time a sexual attraction to him and thus a desire to please him, Ortega invites Quirós to stay with him during the mother's honeymoon. He immediately regrets the invitation at the same time that he hopes it will be accepted, and his old fears return:

Pero a la vez, y como por debajo es esta actitud propia del hombre que espera la sentencia de un juez, sentía Ortega arriesgado sabiamente en el momento oportuno y está a punto de ganar. Y, sin embargo —pero también a la vez—, sentía Ortega el miedo de todo solitario a ver su soledad invadida y sus pobres tranquilizadoras rutinas descompuestas. Y este miedo era punzante y no era nuevo, sino muy antiguo, como también era muy antigua la desprecia que Ortega sentía por sí mismo cuando sentía que sentía este aguzado miedo de solterón timorato.

(129)

Once again Ortega falls into the trap set by the younger man. His desire to have Quirós with him overrides his good judgment. Even when he feels that the invitation is a mistake, he is too cowardly to rescind it. Just as Foucault describes sexuality as “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power” (Vol 1, 103), the sexual attraction felt by Ortega toward Quirós causes him to surrender total control to the young man, who willingly, albeit subtly, assumes the dominant position in the relationship.

This shifting of power proves the turning point. Quirós pressures Ortega into defining their relationship, knowing full well the older man will sidestep the issue: “¡Y yo no veo por qué coño no lo entiendes!” Quirós tells Ortega. “Es bien fácil de entender. Lo nuestro, o sea, esta amistad no es cosa de mujeres. No hay nada entre nosotros, vale, pero parece que lo hay. Y en cierto modo lo hay, ¿o no lo hay?” (133). As is his custom, Ortega retreats from confrontation, but Quirós continues to entrap him. Fear once again overtakes the older man. Terrified that his lack of clear response has angered the young man, Ortega begs him to return, confessing that he cannot live without him. Now Quirós knows he controls the situation.

After his humiliating performance with Quirós, Ortega again feels afraid. When the young man arrives the next afternoon, Ortega discovers the consequences of his breakdown. Quirós asks him for money:

—Hombre, poder, puedes hacerlo. Lo que pasa es que me da coraje, después de lo de ayer, pedirte así un favor. No sé si vas a pensar mal de mí.

—Di lo que sea, venga . . .

—¿Podrías dejarme cinco mil pesetas?

—Desde luego. Toma —Ortega se sacó la cartera de atrás y le alcanzó a Quirós dos billetes de dos mil y uno de mil. El gesto de Ortega fue muy rápido, como si la frase “después de lo de ayer” hubiera sido un agujón. Ortega tenía la sensación, incómoda una vez más, de estar llevando a cabo un acto de incalculables consecuencias cuyo sentido no percibía claramente. (147-48)

Ortega is right in his sensation of the consequences of his loaning Quirós the money. It seals his fate as victim, altering permanently the mechanics of power in the relationship. The more he analyzes the situation, the more confused he becomes. No matter how he tries to justify his young friend's actions, the fact remains, Quirós felt he could ask for money based on what he perceives had happened between them the day before. Politically, Spaniards suffered similar psychological manipulation at the hands of the PSOE leadership. Seeking increased power and recognition for themselves and Spain, those in charge increasingly demanded more of the electorate at the same time that they abused the trust the people had placed in the party. For Ortega, nothing can be the same again. He knows, because of Quirós's habit of living off the money of others, that he must consider the loan a gift, but it pains him to do so. He considers it a no-win situation:

La única solución que a Ortega se le ocurría era la de tratar de formar dentro de sí mismo la intención de regalar aquello mismo que le había

sido arrebatado a la fuerza. Pero para eso, a juicio de Ortega, se requería cierto acto, realizado ante Quirós. [. . .] Sin ese acto Ortega se sentía ni agradecido ni pagado. Luego en ambos casos, tanto si se convertía en permanente acreedor de Quirós como si, mediante la formulación de dichas palabras se convertía en su benefactor improvisado. Ortega quedaba en mal lugar ante sí mismo. Y, a su vez, Quirós quedaba también en mal lugar, sumido en el efecto un tanto chusco de toda aquella transacción. (151)

No matter how he tries, Ortega cannot see the situation in a good light. He feels betrayed and victimized. He refuses to heed the warnings, as did many of the Spaniards on the initial discoveries of corruption within the socialist party. Even though the image began to tarnish, the people overlooked the scandals that emerged as early as 1983 within the PSOE government (Edles 148).

As Ortega analyzes the hopelessness of the situation, he fears what might happen next. He is too frightened to move ahead or to retreat. When Quirós arrives quite drunk at the apartment the next day, the older man feels the imminent danger, but decides to ignore the warning signs. He offers the young man more to drink, and as the alcohol numbs Ortega's senses, his inhibitions fall away. The seduction begins:

Quirós abría y cerraba las piernas de Ortega lentamente.

—¿Quién es el seductor? —preguntó Quirós.

—Tú.

—De eso nada. Si quieres lo dejamos.

—Entonces, yo.

—Eso sí. (165)

As Ortega falls to his knees and caresses Quirós, he cries. The young man's control over him is complete, as he once again tells Ortega what he wants to hear. The seduction continues:

Quirós dejó caer los pantalones. No llevaba calzoncillos. Se sentía joven. [. . .] Ortega le había soltado los tobillos y le sujetaba ahora, de nuevo, las caderas. La cara de Ortega quedaba a la altura del pene de Quirós.

—Chúpamela, si quieres —dijo Quirós. Y él mismo le metió la verga en la boca, casi ahogándole. Quirós pensó: “Tiene gracia.” (166)

The next morning, Ortega remembers his tears, but he felt no immediate remorse, finding everything peaceful, coherent, and profound “como una narración bien terminada.” (167). Twenty-four hours later, his fears returned. For 15 years, Ortega had repressed all feelings, avoided all encounters, not written a word. Now he must face the consequences of his actions with Quirós:

Ortega había recorrido, como una rata en un experimento, el circuito cerrado de dos, a lo sumo tres, grandes y opacas emociones: el deseo de volver a ver al chico, el deseo de no volver a verle, la esperanza de sacar de aquella experiencia (que ahora resultaba desoladora y desolada) un impulso creador, o sencillamente el suficiente impulso para no atormentarse inútilmente. (180)

His overall instinct, however, is to free himself of the young man. When Quirós finally arrives at Ortega's apartment, the older man views him differently. Everything the young man does appears rehearsed, faked, like an actor in a play. Suddenly, Ortega realizes it has all been a performance, and he fears what will follow: "Ortega ya sabía que su grotesco, imprevisible calvario había empezado" (184). He apologizes for his behavior, promising it will not happen again. As always, he feels guilty for what happened. "Fue una debilidad. Tuve yo la culpa. Reconozco que tuve yo la culpa. No volverá a ocurrir. Podemos seguir siendo amigos, si tú quieres, sin eso. . ." (185). His words, however, fuel the flames of Quirós's anger. Finally he understands: "Ortega, como si en aquel momento le fuera dada la capacidad de contemplarse fría y burlonamente desde fuera, desde lejos, se dio cuenta de que iba cayendo, una por una, en todas las trampas que Quirós le tendía" (185). Losing all sense of dignity, Ortega again cries, increasing even more Quirós's sense of power. Although he has the courage to resist the young man's request for oral sex, his manner appeared more as a flirtation than a refusal, which excited Quirós tremendously. Ortega continues to plead:

—No podemos seguir así, lo sabes de sobra, no podemos, yo quiero ser amigo tuyo . . .

—¿Qué tiene eso que ver?

—Si seguimos así, se va a deshacer todo . . .

—¿No será que tienes miedo? A ver si encima de maricón eres un cagueta! Es legal, tío, es legal. Ya soy mayor de edad. . .

—No hables así. . .

—Lo que tienes es miedo. Quieres que me largue, ¿no? Quieres volverte atrás. Ya no puedes volverte atrás.

Quirós se cerró la bragueta. Se ajustó los pantalones. Encendió un pitillo.

—Esto te cuesta caro —dijo. (130)

For Ortega, it is a double-edge sword. Moving forward in a relationship of victimizer/victim offers nothing but humiliation for him. It is now too late to be strong, and his instincts to retreat are correct ones. Unfortunately, like many Spaniards, his courageous stance (motivated by fear of commitment as much as anything else) comes too late. Quirós's demand for 20 thousand pesetas seems almost a relief, a way to bring an end to the sordid affair: "Ortega pensó: 'Así tenía que ser. Es preferible así.' No había ni un solo resorte ya, ningún recurso. Sólo la voluntad de terminar, de darse por vencido. 'Tienes toda la razón' dijo Ortega" (188). Once his rage subsides, Quirós continues to manipulate Ortega by blaming his violent outburst on the older man. As the enabler in the relationship, Ortega again accepts the blame. He understands, however, that nothing will ever be the same.

The next day the older man faces the reality of the situation. For the past 15 years he had kept his emotions in check, hiding from himself and the world. Now they are out of control:

Pero los insurgentes deseos de ahora volvían enfermos de confusión y cobardías. Le venían grandes, le parecían máscaras grotescas que no



sentía en condiciones de asumir. Tras tantos años de vivir apagado, no se sentía Ortega dueño de la intensidad de sus afectos, que gesticulaban alborotados y como en las afueras de su propio ser, como trajes de una moda excesiva. Convertir a Quirós en su amante y vivir con él —aunque fuera en secreto— le resultaba a Ortega fantástico, tan peligroso y tan confuso como alterar repentinamente todo su vestuario o verse obligado a hablar en público o salir en la televisión. (192)

However tempting the idea of living with Quirós might be, Ortega cannot forget the young man's threats. His fear overrides his sexual desires, and he decides again to free himself of his young friend. He withdraws the money from his bank account that afternoon.

The last encounter between Quirós and Ortega proves violent and tragic. As he returns home with the money, Ortega admits and regrets the fear that has controlled his life:

“Toda mi vida —pensó amargamente—, toda mi vida es un monigote arrastrado por el miedo. La pereza también era miedo.” Y no se sentía capaz de envalentonarse ahora, o de reanimarse. Tener que comprar su libertad era la última humillación, la más profunda. Y, al pensar en ella, no pensaba Ortega en Quirós como el causante de su extraña situación, sino sólo en sí mismo. (193)

The regrets of his life overwhelm him as he thinks about everything he should have done. Waves of guilt and embarrassment wash over him, mixing with self-hatred until he can only think of one thing: “olvidar y negar lo ocurrido entre Quirós y él” (194).

Forgetting what happened the night before was not to be, however, as Quirós impatiently greets him at the door. Ortega avoids eye contact with the young man as he turns over the money. “Ahí tienes lo que me pedías,” he tells Quirós. “Quinientas mil pesetas. Cógelas y vete. Por favor, César” (196). As much as the young man tries again to seduce him, Ortega resists. His fear angers Quirós, which in turn excites the younger man, pushing him to seek revenge on the older man for refusing him. The violence with which Quirós forces himself upon Ortega allows for little resistance:

Quirós sentía el peso muerto de Ortega entre sus brazos como un triunfo. Era un triunfo. Y era una novedad. Una sensación que no se parecía a ninguna otra [ . . . ]

Ortega aulló, mordiéndose las manos hasta hacerse sangre. Quirós cabalgaba sobre el culo de Ortega como un crío. Una escena reproducida casi exactamente así en cualquier colección de fotos pornográficas. No tiene ya la menor gracia. (198)

After the rape, Quirós dresses and counts the money in the envelope. The final insult comes as the young man takes his leave: “¿Tienes que estar loco. Cuando te estaba dando por el culo pensaba que tenías que estar loco. Si no estuvieras loco te hubieras defendido. ¿O es que te gustaba? Yo creo que te gustaba. [ . . . ] A ti te gusta la violencia. Te ha gustado que te castigue. Y yo lo entiendo, ya ves. Lo entiendo todo.

Te entiendo a ti muy bien” (198). He takes the money and disappears. Ortega’s final act is once again a cowardly one, as he simply lets himself fall over the balcony to his death. His earlier prayer proves prophetic, in that when confronted with the ugly reality of his new love, he chooses to end his life: “Esto es lo que buscaba, ¿no es esto? Un final feliz” (199). Breaking his self-imposed isolation to gamble on a relationship with Quirós could be seen as a courageous act on Ortega’s part. But the reality is that he is unable to overcome his fears, never finding the courage to resist or to take the lead. Consequently, he allows himself to be victimized by the person he hoped would be his second chance at life. A generation of Spaniards much like him who had lived through repression of the dictatorship hoped for a new future by placing its faith in the young leadership of the PSOE. In the early 80s, that faith also looked to be misplaced, as the country struggled to adjust to the hardships of the economic recovery plan.

Quirós, on the other hand, suffers not from cowardice or misplaced faith, but from a lack of conscience. As the second protagonist in *Los delitos insignificantes*, he, like Ortega, is wanting of a sense of self-worth. In contrast to the older man’s upbringing under the dictatorship, Quirós is the first to have no memory of such a life. Unemployed and with no desire to find employment, he is the poster boy for the disillusioned youth of the mid-1980s. With the political scandals of the PSOE beginning to surface and unemployment approaching a record-high of 22%, young people like Quirós sought to disassociate themselves from the establishment,

identifying more with the counter-culture of the night. The night in Madrid, according to Quirós, is a totally different world:

Como no tengo nada que hacer, ni oficio ni beneficio, como la mayoría, pues duermo las mañanas [. . .]. Son dos mundos que no tienen nada que ver: el diurno y el nocturno. Por la noche se siente uno más ágil. [. . .] Todo es un poco una cacería por las noches . . . Somos cazadores y cazados porque no se distingue claramente nada . . . Lo más evidente, lo más inmediato es el latido de la propia sangre, la propia conciencia encabritada. Un erotismo indefinido . . . (44-45)

This undefined eroticism, along with the new wave of freedom of expression that manifested itself in the art, music, and cinema of the *movida* allowed young people like Quirós to establish a counter-cultural movement that rivaled any in Europe during the first half of the 1980s.

Raised outside the disciplinary power structure of the dictatorship, the moral values of Quirós and his generation differ greatly from those of Ortega and his. In their search for individual and collective identity, they rejected the values of the establishment, rejoiced in their abundant freedoms, and embraced a different set of standards. Foucault defines morality (an ambiguous word at best) as “the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them. The word thus designates the manner in which they comply more or less fully with a standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction or a prescription; the manner in which they respect or disregard a set of values” (Vol.2,

25). Responding to a different reality, Quirós and others of his age conducted themselves according to a new standard of conduct, a different morality. Inasmuch as Ortega's behavior responds to the injunction to silence inherited from the dictatorship, Quirós lives in the present, selfishly and with few inhibitions, searching for stability in the unstable and impersonal atmosphere of a modern, urban Madrid.

In his search for identity, Quirós finds validation of self from the reflection of himself that he sees in others. Quirós enjoys being admired. The sensation of being watched, appreciated, and desired by others gives him intense satisfaction. Like Lacan's infant who can see himself only through the intervention of an external image, Quirós constantly seeks those outside sources: "Estoy siendo mirado — pensó—. Y es como una droga." From this "seeing of oneself being seen," as Silverman describes it, Quirós gains his power. The look is what constitutes him as subject (127). Seeking his image in mirrors, whether through his own eyes or the eyes of others, the young man reinforces his self-concept as young, attractive, and desired. He finds himself attracted to young women, but not young men of his age: "Las muchas cosas que por razones obvias tenía en común con ellos era lo que más le repelía. Tener el mismo aspecto de toda su generación le resultaba insoportable" (18). He especially enjoys the attention of older men, those similar to Ortega in age, and frequently opens conversations with them in cafeterias or bars: "Por diferentes que fueran entre sí, tenían en común el sexo y la edad" (18). Quirós enjoys them for two specific reasons:

[. . .] un gusto instintivo por lo avejentado o torcido o marcado por la edad, no sólo en el aspecto físico sino, sobre todo, en la textura anímica de los hombres de la edad de Ortega. Y había otra cosa más: que con frecuencia Quirós sentía que le admiraban. Sus miradas le recorrían sigilosamente el cuerpo entero como caricias, como labios. Y así sentía ahora que Ortega, al mirarle, se le había enredado en el cuerpo aquella tarde calurosa como una mosca en una tela de araña.

(18)

In Ortega's gaze, Quirós finds not only admiration and desire, but also reflections of himself that attract and intrigue him. He instinctively knows he must continue the relationship: "Entusiasmado como estaba, excitado y curioso, intensamente absorto, como un gato en el aleteo malherido del desdichado Ortega que, precisamente porque no tenía salvación, le pareció a Quirós que era un caso único, fascinante. Una singularidad absoluta, un espejo" (28). Through Ortega as mirror, Quirós finds a reflection of himself that feeds his narcissistic need for self-love and a gaze that constitutes him as subject. The narcissism reflected in Quirós evidenced itself also in many areas of post-transition Spanish society. Competing for recognition at the global level, leaders attempted to focus all eyes on Spain as it prepared for its "coming out." The collective ego sought the undivided attention of the world, planning a variety of performances that would culminate in 1992 with the Olympic games in Barcelona, the International Exposition (World's Fair) in Seville, and the designation of Madrid

as the Cultural Capital of Europe. Vilarós describes these events as economic and libidinal excesses that signalled the end of the years of the transition:

[. . .] en un sentido local es el fin de los acontecimientos culturales del 92 [. . .] el que da término a la fiesta transicional y pone la euforia pasada en perspectiva. El año 1992 marcará por otra parte el inicio de la incertidumbre económica, que contrasta con el crecimiento avasallador de la renta per cápita y con el potencial inversor de la época de los ochenta. (3)

Just as Quirós planned every move, every action, and every reaction in his relationship with Ortega, so was performance the key at the political level as well, as Spain, like Ortega, sought the world's gaze in order to constitute itself as subject. Labanyi attributes this conversion of life into performance as a reflection of the "death of the real" produced by the mass media's conversion of reality into images and information technology's replacement of it with simulated models. For Quirós and many like him, his life centered on his image and on his performance, with all eyes focused on him (or Spain) as the object of the gaze.

Like Ortega, Quirós considers himself a failure. Unsuccessful in school, he has no interest in anything. He can find no work, nor is he interested in working. As noted earlier, Cristina gives him the spending money he needs; his mother provides him shelter. As his relationship with Ortega begins, however, those with his mother and Cristina break down. He becomes less important to his mother as she decides to marry again, and he becomes less satisfying to Cristina as she becomes bored with the

relationship. His reaction to their rejection follows a pattern found in many who suffer from pathological narcissism. A Freudian term that comes from the Greek god Narcissus, narcissism (an exclusive self-absorption) is considered a normal stage in the development of children. When it occurs after puberty, it is known as secondary narcissism and indicates a libidinal energy directed exclusively toward oneself. A degree of narcissism is considered normal, where an individual has a healthy self-regard and realistic aspirations. The condition becomes pathological when it significantly impairs social functioning:

An individual with narcissistic personality disorder tends to harbor an exaggerated sense of his own self-importance and uniqueness. He is often excessively occupied with fantasies about his own attributes and potential for success, and usually depends upon others for reinforcement of his self-image. A narcissist tends to have difficulties maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, stemming largely from a lack of empathy and a propensity for taking advantage of others in the interest of self-aggrandizement. (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia 1)

The behavior exhibited by Quirós in his relationships with others reflects many of these personality disorder traits, offering insight into his actions and reactions to the events around him. Similar behaviors by Spanish society would indicate that it, too, suffered from a form of narcissistic personality disorder evidenced by an excessive libidinal energy directed toward itself during the years leading up to the 1992 events.



Although Quirós does not consider himself successful, he does display an obsession with his bodily beauty, always pausing before a mirror to admire his image. The frequent appreciative stares of others reinforce his concept of self-beauty. “Me siento como Dios,” he thinks to himself. “Y atraía, en aquel estado, a las dos de la tarde, an aquel sitio, Quirós muchas miradas. Y él las recogía, se empapaba de ellas como una dulce esponja de colores. Se sentía limpio, envuelto en la calma melodiosa, sudoroso de encantos respirables, aureolado por la erección difusa de su media trompa, como todos” (158). Just as narcissists require excessive admiration, adulation, attention, and affirmation (Vaknin 1), Quirós seeks the admiring glances of others to counter-balance the feelings of inferiority that exist under the surface. For him, the grandiose feelings of self-importance normally exhibited by a pathological narcissist appear to disguise the feelings of self-disgust that come from his relationship with his mother and Cristina and his fear about the future.

Interpersonal exploitation and lack of empathy are two traits of the narcissist that also control Quirós’s relationships. Seemingly unable or unwilling to recognize his mother’s needs to marry again, he rejects her fiancé. Feeling entitled to special treatment by his mother, he refuses to consider that he should abandon the home in which he grew up so that his mother could enjoy her honeymoon in private. A master at exploitation, he transfers his frustration with his mother to Ortega, who becomes the new object of that exploitation. As he manipulates the older man into inviting him to stay in his apartment, Quirós admits to this “taking advantage of others for his own self-agrandizement.” He is surprised at how easy it is:

Y que Quirós era consciente de que Ortega aceptaría siempre lo contrario de cualquier proposición que Quirós formulara explícitamente en contra de sí mismo. Era un juego muy fácil. Y le chocaba a Quirós que un hombre de la edad de Ortega se dejara atrapar tan fácilmente. Y no sólo le chocaba, sino que en el fondo le inspiraba un cierto desprecio (Quirós, dicho sea de paso, había sido educado en el desprecio como otros lo son en el amor o en la angustia y era, por consiguiente, propenso a menospreciar y a despreciar). (131)

Quirós's disdain grows in direct proportion to Ortega's infatuation as the young man's manipulation creates a victimizer/victimized relationship.

This power paradigm that develops between the two men feeds Quirós's need for affirmation. The fear he senses in Ortega acts as a catalyst for the violence that is yet another trait of the pathological narcissist. Vaknin writes:

His sensitivity to the needs and emotions of others and his ability to empathize with them deteriorates sharply. He becomes intolerably haughty and arrogant, with sadistic and paranoid tendencies. Above all, he then seeks unconditional admiration, even when he does not deserve it. [. . .] He tends to exploit others, to envy them, to be edgy and explode with unexplained rage. (4)

When contradicted, frustrated, or confronted, someone suffering from narcissistic personality disorder responds with violence, much like Quirós responds when he is

rejected by his mother, his girlfriend and ultimately, Ortega. In addition, his treatment of the older man excited him sexually, leading to the final cruel action of the novel:

Pensándolo bien, la violencia de sus propias reacciones de la pasada noche había sido sorprendente. Asustar a Ortega, manipularle, le había excitado sexualmente. Y esto era una novedad. La gran novedad de la situación era el error que había conseguido infundir en Ortega. Se sentía rejuvenecido. [. . .] Ahora tenía la sensación de que su recién descubierta capacidad de estimularse sexualmente mediante un acto (impensado, espontáneo) de brutalidad o crueldad también era exterior a sí mismo. (192)

The newly discovered sexual excitement experienced by Quirós, coupled with his inability to accept the rejection of his mother and Cristina, transform him. His last violent act, the rape of Quirós, releases his anger.

The lack of empathy, the need for excessive admiration, and the belief that he is unique account for his reaction to Ortega after their last sexual encounter. Feeling no remorse for his actions, he counts the money offered him by the older man and decides to accept it. He remains incredulous, however, that Ortega wants him to leave: “Te estoy diciendo que me gustas, joder. Hay montones de tíos y de tías que darían la vida por les dijera eso. [. . .] Y has tenido suerte de dar conmigo. Porque yo te quiero [. . .] Por eso, hasta que no me encontraste a mí, no habías follado a gusto. En medio de todo, tienes suerte” (197-99). For Quirós, his victimization of Ortega compensates for the injustices he believes he has suffered at the hands of the women

in his life: “En condiciones de enfrentarse ahora de igual a igual con Cristina, con su madre” (192). Immersed in himself, he seeks pleasure from any source that will provide it, regardless of the consequences. In his constant search for attention and validation, he moves from one victim to the next. Inasmuch as Ortega faces his future by deciding to end his life, Quirós refuses to look beyond the present, recognizing that the adulation of others is his drug of choice:

Sentirse dueño del universo un par de horas o tres, y así noche tras noche, hasta la muerte. La vida no nos ofrece nada más: el ensalmo, el bebedizo, la nada. . . Sólo —pensó Quirós rápidamente— que hay que tener talento suficiente para prolongar el encanto lo bastante. ¿Por cuánto tiempo? Todo lo posible. Lo mío es más difícil, más sutil, yo no me voy a destruir pinchándome o esnifando guarradas. Lo mío es puramente especulativo. Todo sucede en un espejo. (105)

This desire to be master of the universe and to prolong the “high” for as long as possible echoes the excessive self-indulgence of the *movida*. With the death of Ortega, Quirós will no doubt find his needed reflection in other mirrors. His search for identity will continue, just as that of his generation continued throughout the 1980s as young people at first rejected but eventually assimilated the value system of previous generations at the same time that those systems adjusted by absorbing the ideas of the youth. The aggression exhibited by Quirós reflects an increasing tendency by young people to release their fears and uncertainties about their future by similar acts of violence. Again anticipating rather than reflecting, Quirós’s character

predicts the arrival in the 1990s of Generation X, the Spanish youth who seek instant satisfaction through sex, drugs, and violence and reject social or personal responsibility (Fouz-Hernández 88).

*Los delitos insignificantes*, in the words of its author, is “a nasty novel. . . but it is a novel that had to be written” (Interview 2004). It brings together two men from different backgrounds and different sensibilities and tells the story of their failed relationship. Ortega, living under a self-imposed silence that began during the waning years of the dictatorship, looks to his young friend for companionship, for the inspiration to write again, and for the strength to conquer his fears. After 15 years of non-involvement, he decides to take a risk, placing complete faith in another human being. Not heeding the warning signs, however, he chooses badly and pays the ultimate price. As a result of his cowardice and fear of failure, he falls victim to the psychological and physical abuse of his new friend. Spain, after years of silence during its transition from a dictatorship to a democracy, looked to strengthen its economy and play a more active role in the global community under the PSOE leadership. Just as Ortega struggles with how much of himself he is willing to surrender to Quirós in exchange for his affection, the government faced similar power issues in the mid-1980s as it prepared for entry into the European Community. Quirós, on the other hand, sees Ortega as nothing more than the short-term solution to his cash flow problem. Operating under a different system of moral values, Quirós, like many others of his generation lives only for the present. Early victims of the socialist’s economic recovery plan, the young people saw themselves without a future.

In response, they created their own world of significance in the nightlife of the *movida*. Evidencing Spain's identity crisis mirrored in its people, the "nasty" story of Ortega and Quirós at both the personal and political level draws attention to the tragedy of failed relationships and underscores the unstable nature of relations of power. As the final work in Pombo's first novelistic cycle, *Los delitos insignificantes* closes the narrative circle opened with the author's earlier collection of short stories. By implication, the novel also closes a sociopolitical epoch in which the country and its leaders, like Pombo's characters, suffered from a lack of political substance. The end of this cycle points to the beginning of a new era in which Spain and its citizens, like the characters that Pombo features in his next cycle, turn their focus to the outside world as they play a more active role in shaping their future. In Chapter 4, *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo*, the only novel of the author's second cycle included in this study, the protagonist must free herself from her totalitarian past in order to define her new role as a woman in 1990s Spain.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In an unpublished 1996 essay, Thorne compares *Los delitos insignificantes* by Pombo with *La noche en casa* by José María Guelbenzu in terms of what she labels “the politics of eroticism” (1).

## Chapter 4

### *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo: The Evolution of the New Spanish Woman*

While the failed relationships in Chapter 3 mirror the collective struggle for self-definition in socialist Spain of the 1980s, the analysis in Chapter 4, *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo* (1995), details how a middle-aged woman's process of redefinition in 1990s Spain illuminates the emancipation journey of Spanish women during the country's transition from a dictatorship to a democracy. Because it is one of Pombo's more recent novels, few critical analyses of it have been published. In the only detailed study to date, Weaver stresses the roles that literature and popular culture play in the novel.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, by focusing on the protagonist Celia Cecilia as a character produced and controlled by relations of power, I will examine not only how she negotiates, resists, and inverts the forces that have previously restrained her, but also how she represents the women of Spain engaged in similar negotiations during the dictatorship, the transition, and the new democracy. Recognizing her position of marginality as an ex-wife and a former secretary, Celia Cecilia engages those around her in a power struggle that not only challenges her marginal status but also alters the dynamics of her relationships. After discovering the control she has over others as they search for the last-will-and-testament of her ex-employer, she shifts from a position of a dominated, abandoned woman to one who uses her newly found knowledge to manipulate those around her and reverse her professional and social status.



As a 50-something-divorced female, the protagonist represents a generation of women marginalized at multiple levels. Her evolution from a female nonentity to a woman of substance mirrors that of Spanish women of her generation and also of Spain itself as it moved from a marginalizing dictatorship to a successful democracy. In order to carve a niche for herself in 1990s Spain, Celia Cecilia struggles to free herself from a past that includes a first marriage influenced by an overpowering husband and Francoist ideology, a professional relationship dominated by a male employer, and an infatuation with a powerful television personality. In this process of redefinition, she liberates herself from the dominance of the three men whose ideologies have controlled her, and she embarks upon a journey of self-discovery. The women of Spain followed a similar path as their motherland experienced its political metamorphosis and struggled to free itself from its Francoist past. As Celia Cecilia inverts her dominated position and takes control of her own life, she maneuvers herself away from the periphery and more toward the center, poised to become a twenty-first century Spanish woman. This chapter not only examines how Celia Cecilia breaks free of the traditional power structures that have marginalized her and renegotiates her position in 1990s Spanish society, but also draws parallels between her struggle and that of the women of Spain as their country searched for legitimization during the transition from dictatorship to democracy.

The presence of a woman such as Celia Cecilia continues Pombo's pattern of featuring marginalized individuals as his protagonists. Spain has historically valued and yet excluded its women. Spanish women have played vital roles in the

development of their country, but they have only recently approached social and political equality. Even though women have governed the country on a number of occasions and have been considered vital to the family structure and therefore essential to the economic growth of Spain, their participation in formal institutional politics was almost non-existent before the period 1931-36 and the more recent transition to democracy. Until the Second Republic, women could neither vote nor hold office. Great strides were made in women's rights under the democracy of 1931-36, but conditions reversed themselves under the Franco Regime. Though the fascist state viewed women as its indispensable partner in nation building and put in place institutions and laws "to officiate women's duties as mothers and daughters of the fatherland" (Morcillo Gómez 51), women were excluded from political discourse and the public sphere.<sup>2</sup> In choosing a woman of the Franco generation as the protagonist for his seventh novel, Pombo gives voice to a character raised under the exclusionary politics of the dictatorship and banished from the post-transition mainstream because of her gender, her age, and her marital status.

To understand Celia Cecilia Villalobo, one must first situate her within the context of her gendered past and present. As suggested above, women have existed on the margins of Spain's traditional, patriarchal society for centuries. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Spanish women were almost invisible in the classic public arenas of work and politics, and few openly challenged their exclusion (Enders and Radcliff 3). In Spain, as in other European countries during the nineteenth century, a web of institutions, laws, values, and customs dictated the

behavior for each sex. This web, according to Enders and Radcliff, was shaped by the dominant ideology of separate spheres, which posited complementary missions for men and women.<sup>3</sup> Spain's version of this new gender ideology excluded women from participating in social and political changes: "As the new language of liberalism with its rhetoric of individual citizenship and liberty took hold, a parallel language of exceptionalism emerged to explain why certain groups, including women, did not qualify for citizenship" (19). For women, the explanation was the division of the world into public and private spheres, which cast the male in the public and political arena and relegated the female to the private domain of domesticity. According to Enders and Radcliff, "by the mid-nineteenth century, the dualistic world of separate spheres constituted the official framework for assignment of woman's status and proper function, and its residual impact remains an important constituent of gender roles to the present day" (19). Although adopted by other European countries, the ideology of separate spheres molded itself uniquely into Spanish society. Enders and Radcliff trace Spain's affinity for the concept to its historical penchant for rigid dualisms:

In simple terms, the binary opposition between domestic and public, female and male fed into and off of the larger discourse of binary opposition that dominated Spanish political culture from the Napoleonic invasion (1808-1814) to the recent transition to democracy (1975-1878). [. . .] The black and white world of Spanish political discourse revolved around the opposition between "right" and "left,"

or traditionalists and modernizers. While this struggle existed to some extent throughout the industrialized world, in Spain it took an especially acute form, summed up in the common image of the “two Spains.” (20)

In a battle that began in the nineteenth century, the Church-dominated traditionalists labeled the secular-modernist opposition as anti-Spanish, laying the base for what eventually resulted in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). This political battle between traditionalists and modernists carried over into gender issues in the guise of the historical view of women’s domesticity as part of the country’s national identity in opposition to the modern version of Spain’s future tied to the woman as a public figure.

The separate spheres exemplified by the “two Spains” image continued to play well under the almost-forty years of the Franco regime. Viewing the woman’s patriotic role as that of domestic guardian of home and hearth, any reference to a modern or public woman was equated with disorder and decadence, “the quintessence of anti-Spain” (Enders and Radcliff 20). Under the influence of this ideology, which emphasized the woman’s role as wife, mother, and guardian and excluded her from participation in the public sphere, Celia Cecilia Villalobo spent her formative years. The barriers constructed by these gender attitudes contributed to the “ex-centric” position not only of the protagonist, but also of all Spanish women coming of age under the dictatorship.

Although the boundaries between center and margin became more fluid in the waning years of the dictatorship, the ideological influences did not disappear with the end of the Franco regime. In spite of the continuing campaign to keep women at home, economic changes forced many into the labor market in the 1960s and 1970s, where the impact of the separate spheres ideology still influenced the wages, the job-security, and the marginal professional status of women (Enders and Radcliff 127):

As in any society, work was of great significance in defining power and status. By de-legitimizing or denying the role of women in extra-domestic work while correspondingly stressing their domestic duties, dominant ideas underpinned a rigid gender hierarchy and acted as strong constraint on female participation in the public arena. Such ideas both reflected and powerfully shaped attitudes about women by outlining an ideal in which women had no occupational identity and took their status solely from men, as fathers, husbands or brothers, and were subordinated to them in the public affairs of society. (175)

As a young wife in Spain in the 1960s and 1970s, Celia Cecilia represents the generation of Spanish women who surrendered their occupational identities and subordinated themselves to men because of social pressures. From their position at the margins, their roles as women confined them to the female sphere and thus excluded them from any position of power.

The status of women continues to change as Spain enters the twenty-first century. According to Anny Brooksbank Jones, since the start of the economic

recuperation in 1985, female presence across all sectors of the workforce has grown, with some even enjoying job stability and working conditions comparable to their male counterparts. Many, however, enjoy no such thing. These women, forced to seek employment in the “black economy” because of socio-economic instability, have little job security or hope of career development or status (386). As roles for women shift from home to work and from private to public, historical tensions between the traditionalist versus the modern value structures again bubble to the surface. Jones sees these conflicts played out both in the workplace and at home:

While formal education remains a function of the state, the broader socialization of the young—for conditions which can no longer be predicted with any certainty—is increasingly the responsibility not of the school or the Church but of parents who may be divorced, separated, unmarried, and/or have major extradomestic commitments. Their experience of the conflicting hours, time-scales, and [. . .] priorities of home and workplace, [. . .] has been accompanied in many younger women by an increased sensitivity to unequal social relations [. . .]. (387)

These unequal social relations experienced by women of the 1990s also affect the female characters in *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo*. In the context of social and economic restructuring, Celia Cecilia, a traditionally marginalized woman, faces an unknown future as she seeks stability in an uncertain world where the playing field has yet to be equalized for males and females.

The woman's struggle for equality is by no means unique to Spain. The cultural traditions that fostered the inequality, however, have made the battle more difficult. Rosa Montero writes that the social and cultural advances gained by women in Europe since World War II have been compressed into the last two decades in Spain, creating a special situation:

First as we have seen with regard to women entering employment, there are two Spains: the 50+ group (male and female) tends to have much more traditional values and life-styles. Given this it is not surprising that, overall, Spain has the lowest figures for men helping with the housework of any country in the EC: 8 out of every 10 men make no contribution whatsoever [ . . . ] while Spanish women going out to work spend an average of three extra hours a day on housework.

(382)

Once again, the concept of two Spains presents itself. Both Álvaro Pombo and Celia Cecilia Villalobo belong to the 50+ group that Montero describes. A study of how his protagonist is not only influenced by her past, but also adapts to her present, reveals that Pombo has created a marginalized character who can be seen as a metaphor for Spanish women of her generation who, after existing for so long on the periphery, are now carving a new niche for themselves more toward the center of the power structure in today's Spain.

Middle-aged Celia Cecilia is not Pombo's first female protagonist, nor is she the first of his characters to tell her own story. Her journey of self-discovery follows

what Weaver describes as a Pomboian pattern of a search for legitimization and a fight to transcend the necessity of this legitimization (61). What makes Celia Cecilia unique among Pombo's personalities is the manner in which she arrives at her destination and, according to Weaver, the way she juxtaposes reality and fantasy, just as Pombo juxtaposes television and literature as the media that his protagonist employs in her storytelling.<sup>4</sup> As already noted, a recurring theme in Pombo's novels is a search for substance on the part of the protagonist.<sup>5</sup> What moves Celia Cecilia along in her search, however, is a unique innocence that endears her to the reader at the same time that it highlights the sadness of her existence. Her constant dialogue establishes a relationship that inspires humor, sympathy and, eventually, respect from the reader, those around her, and ultimately herself. Gaining her voice gradually, Celia Cecilia speaks for all Spanish women who lived voiceless lives during the Francoist dictatorship, fought for self-expression during the transition, and found themselves near the end of their struggle in the new democracy.

Celia Cecilia begins her story with a description of the events of the recent past that include her appearance on the television show of the famous Jesús Hermida, an appearance that came as the result of the death of her former employer, Julián Zabala, a well-known writer. Mixing the present with flashbacks of life with her "ex" and with her employer, the protagonist takes the reader through the months that follow the television appearance, a time in which she must decide who she is and who she will become. Her "ex," Esteban, along with her employer's former lover, Bea Zaldivar, pressure Celia about the existence of Julián's last-will-and-testament.



Although at first ignorant of the will's existence, she eventually discovers it in his desk. As she struggles with her decision to make public this will, she also labors with the information provided by Hermida on his program that her relationship with Julián might have been more personal than she was willing to admit. An unexpected encounter with Julián's illegitimate daughter, Luz, further confuses the protagonist, as Luz tells her that Julián had talked about marrying his secretary. When Celia Cecilia finds the will, she is paralyzed by the fear that revealing its contents will either verify or negate the new image she has created of her relationship with her now-deceased employer. Motivated by the disdain she feels that others hold for her, she hides the fact that she has discovered the much-sought-after testament. After much soul-searching, she recognizes that her possession of the will gives her the power she needs to alter her marginalized position, and she decides to take action. Finally trusting in Luz's friendship, she returns to Jesús Hermida's television program to make public the testament and resolve the confusion. In the document, Julián does indeed acknowledge that Luz is his daughter and that Celia Cecilia is his much-valued secretary and beneficiary of a portion of his estate. The novel ends with her recognition that, after allowing herself to be controlled by other forces for so long, she now has the power and the knowledge to move ahead with a new life.

Celia Cecilia personifies Foucault's disciplined individual. She is subject to the disciplinary mechanisms that have shaped her at the same time that she is the object of those same mechanisms. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the individual as a reality fabricated by the power of discipline: "Discipline 'makes'

individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (170). As a subject of the dictatorship during her formative years, Celia Cecilia is now an object fabricated by the discipline of the Franco regime. Raised under the disciplinary power of fascism with an attitude of submission and subordination, she participates in life as a marginalized, or an abject being.<sup>6</sup> All of her relationships are based on the dominator/dominated paradigm of her past. In her search for substance, she must confront the forces that control her: the disciplinary power of the dictatorship, represented by her ex-husband Esteban and the wealthy Bea Zaldivar; the discursive power of the written word in the writings of Julián; and the mesmerizing power of the mass media in the personality of Jesús Hermida. In equalizing these unequal power relations, she repositions herself from object to subject, from the periphery of their world to the center of hers. The confrontations are at times subtle and at times obvious. In her struggle, the strengths and weaknesses of her character and her actions and reactions can be understood better by an examination of some of the forces that molded Celia Cecilia’s unique system of beliefs.

By giving voice to Celia Cecilia, Pombo allows the first generation born after the end of the Spanish Civil War to speak. In her recounting of recent events, the protagonist tells the reader that she is fifty-five years old, making her date of birth around 1940. Both she and Pombo (1939) would have been children during the postwar years, a time of restriction and rationing according to Carmen Martín Gaité in *Usos amorosos de la postguerra*:

La propaganda oficial, encargada de hacer acatar las normas de conducta que al Gobierno y a la Iglesia le parecían convenientes para sacar adelante aquel período de convalecencia, insistía en los peligros de entregarse a cualquier exceso o derroche. Y desde los pulpitos, la prensa, la radio y las aulas de la *Sección Femenina* se predicaba la moderación. (13)

The first ten years of Celia Cecilia's life would have been spent under this atmosphere of moderation, which was a euphemism for resignation and conformity. The controlling forces of the Franco regime assured conformity by maintaining order and discipline within the population and creating what Foucault describes as a "micro-economy of perpetual penalty":

What we have here is a transposition of the system of indulgences. And by the play of this quantification, this circulation of awards and debits, thanks to the continuous calculation of plus and minus points, the disciplinary apparatuses hierarchized the "good" and the "bad" subjects in relation to one another. (181)

For Celia Cecilia, this attitude manifests itself in a persistent self-deprecation ("Yo no soy nada especial"), a never-ending habit of second-guessing, and an almost paralyzing hesitancy to make any sudden decisions or rash moves. By burying herself in two worlds, that of her work and that of her television, she avoided being compared to others and found wanting.

The chief function of a disciplinary power, according to Foucault, is to train.

The educational system in Franco's Spain became the instrument by which the regime perpetuated its patriarchal agenda. As a teenager, Celia Cecilia's training would have come under the direction of the *Sección Femenina*, an organization of the government created by the Falange party during the civil war and assigned the task of "forming the women of Spain." According to Morcillo Gómez:

[ . . . ] education came to serve the forces of unity and uniformity. It was the process by which the individual related to the concept of nation. Through the promotion of a singular language, history and religion, the Francoist education system inculcated, on a grand scale, a sense of individual duty to the National-Catholic agenda. Duty, for its part, was designed differently for men and women. The official arbiters of female duties, the Catholic church and the women's section of the Falange (the *Sección Femenina*) dictated that women were to serve the *patria* with abnegation through dedication of the self to the common good. (52)

The new woman of postwar Spain trained by this educational system would reflect the attitude of the male government and of the leader of the *Sección Femenina*, Pilar Primo de Rivera. The new woman would not be a "modern woman." She would not negate her femininity, nor avoid maternity, and she would never compromise the virility of her spouse by acting as his good friend, but rather "sería una mujer de su tiempo, feliz en la maternidad, educando los hijos, demostrando un interés femenino por los asuntos de su marido y proporcionándole un refugio tranquilo contra los

azares de la vida pública; en pocas palabras, ‘limpiamente moderna’” (Scanlon 324).

The dissemination of this attitude of submission and subordination was controlled by the *Sección Femenina*, and a government decree was issued that made domestic science, taught by the *Sección Femenina*, a required class for all Spanish girls. By 1950 it also controlled the physical education in all the primary and secondary schools and all the teaching institutions of the country (Scanlon 326). As a part of her education, a young girl was also required to complete a semester of social service, in which she not only took intensive courses in domestic science, pediatrics, religion, and political formation, but also participated in active service in one of the institutions belonging to the *Sección Femenina*. Martín Gaité describes the essence of the organization: “el verdadero poder de aquella organización se ejercía a través del famoso Servicio Social, inesquivable requisito para obtener trabajo y cuya obligación comprendía a todas las mujeres solteras o viudas sin hijos desde los 17 a los 35 años”(59).

In addition, the *Sección Femenina* sent its members into the countryside to provide medical assistance and into the factories to promote the Falangist ideology. According to Geraldine Scanlon, it launched a tremendous propaganda campaign by means of the press and radio in order to promote its concept of the Spanish woman. Scanlon says: “Esta red de actividades, combinada con el control de la educación doméstica obligatoria en las escuelas y del Servicio Social, aseguraba que la mayoría de las chicas españolas pasaran por las manos de la *Sección Femenina*” (326). As a teenager in the 1950s, Celia Cecilia Villalobo indeed would have passed through the

hands of this ideological instrument and very likely would have become a product of its intense propaganda campaign.

One of the principal tasks of the *Sección Femenina* during the 1940s and 1950s, the years of Celia Cecilia's formation, was to discredit the concept of feminism. To accomplish this task, the propaganda of the time indoctrinated the women in the traditional feminine virtues, including sacrifice, submission and obedience, glorifying the home, and exalting the traditional mission of the woman as "mujer de su casa"(331). Celia Cecilia unwittingly displays these government-promoted virtues in the first paragraph of the novel as she describes how she quit her job for the sake of her husband. Scanlon describes this sense of sacrifice as one of the most important of the traditional virtues of the Spanish woman, based on the propaganda of the time:

Como la mujer era por naturaleza "más paciente, más abnegada y más amante", podía salvar fácilmente al hombre de sus propios defectos y así asegurar la felicidad de la familia adaptándose al modo de vida de él. El sufrimiento constante y el sacrificio eran "un tributo obligado" que exigía la vida a las mujeres y que siempre estaría compensado por "una felicidad mayor, más completa y permanente". (333)

Celia Cecilia reflects the above attitude as she describes her "ex," her "compañero sentimental": "Hasta el empleo mío lo dejé por él, para no llevarle la contraria en lo de que las mujeres trabajamos por castrar a los hombres hoy en día . . . En fin, yo no soy nada especial, soy una buena secretaria, *era* buena secretaria cuando le dejé todo

por Esteban, por no oírle, por demostrarle a las claras que le amaba” (9). As a disciplined individual, Celia Cecilia sacrificed her job for her husband, as would any “real” Spanish woman. Her marriage to Esteban mirrored the controlling ideology of the *Sección Femenina*. When he re-enters her life twelve years after their divorce, Celia Cecilia faces conflicting emotions. The rules for their new relationship cannot be those of their past. Her final rebuff of him signals a reversal of the indoctrinated dominator/dominated paradigm of the dictatorship as Celia Cecilia, the object, seizes control.

Formed by the same patriarchal ideology and reflecting the indoctrinated belief in male superiority and female abnegation, Celia Cecilia’s “ex” presumes an ability, even a duty, to control her. Still thinking his former wife to be compliant and submissive, he walks back into her life to press her for information about her deceased employer’s will:

Y no pongas esa cara y no lo niegues, lo que te dije el otro día lo mantengo: tú sabes más, mucho más de lo que dices, lo malo es que no sabes qué hacer con lo que sabes. Tienes la pólvora pero te falta mecha y fuego . . . Por ejemplo, sé de buena tinta que el egregio no murió *ab intestato*, sin testamento, según dicen. (57)

He mistakenly believes that his previous knowledge of Celia Cecilia gives him power over her. His tone, which immediately puts his ex-wife on the defense, continues throughout his series of harassing visits, clearly illustrating his disparaging patronization. In the game of power, each jockeying for the dominant position,

Esteban and Celia Cecilia engage in a battle for control. She becomes stronger in her determination to discover his motives and resist his demands while what he perceives as a pretended innocence in her responses brings out the worst in him:

Como comprenderás, Celia, yo a ti te conozco mejor de lo que tú te conoces a ti misma: no es que seas una lumbrera, no tienes los más mínimos estudios, excepción hecha del secretariado, pero tienes, lo reconozco, un recoveco a veces y un no dar el brazo a torcer para salirte con la tuya sin soltar prenda ninguna, que es un lujo, Celia, que cada vez que te me pones como ahora, con ese recoveco de enigmática, chata, te daría un bufetón. Voy a preguntarte solamente una pregunta, contesta sí o no, ¿a que sabías lo del testamento? (90-91)

His attitude with her rekindles her resentment for him, and she lies to him. As she tells him she does know about the will, however, she discovers that this lie invokes a response in him that gives her the upper hand. The knowledge of the importance of the will that she gains from Esteban, nevertheless, forces her to search for it even though she fears that the discovery of the testament will bring with it the revelation that she had no special place in Julián's life. Esteban's condescending treatment catapults Celia Cecilia into action. Because, as Foucault ascertains, relations of power are fluid, her "ex" could not maintain his dominant position in his relationship with Celia, and his continued harassment of her offers the protagonist her first opportunity for resistance.

After another round of interrogation by Esteban, Celia Cecilia discovers that



he knows Bea Zaldivar, former lover of Julián. She is the reason behind his inquiries. Everyone but Celia wants to know the contents of the last-will-and-testament, and everyone suspects her of secretly possessing it. Suddenly Bea and Celia Cecilia's "ex" merge into one entity, that of the dominator. And as with Foucault's micro-physics of power, Celia Cecilia must resist their domination. Foucault writes:

In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions -- an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. (*Discipline 26-27*)

Both Esteban and Bea Zaldivar represent authority to Celia Cecilia, the former as her ex-husband and the latter as a member of the intellectual upper class. Their strategic positions have allowed them power over others, but she chooses to be subject to that power no longer, and she struggles to resist its grip. During yet another interrogation by Bea concerning the whereabouts of the testament, Celia Cecilia refuses to be intimidated by threats and takes control. She tells Bea and others in the room: "Ya lo he dicho. No lo sé, ni me importa lo más mínimo, y demás se me hace tarde, así que adiós"; Y salí derecha de la sala, pasillo adelante hasta el vestíbulo. Abrí la puerta de

la entrada, salí, la cerré, encendí la luz del descansillo y llamé al ascensor” (110). In her attempt to overthrow this “micropower,” she inverts the power relations and unleashes a series of events that alter the lives of everyone involved. As she frees herself from the dominance of this authority, Celia Cecilia takes her first step from subservience toward liberation.

Throughout the novel, the protagonist struggles against the role that her “ex” consistently expects her to play. Twelve years after their divorce, Celia Cecilia’s attitude toward Esteban appears to reflect male-female relationships of the 1990s more than those of the dictatorship. She doesn’t allow him to play psychological games with her, and she analyzes their respective roles in very realistic terms. His pretended concern for her well-being only makes Celia distrust his motives. She admits that he knows her well, but refuses to submit to his attempts to control her:

Mi “ex” se permitía hablar de mí como si nada hubiese ocurrido en todos estos años, como si tuviese algún derecho . . . al mismo tiempo, yo me veía obligada a reconocer que una parte al menos de lo que decía era verdad [. . .]. El tiempo que había transcurrido entre el divorcio y ahora, me impedía considerar a mi “ex” como un amigo o como un confidente, pero la relación que tuvimos también me impedía considerarle como lo contrario: mi “ex” estaba justo en todas partes y en ninguna, en el centro y al margen de mi torbellino emocional. (56)

With this analysis, Celia Cecilia shows an ability to think independently, an ability that improves throughout the novel. The first evidence of her emergence from her

dependence on others surfaces when she gathers the strength to ask her “ex” to leave her apartment after one of his uninvited interrogational visits. As Esteban condescendingly analyzes Celia Cecilia, she remembers the power he used to have over her, and she rejects it now:

Me acordé que al oírlo hablar como ahora hablaba, siempre había sentido una misma sensación de desesperación y sedación . [ . . . ] No sé dónde repentinamente saqué energía suficiente para echarle: tal vez fue el recuerdo de Julián y el asco que me daba ver a aquel desaprensivo que me había hecho sudar tinta años atrás, metiendo la nariz en mis cosas. (57)

In spite of her appearance of weakness and hesitation in previous decision-making moments, this display of strength gives further evidence of the beginning of Celia Cecilia’s independence, a direct rejection of the ideology of her youth. Her relationship with her ex-husband has changed from subservience to superiority, the first step in her journey toward liberation.

The dominator/dominated paradigm that controlled both Celia and her “ex” wielded its iron fist over the whole of Spanish society during the years of the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975). But just as Celia’s life with Esteban mirrored Spain’s relationship with its dictator, her new life without him after their divorce parallels that of Spain’s process of redefinition following the *generalísimo*’s death in November of 1975. Under the leadership of Franco’s hand-picked successor Juan Carlos, the country embarked on its journey toward democracy. While experts disagree on dates,

all agree that the period of change known as the transition began in earnest with Franco's death. As leaders of the various factions jockeyed for positions within the new government, the citizens eyed the political machinations with suspicion. They warily looked toward the future with one eye on the past, anxious for the dream of democracy to become a reality while fearing the return of fascism. The transition was not an easy one. After his first government lasted only six months, King Juan Carlos appointed Adolfo Suárez as the new prime minister in 1976. Suárez began the process that resulted in democratic elections in 1977 and a new democratic constitution in 1978. After a failed military coup on February 23, 1981, King Juan Carlos assured the Spanish people that "the Crown would not tolerate any attempts which aimed at interrupting by force the democratic process determined by the Constitution and approved by the Spanish people by means of a referendum" (Gilmour 244). According to Montero, the failure of this coup, which came to be known as "*el 23-F*," marked the end of the transition. Carr and others link the 1982 elections as the definitive end of the process:

The widespread indignation caused by the attempted coup and the gradual disintegration of the disparate elements that make up Suárez's party of the transition led to the spectacular victory of the Socialist party, the PSOE, in the elections of 1982. The PSOE held power, with steadily diminishing electoral support, for the next fourteen years. For all its subsequent failures, the Socialist government oversaw the consolidation of Spanish democracy, the full establishment of regional

autonomy, the incorporation of Spain into NATO and the European Community, and the introduction of a range of crucial social reforms.

(278)

Celia Cecilia, like all Spanish women, played no role in the transition. While the new constitution legalized divorce, women's position in society remained marginalized. Although given the right to vote, women were still denied agency in the public sphere (Alexander 368). After obtaining a now-legal divorce from her husband, Celia Cecilia reentered the workforce to support herself. As a working woman in post-Franco Spain, she had more freedoms than she did in her life with her "ex." In spite of her progress, however, she willingly appears to cede most of the ground she had gained as she falls into the comfortable routine of the traditional gender roles with her new employer, Julián.

After successfully resisting her first husband's attempts to control her, Celia Cecilia next must gain her independence from the power wielded by her employer, the now-deceased writer Julián. For Celia Cecilia, this relationship is more difficult to alter because it is more difficult to define. As a famous author in the 1980s and 1990s, Julián represents the Spanish intellectual of the transition. His voice represents the voice of authority, but with the newly found freedoms and the confusion in Celia Cecilia's life after her divorce, Julián's control is subtle and more seductive. He appeals to her because his superior status as an intellectual male plays perfectly against her inferior status as female. Throughout the novel, the protagonist engages in self-deprecating monologues that reflect the childhood governmental indoctrination

of male superiority and female submission. This propaganda machine of the *Sección Femenina* describes the woman as preferring to be dominated, with a marvelous capacity to adapt to her environment because she is totally deficient in creative powers. According to Scanlon, “la mujer duda poco, como duda poco el río o el tronco del árbol sobre la dirección que ha de tomar. Es débil por naturaleza y, consecuentemente, está casi siempre en una posición de sumisión [. . .]” (332). And although the attitude toward women began to change gradually in the 1960s, the years of Celia Cecilia’s marriage to Esteban, the basic impression of inferiority controls her thought processes throughout the transition and into the new democracy.

As Celia Cecilia forms her life as secretary to Julián, she automatically falls into this pattern of submission. From her first day of work, she admits feeling overwhelmed: “Los primeros meses es que no me atrevía ni a moverme de la silla, ni a mirarle, ni a pedir un vaso de agua, ni a tener siquiera sed. Se me solía quedar un pie dormido, mejor dicho: toda la pierna y hasta el muslo, por no cambiar de posición” (10). She is unaware of how she consistently reflects the ideology of the dictatorship, but this attitude comes to the surface again when she relates a conversation with Julián. “Menos mal, Julián, que hablo poco con usted. Usted es quien habla y yo me limito a tomar nota. Si me oyera hablar a mí, sin miramientos, tal como hablo, sin pensar nunca en ningún fin, a bulto, como mínimo me echaba usted de casa, me quedaba sin empleo, yo y bastante gente que conozco. ¡Las mujeres todas hablan como yo!” (31). The women talk, the men think. The men dictate, the woman transcribe their dictation:

Y es que Julián y yo sé cómo hacía que saboreaba las palabras, él y yo, cada frase, por muy larga o por muy rara o por muy corta o por muy sosa o por muy repleta hasta los topes que estuviese de subordinadas de subordinadas de subordinadas, siempre tenía un fuerte sabor a lo que quería Julián decir, que iba desde Dios y los maizales hasta el sabor del cocido de garbanzos o el del agua. (44)

As secretary to Julián, Celia Cecilia served as the ultimate receptor, as the perfect subordinate to his dominance, as the ideal product of all the regime's ideologies, yet with a difference. In their relationship, as in their shared discourse, Julián clearly maintained a position of power over Celia Cecilia; however, theirs was a mutual interaction from which both benefited. Only at his death did she discover the extent of his control over her and her willingness to be dominated. Developing during and at the same time representing Spain's period of transition, the relationship between Celia Cecilia and Julián evolved into a combination of the old and the new.

Living by herself, independent of a spouse's mandates, but working for Julián, she unconsciously adds the traditional role of caretaker to her contemporary job as secretary. In her subordinate position, Celia Cecilia not only "wrote all his books," but she also converted the area in which they worked into a home, unconsciously performing her indoctrinated duty as a "real" Spanish woman to protect and nurture the home and family, in this case Julián and his apartment. Luz explains what Celia Cecilia is incapable of expressing:

[. . .] tú en cambio, Celia, eres básicamente una mujer de espacios, tú

eres, Celia, lugarera y dejas piedrecitas por los sitios, todo el sitio de Julián es tuyo y no te lo puede negar nadie, la mutua compañía que os hicisteis fue un lugarcito, un hogarcito -- quién lo pillara, digan lo que digan -- que abres y cierras y conoces sólo tú . . . no sé si me explico . . . (45)

Celia Cecilia's education under the direction of the *Sección Femenina* manifested itself in her relationship with Julián in which she treated him as the superior male (although the relationship was platonic), his apartment/office as her own home, and her work for him as a "tarea de la casa" (Scanlon 331). She admits to herself: "me di cuenta del bienestar que sentía entonces de ser yo la subordinada o dependienta y Julián el centro de la luz o de la temperatura o de la claridad del aire y la serenidad de los folios para ir pasando todo a limpio"(63). Once again, in spite of the freedoms she had gained as a woman under the transformation to democracy, she fell back on old patterns in her new relationships. Although women had made cultural and political advances, all parties still found it difficult to shed the past completely. It is no wonder that she felt like his widow at his death, because she had made him her life: "me había dejado sola en este mundo y aquejada, encima, de algo mucho peor que la viudedad de nones, de soltera y boba, todo en uno" (43). Now she must face her life without Julián, without her "hogar" and her "tarea de la casa." The long-sought freedom that accompanied the new democracy left many women vulnerable because their years of submission did not prepare them for their new lives as decision makers, bread winners, and contributing members of the new political order.



Celia Cecilia's inferior status is not only represented in her gender, but also in her infatuation with mass culture, especially television, in contrast to the refined culture of Julián's literature. According to Weaver, this juxtaposition is deliberate on the part of Pombo:

Frente a la creciente amenaza de la extinción de la novela a causa de los medios telecomunicativos, lo que Álvaro Pombo logra es encontrar, precisamente en esta industria, materia novelable. De esta manera, en *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo* se libera una batalla entre la cultura refinada, representada en el legado literario de Julián Zabala, y la cultura popular, presente en el submundo que aflora en la teleadicción de Celia Cecilia Villalobo. (45)

The protagonist finds solace in the world of television when she is not absorbed in the literary activities of her employer. She was not alone in this tendency. With the 1978 Constitution came freedom of the press, radio, and television. As government control loosened, foreign investment increased, which in turn forced changes in the regulations of the communications industry. Television entered Spanish homes and, as with Celia Cecilia, became a part of everyone's life. According to Hooper, the Spanish are a nation of TV addicts:

Almost every home in Spain has a television set--even those which lack other, more useful amenities [. . .]. In 1989, according to a study by the research department of state-owned TV, the proportion of the population over the age of fourteen that watched television on a

normal day was 85 per cent in summer and 87 per cent in winter. The average length of time Spaniards spent watching TV was almost three and a half hours a day—and only fifteen minutes less in summer than in winter. (307)

Celia Cecilia found her passion in television. In spite of spending her working hours taking his dictation, she seldom absorbed Julián's words, let alone entered his literary world, although he controlled her waking hours by the power of his discourse. Even though his comments and opinions dominated her memories of him, only when seeking validation of Hermida's statement that she was her employer's muse did she take note of his writing. Written in his own hand, filed in notebooks she had never seen entitled "Celia, lo que dice" and "Celia Cecilia, lo que dice,"<sup>7</sup> she discovers his attempts to incorporate her into his world. In his own difficult to decipher handwriting, she reads:

[. . .] la fascinación de Celia Cecilia, desde el primer día hasta la fecha, ha residido sobre todo en eso, en lo que dice, en lo que cuenta sin darse cuenta que desde hace ya bastante tiempo mis dictados sólo son intercalados para dar pie a que Celia Cecilia cuente lo que cuenta: en resumidas cuentas, los títulos o el título da igual, porque nada es publicable, no tengo nada que añadir a lo que ya he publicado, ni inéditos ni póstumos. La voz de Celia Cecilia, que llenaba alegremente, poéticamente todo el tiempo de escribir, no consta en acta, es sólo una pobre, viva voz que me acompañará hasta que me

muera . . . (87)

Although their professional relationship is based on Julián's dictation and Celia Cecilia's silent transcription, it is her voice that inspires him. To her, these words make clear Hermida's assertion that she was, indeed, Julián's muse. Foucault maintains that the turning of real lives into writing functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection. By writing her as his object of discourse, Julián simultaneously exercises his power over her and cedes that power to her, thus converting her from object to subject. It is, however, Celia Cecilia as the object who must interpret the truth of that discourse.

In her self-analysis, Celia Cecilia realizes that she allowed Julián to control her life, a control he exercised through words, through what he said as much as what he failed to say. The truth is that she feared that the testament of Julián would reveal that she meant nothing to him, that his last words would negate the meaning of her life. Until the end, Julián exercised control. Ultimately, her fears were not realized. In fact, her relationship with Julián was validated by his last-will-and-testament:

[ . . . ] se vio la claridad, su verdadera voluntad, lo que Julián quería sin reservas: reconocer que Luz era hija suya, y por lo tanto, su legítima heredera: reconocirme también a mí como quien soy, como quien fui fielmente, sin más complicaciones, su secretaria personal, mediante el tercio de libre disposición, dejándome encima mejorada con el piso de Culler, que ahora es mío. (171)

Celia Cecilia was finally able to put her relationship with Julián into perspective, thus

freeing her from his dominance. The knowledge she gained through the revelation of his testament allowed her to affirm her own position of power, better positioning herself to negotiate her own future.

Interpreting the truth does not come easy for Celia Cecilia. Influenced by Julián's writing, Hermida's suggestions, Esteban's and Bea's insinuations, and Luz's revelations, she struggles to separate reality from fiction. Wrestling with the forces of conscience still influenced by the disciplinary power of her past, she resists her natural tendency to assume the subordinate position and judge herself according to the rigid codes of right/wrong, good/evil, selfish/selfless. Her "ex" accuses her of wanting revenge, an accusation that leads Celia to an examination of her conscience. As she soaks in the bathtub to relieve her stress, she has what could be seen as a conversation with her "other" as she analyzes her behavior: "Era como si me hubiese vuelto yo mi doble, como si me hubiese desdoblado en dos, una buena y otra mala, o, por lo menos, regular" (115). She imagined herself as another person, a woman with no cares or worries. Then she saw her reflection in the mirror and she was forced to face the truth. But what was that truth?:

Me miré al espejo y me reí, parecía un perro de aguas con un quiqui . . .  
 . A partir de ahora, hay que tenerme en cuenta, muy en cuenta. A partir de ahora, mi voluntad se tendrá en cuenta. Y mi voluntad es distinta de la suya . . . ¡Entonces sí que de verdad vi todo claro! ¡Con razón me dividí en dos partes, una buena y otra mala! La Celia Cecilia aquella del moño y las toallas y los espejos y las suites y los secretos y los

disimulos y las voluntades, era una Celia Cecilia que quería vengarse.

¿Era eso la verdad? (117)

Which Celia Cecilia would take control, the good one or bad one? And what was the truth? The words contained in the testament of Julián held a power over Celia that she was unable to resist. Yet she was paralyzed by fear to open the envelope. His inscription of her as object of his discourse allowed him to control her even from the grave. Until she interpreted his writing, she could not invert the subject/object position to which she had been relegated. The revelation of the testament's contents would allow her to wrest herself from his control and face the truth of her own future. Along with the freedom that the new democracy brought to the women of Spain came added responsibilities and hidden conflicts. Forced to acknowledge both the good and the bad reflected in her new image, the 1990s woman, like Celia Cecilia, was forced to separate her true identity from her reflection as she repositioned herself as subject in the power paradigm.

With the economic changes that began in Spain in the 1960s, the attitude toward women also changed, but the controlling ideology of the government remained. The young people of the 1960s and 1970s considered the mention of war a boring nuisance. Women began to demand equal rights, and more opportunities developed in the work force. The *Sección Femenina* began to recognize the problems of the working woman, and in 1970, even though it continued to emphasize the domestic roles of the woman, the agency created a new section for “the formation of and promotion of the woman” (Scanlon 350). Celia Cecilia would have witnessed

these changes as a safely married woman in the 1970s, but would have to face their consequences as a divorced woman in the 1980s. In reality, the protagonist did not face the changes until Julián's death, when she found herself alone in a world with different values and realities. As she grieves for Julián, she voices her fears:

[. . .] todo era igual que cada día y yo también, sólo que yo no sabía qué hacer ni si sería o no capaz --seguramente no-- de seguir y seguir viviendo y ser feliz como había sido, sin casi darme cuenta, trabajando con Julián. Entonces pensé --con el detenimiento de quien repite una jaculatoria--: Tengo que hacer a partir de este mismo instante una acción, muchísimas acciones . . . si me quedo quieta, voy a perder todo del todo . . . (64)

The fear of losing everything, of being fifty-five and alone with nothing, paralyzed Celia Cecilia to inaction. Her friendship with the young and vibrant Luz forces her to act and helps her face her fears about the new world.

Celia Cecilia's friendship with Julián's daughter Luz also highlights the contrast between the protagonist as a product of postwar Spain and as a potential person of the 1990s. With Luz, she finds herself confronting reality. Luz is a child of today's Spain. She is Spain's public woman: she is a professional, she is outspoken, she has confidence in herself. Celia Cecilia's relationship with her parallels not only the protagonist's own growth process, but that of the new democracy as well. Her first meeting with Luz is unsettling as she struggles to identify the reasons for her discomfort. Luz claims to know her well, to be able to read her thoughts. Celia

Cecilia intuitively trusts this young woman, but she will not allow herself to trust completely. Her lack of confidence controls her actions. She thinks to herself, “Me pareció de verdad muy lista, capaz de llevarse cualquier gato a cualquier agua, entre ellos yo, simplemente haciendo el mismo aquel de bailarina, comedianta, contorsionista, equilibrista” (40). On the other hand, she intuitively feels, as she tells Luz, that their encounter will be very important for the two of them, and she tells herself, “Y al cabo --yo qué sé-- de cuarto de hora, sólo verla allí sentada ya me daba una sensación de inexplicable bienestar que era una combinación del predormir de las siestitas del verano [ . . . ]” (49). She feels an inexplicable calm, yet a fear of the unknown. She and Luz share a friendship based on a relationship with Julián and both seek self-definition from his testament. Luz welcomes the revelation; Celia Cecilia fears it.

In her battle for autonomy, Celia Cecilia also must free herself from the overpowering influence of the mass media. Spain in the 1960s quickly became a consumer society, with purchases of consumer durable goods soaring. According to Borja de Riquer, the process of cultural massification was extremely rapid, highly superficial, and rife with contradictions caused by the country’s peculiar political situation: “The spearhead of the phenomenon was television, popular music, and film. Spain passed rapidly from high levels of functional illiteracy to TV saturation without passing through intermediate stages of cultural development” (265). Both Celia Cecilia and her husband, married in the 1960s, fell under the controlling influence of the mass media. As Celia Cecilia talks about her appearance on the television show

*Hermida y compañía*, she exposes her fascination with the medium: “¡Entonces comprendí lo que es la tele! Hasta ahora no lo había comprendido, y eso que Esteban compró una en blanco y negro de las primeras que salieron. No sé si en el 63, en el 64 o en el 65, no recuerdo este detalle [. . .]” (15). Throughout the novel, Celia Cecilia confuses reality with the world of television, behaving as product rather than person. During the most stressful of times, she seeks and finds comfort in her television set, especially in the program of Jesús Hermida. And it is with this very program that Celia Cecilia begins her journey of self-discovery.

Shortly after the death of her employer Julián, Celia Cecilia appears on the television show *Hermida y compañía* at the invitation of its host, Jesús Hermida. The show, already an important part of the protagonist’s life, serves as a site of public spectacle. Twice she is put on display. Her first appearance takes the form of an examination in which she tells the public the small details of Julián’s daily life, her second is a confession in which she “tells the truth” about the testament and her relationship with Julián. Under the gaze of the camera, the in-studio audience and millions of at-home viewers, the protagonist becomes a part of the very world that so enthralls her. As a result of those two appearances, Celia Cecilia is forced to separate reality from fiction as she adjusts to the truths that her performances reveal.

Celia Cecilia’s invitation to appear with Jesús Hermida comes as a complete surprise to her. In her role as “una humilde secretaria,” she considers herself as nothing special. As the object of the examination, however, and with the eyes of world focused upon her, her view of herself changes. According to Foucault, the



examination is at the center of the procedures that constitute the individual as “effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge” (192). In his opinion, the examination 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 [. . .] In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected. (184)

Under examination by Hermida and company, Celia Cecilia tells the truth as she knows it about the life of Julián. The excitement of the spectacle mesmerizes her: “el ambiente que hay es ése, más que nada: de cotillón y de que todo es importante, sobre todo tú, como yo esta vez, que iba de invitada principal” (12). By means of this live television program, Celia Cecilia passes from the anonymity of a secretary into temporary fame as “la musa” of a famous writer. In effect, she allows herself to be created by Hermida as he attributes to her the function of muse. Subjected to such an examination, she indeed is judged by viewers and becomes the object of the gaze. To reinforce the effects of “truths” of the examination, Celia Cecilia had merely to watch the recording again and again on her television:

Pues al verla, la cassette, volví a oír lo de la musa y me quedé pensándolo después, me chocó mucho que insistiera Hermida tanto, y

como yo lo que hice fue negarme, volví a verla la cassette, y no sé si la cuarta o a la quinta o a cuál vez, me di cuenta de pronto que Jesús había acertado en todo y en lo que más en lo de “musa” ¡Sin saberlo, yo había sido musa suya! (15)

By means of a televised examination in which Jesús Hermida controls the questions, Celia Cecilia reveals the details the public (and Hermida) wants to hear. The truth revealed by Jesús, however, remains questionable. Regardless of the veracity of the information, the spectacle of the appearance served as a catalyst for the changes that began to take place in the life of Celia Cecilia

The television personality of Jesús Hermida represents a third power from whose domination the protagonist must liberate herself. Her relationship with him offers the best example of her passiveness and her willingness to be controlled, especially by the magic of television and the powerful personality of Hermida. From her first appearance on his show, Celia Cecilia firmly believes that he is the only person who understands her suffering. She credits him with an extraordinary power of understanding and raises him to the level of a demigod. “[. . .] porque ahora sí que estaba claro lo que Jesús Hermida dijo de la musa . . . Lo adivinó Jesús Hermida, así de fácil, porque ya se le ve que el corazón humano él le comprende, por eso ha llegado donde ha llegado, y más arriba llegará si quiere” (87). Her appearance on Hermida’s show can be likened to a religious experience for Celia Cecilia, from which she receives a “divine revelation” about her identity that she struggles with throughout the novel. His label of her as “musa” causes her to re-evaluate her

relationship with Julián, leading her on several occasions to false assumptions, causing her to deny what she felt was real in order to accept the “word of truth” revealed to her from the highest of powers, from her savior Jesús: “Todo había empezado con Jesús, Jesús Hermida [. . .]” (19). In her infatuation with Hermida, she falls victim to two controlling discourses, that of the dominant male and that of the powerful media. Once again, Luz helps her put the personality of Hermida in perspective as she arranges to use his television show to resolve the protagonist’s problems. And at the end of the novel, Celia Cecilia explains to Luz her newly discovered understanding of the medium:

Lo de la televisión es mucha cosa, sobre todo si televisión es lo único que ves, como yo, que no leo nada, como mucho las revistas. Como la mayoría de la gente como yo, la inmensa mayoría de personas, en todo el territorio nacional millones, de todas las edades, van a trabajar y vuelven a cenar y a ver la tele a casa, la mayoría es como yo, en la tesitura misma estamos todos, que queremos saber, queremos preguntar bastantes cosas cuando nos llega nuestro turno, y más en mi caso, que me dio la vez a mí Hermida, en persona, a mí en persona.

(184)

In realizing the effect that television has had on her and on society, Celia Cecilia releases herself from its control, thus taking another step on her journey towards autonomy.

The power that Jesús Hermida wields over Celia Cecilia represents the power

that performance-oriented Spain of the 1990s exercised over the historically vulnerable women. Hermida, attuned to exploitation of the weak, hones in on the former secretary's weakness in order to advance the popularity of his television show. To Hermida, everything is performance, and he benefits financially at the expense of the audience. To Celia Cecilia, he represents truth and enlightenment, the answer to her prayers. Her exaggerated opinion of him casts him as the "perfect male," in contrast with her "ex" and even with Julián. She places her complete confidence in him, and her description of her conversation resembles that of a religious or mystic experience: "Noté que me entraba un sueñecillo, como si, al hablar, la tensión de estar allí se descargase y me entrase como un sueño y un relax. Todo el tiempo estaba yo segura que Jesús Hermida se haría cargo de mi situación [. . .]" (145). She seeks him out as confessor as she struggles over what to do with Julián's testament. Her desire to confess is related to her desire for the truth, a relationship that, according to Foucault, has existed since the Middle Ages in Western Society. In the *History of Sexuality Part I*, Foucault describes the need for and the effects of confession:

The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. (*Sexuality* 58)

Celia Cecilia needs to tell someone about her possession of Julián's last-will-and-

testament. She seeks his counsel because she believes him to be wise, “natural y humano en todos los aspectos y facetas” (143). He was the one person to whom she could tell that which was most difficult to tell:

Entonces me di cuenta que el único recurso que tenía, la única manera de ocultarme y de salvarme y de salirme con la mía (que, por cierto, aún no sabía cuál era), era dejar de ser un particular, una persona que va y viene, del montón, a sus asuntos, y que no le importa nada a nadie, tenía que convertirme en un pez gordo, por lo menos por un breve tiempo . . . Entonces fue cuando llamé al programa después de pedir al OO3 el número. . .(141)

She seeks out Hermida because of her faith in him. She sees him not as a personality created by television, but as a genuine, god-like entity in whom she could place all her faith. Foucault writes: “If one had to confess, this was not merely because the person to whom one confessed had the power to forgive, console, and direct, but because the work of producing the truth was obliged to pass through this relationship if it was to be scientifically validated” (66). In order for Celia Cecilia to move on, she had to confess to Jesús, who to her, indeed possessed “the power to forgive, console, and direct.” But when face-to-face with her confessor, she does the unthinkable and lies to Jesús about her possession of the testament. She is devastated:

Dios mío, qué he hecho, la confianza de Hermida la he perdido, pero cómo, Dios mío, me desdigo ahora, es imposible. Qué pensaría de mí Jesús Hermida, no quiero ni pensarlo . . . [. . .] habiéndole mentido

como yo lo le había mentado, ¿cómo iba a tener Jesús Hermida, el pobre, la gentileza de volverme a escuchar ya nunca jamás. (146-47)

Dealing with the mental anguish of the lie brings Celia Cecilia to a new level of depression and self-deprecation. But Luz leads her back into the light, convincing her to place her trust in Jesús once again. For the second time, Celia Cecilia becomes the object of the spectacle, but this time she seeks a public confession to rid herself of guilt and the constant harassment from others. According to Foucault, confession frees, but Celia Cecilia seeks more than just the freedom that confessing to Hermida can offer. She seeks an audience of millions. Foucault writes:

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. (62)

Under the gaze of the camera, Hermida, and the viewing public, Celia Cecilia unburdens herself, confesses the truth, and opens the envelope that contains the last-will-and-testament of Julián. The audience as confessor corroborates her testimony; she relieves herself of her wrongs and liberates herself from her guilt. According to Foucault, “The one who listened was not simply the forgiving master, the judge who condemned or acquitted; he was the master of truth. His was a hermeneutic function. With regard to the confession, his power was not only to demand it before it was made, or decide what was to follow after it, but also to constitute a discourse of truth on the basis of its decipherment” (66-67). Now all who heard her testimony served as her judges and witnesses to her forgiveness. Her ex-husband, Bea Zaldivar, Luz, Jesús, and the millions of views of *Hermida y compañía* now know the truth.

The difference in her third encounter with Jesús is that, with the help of Luz, Celia Cecilia controls the situation, using the format and popularity of Jesús to publicize the contents of the testament of Julián:

[. . .] simultáneamente iba yo a ver lo que me iba a mí a pasar y lo que iban a estar viendo los telespectadores en sus casas, todo a lo largo y a lo ancho de la geografía nacional. Y lo que iban a ver iba a ser lo que me iba a mí pasar, el problema mío, aún sin resolver, íbamos a verlo resolver todos los españoles y yo mismo, en directo, allí en la pantalla, con la ayuda de Jesús, Jesús Hermida. (164)

With the help of Jesús Hermida, Celia Cecilia relieves herself of the burden of the lies she has been telling those around her and frees herself to live her new life guilt-free.

By using the public to help her solve the problem of having lied to Jesús, she ensures that he will not scold her or reject her in front of the audience. And just as Foucault asserts that the confession inverts the power relationship from the confessor to the one confessing, Celia Cecilia, in effect, forces both Hermida and the audience to forgive her, thus freeing herself from her guilt. She also releases herself from Hermida's control by finally seeing him for what he is, a public figure with a private life, just like her employer, Julián.

As Celia Cecilia prepares to begin her new life in the apartment that Julián bequeathed her, she reflects on the events following the death of her employer. She analyzes her relationship with Luz, with Julián, and with Jesús Hermida as she seeks some common ground. With the help of Luz, she finally reconciles herself to her behavior: "Tuve que reconocer que era una boba, a la vez reconocía que lo había creído todo a pies juntillas, todo, desde los sentimientos que Julián no expresó pero sintió por mí, hasta los sentimientos que Jesús Hermida expresó por mí pero seguramente no sintió" (185). After spending her life under the control of others, Celia Cecilia finally has come to terms with reality as she admits her foolish behavior in dealing not only with Jesús Hermida, but also with Julián.

For fifty-five years, the life of Celia Cecilia Villalobo had been that of a disciplined individual. As a subject of the disciplinary power of the dictatorship and subject to its controlling mechanisms, she patterned her life according to the tenets of the *Seccion femenina* and the Francoist ideology. As a young wife, she abandoned her career for her husband. As a secretary, she performed her duties faithfully, always



submitting herself to the dominant ideology. She followed the model of the ideal Spanish woman, limiting herself to the private sphere of domesticity until that model no longer served her. Just as subjects of power in turn resist the grip of that power, Celia Cecilia began to resist the structures that had previously controlled her.

Nevertheless, in her relationship with her employer, she unknowingly begins to exert power over a man. In like manner the architects of Spanish democracy systematically rejected former ideologies as they sought to build consensus among the new leaders. This duality played an important role in the success of the transition. Foucault writes that the forces of power “define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations” (27). When Celia Cecilia found herself completely at the margins, “Y repentinamente entonces, de la pena misma que me estaba dando verme ante mí misma de non, completamente al margen” (108), she decided to fight back, to confront, to reverse her inferior position. In the course of the novel she liberated herself from the controls of her past: first from her ex-husband and the ideology of the dictatorship, secondly from Julián and the subtle control of the new democracy, and ultimately from Jesús Hermida and today’s performance-oriented Spain. As she seeks to redefine herself, she also begins to disidentify herself with the periphery. She is now the center of her new world as the inheritance she receives from Julián, along with his validation of her worth as a human being, allows her to live independently. “Luz, soy una persona, un ser humano, y no la criada” (180). Like the new democracy, she now must face the reality of her existence, not

the fantasies of the television world. As a single, middle-aged woman in Spain in the mid-1990s, Celia Cecilia now faces the challenge of forming a new identity independent of those forces that previously marginalized her. As a metaphor for Spanish women of her generation, she must leave behind the disciplinary power of the dictatorship that sought to restrict her to the private sphere, the rhetoric of the transition that sought to control her by the power of its discourse, and the addictive power of the mass media that sought to delude its viewers with its fantasy world. For Celia, as for the women of Spain, constructing a new identity requires the dissolution of past relationships of power and the reconceptualization of what it means to be a woman of the twenty-first century.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In his article “Literatura y cultura popular en *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo*,” Weaver maintains that Pombo chose this title in keeping with his penchant for word games in his novels. “*Telepena*,” according to Weaver, is a neologism, combining the word “*televisión*,” since the protagonist appears on a television show with the word “*pena*,” which indicates the emotion she experiences as a result of that appearance. The selection of the protagonist’s name relates to Pombo’s desire to establish an implied reader who is current with the politics and culture of Spain. Weaver writes: “Celia Cecilia, como explica Jesús Hermida en su programa, es ‘homónimo casi de nuestra amiga y habitual contertuliana Cecilia Villalobo, [. . . ]’”(164). La presencia en la novela de este homónimo, que es la alcaldesa de Málaga representante del Partido Popular, y que por sí misma tiene, para más de un español, la reputación de estrafalaria y folletinesca, y la yuxtaposición de dos nombres tan parecidos difumina y complica los límites entre la realidad y la ficción” (46). In a book-length study of Pombo’s novels, Weaver includes much of the above article. He makes no mention of the sociopolitical implications of the work.

<sup>2</sup>According to Pombo, the characters in his second cycle share the positive values of goodness and generosity (Morales Villena 19).

<sup>3</sup> According to Aurora Morcillo Gómez, gender difference was a central figure of the political discourse defining national and individual identities in totalitarian regimes, which took great care to articulate women’s roles and obligations as part of the national agenda.

<sup>4</sup> In their introduction to *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain*, Enders and Radcliff claim that Spain's image as a traditional society gave the appearance of an "unchallenged and peculiarly impenetrable world of separate spheres" and the de facto exclusion of women from public life confirmed their role as irrelevant to the "big-picture" debates about Spain's identity that comprise the official history of modern Spain

<sup>5</sup> In the same article Weaver also explores the degree to which popular culture controls the protagonist's concept of reality. He also claims that the tension between the discourses of television and literature manifest the anguish inherent in the search for authenticity on the part of the protagonist.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on the theme of lack of substance in Pombo's novels, see articles by Juan Antonio Masoliver Ródenas and Javier Alfaya.

<sup>7</sup> In the footnotes to *Bodies That Matter*, Butler writes: "the notion of abjection designates a degraded or cast out status within the term of sociality" (243).

<sup>8</sup> Weaver claims the two titles represent possibilities for a novel that Julián was writing about Celia Cecilia. He explains the relationship of the two titles: "La novela *Celia Cecilia, lo que dice*, es una clarísima alusión (así lo reconoce el mismo Julián en sus apuntes [87] a la novela *Celia, lo que dice* (1930) de Elena Fortún, pseudónimo de Encarna Aragoneses (1886-1952)" (52). Weaver maintains that Fortún's novel, which recounts the adventures of the siblings Celia y Cuchifritín, exercised an enormous influence over not only Julián and the protagonist within the novel, but also over the author himself and other writers of his generation (53).

## Afterword

Nearly 30 years after the death of its dictator, the Spain of Francisco Franco is no more. The homogeneity promoted by the regime in classifying all things that were different as *anti-España* has been replaced by a heterogeneity that today makes it difficult to identify what is and what is not “Spanish.” Since the transition, Spain has moved from a marginal country with no economic or political clout to an influential power not only within the European community but within the global economy as well. As more countries seek and procure entry into the European Union, the balance of power continues to shift, not only within the Union but also among the traditional powerhouses of the East and the West. A similarly ongoing realignment has affected Spain’s internal power structure as well. As increasing numbers of immigrant voices join the historically marginalized groups to challenge traditional societal structures, it becomes more and more difficult to identify and exclude the “other” of the *anti-España*. Álvaro Pombo draws attention to these changes by populating his novels with multiple others who destabilize the system as they renegotiate their previously assigned position as abject. In so doing, he has also created works that serve as registers of the social and political changes that have altered Spain’s internal and external structures in the last 30 years.

Set in the years of the transition, 1977-1979, Pombo’s first novel, *El parecido*, introduces a population of fictional others who find themselves outside the center of power. In much the same way, their living counterparts found themselves on both the

social and political periphery at the end of the Franco dictatorship. Old-guard, Catholic aristocrats, closet homosexuals, idealistic youth, and conservative Francoists interact within the story and within Spanish society to secure for themselves a more centralized position in their fictional future and that of the new and democratic government.

With an eye toward retrospection, Pombo's second novel, *El héroe de las mansardas de Mansard*, unfolds in the 1950s, formative years for many of Spain's democratic leaders. Homosexuals, women, and children who were rendered invisible during the years of penitence under Franco constitute the marginalized cast of this novel of formation. The games played by all the characters, but especially the young protagonist as he grows to manhood, mirror those of the regime as it reconsidered Spain's postwar position of economic and political isolation. By rejecting its policy of autarky, allowing the establishment of U.S. military bases, and giving leadership positions to members of the *Opus Dei*, the government changed its game plan, and like the protagonist, positioned itself to become a hero, at least within the confines of its own house.

Returning to the present, Pombo sets *Los delitos insignificantes* in the fast-paced and rapidly changing Madrid of the early 1980s. Juxtaposing generations, Pombo intertwines the lives of the post-war adults (in the form of a closet homosexual and a widowed Francoist mother) with the post-transition youth (represented by the narcissistic gigolo and career-minded female) to comment on the abuse of power that can result from personal and political self-centeredness. Upon its

1986 entry into the European Union, Spain re-examined what it meant to be Spanish in much the same way that the protagonist Ortega reevaluated his lifestyle and fear of commitment. While the PSOE leadership's betrayal of Spain's confidence did not prove as fatal as Ortega's wrong choice with the narcissistic gigolo Quirós, the country and its people learned a painful political lesson about selfishness.

Pombo's choice of a female protagonist for *Telepena de Celia Cecilia Villalobo* allows him to draw attention to the changing status of women in contemporary Spain. In *Celia Cecilia*, Pombo has created a metaphor for the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish woman fighting to liberate herself from the ideological powers that have constrained her. By breaking her bonds with the three men in her life, she (like the women of Spain) rejects the ideology of the dictatorship, the subtle control of the new democracy, and the seductive power of today's performance-oriented Spain. Dissolving these relationships allows her to decide for herself the role she will play in the future.

Each of the four novels analyzed in this study is a story of struggle. As Pombo himself attests, his characters are based on real people who confront issues, search for meaning, and experience successes and failures. Weaver describes Pombo's works as illustrating a conviction on the part of the author that even the most solitary man is condemned to look for substance in another, even though many times the relationship is conditioned by falsehoods.<sup>1</sup> Drawn from marginalized sectors of Spanish society, Pombo's characters represent those living outside the power centers whose search for substance involves confrontations with power. Although this study is limited to three

novels from Pombo's first cycle and one from his second, an examination of his complete works to date reveals a fictional population of marginalized characters engaged in struggles within the texts that bear a strong correlation to marginalized groups in Spanish society immersed in similar life negotiations.

Because the power structure constantly changes, those excluded or unused by the system change also. As the newest member of the *Real Academia*, Pombo now forms a part of the literary center. In much the same way, the status of those historically marginalized in Spain has shifted through the years. The most recent evidence of these changes can be found in the record number of women in leadership roles within the PSOE government, the socialists' willingness to dialogue with dissenting factions, and the agreement by the Spanish congress to initiate legislation that will legalize marriage between homosexuals. In spite of these realignments, however, for every formerly excluded group that gains inclusion, another marginal category appears. The most recent and rapidly increasing excluded sector is that of the immigrant. With as many as 700,000 new residents arriving in Spain in 2003, statistics show that over 2,600,000 emigrants now live in the country, comprising 6.26% of the total population (*El País* "España"). As the government reacts to the changing face of its people, the internal alignment of margins and centers shifts. When the new marginal groups chip away at the center's authority, they render themselves no longer marginal. In a February, 2004 column in *El País*, Rosa Montero writes "La emigración aporta al país receptor una formidable inyección de energía y laborosidad. Los otros nos mejoran." Recognition of the worth of the other



is slow in coming, however. Montero describes it as a fear combined with ignorance that is an inevitable consequence of rapid change. “Me cuenta que hay discotecas en Madrid que acaban la sesión de tarde para menores (entre 14 y 18 años) con el *Cara al Sol*, que los niños cantan brazo en alto. Todo ellos blanquitos y encantados de ser homogéneos. O trabajamos por la integración o emergerá la bicha.” As the country attempts to more-fully integrate its immigrants, monsters emerge, and friction is inevitable.

On Thursday, March 11, 2004, Spain became the victim of a collision between margins and centers. Ten bombs planted by Islamic terrorists on four commuter trains travelling toward the Atocha train station in Madrid exploded, killing almost 200 innocent passengers and injuring more than 1500 (*El Pais* “La policia” 1). The resulting outcry united the country on Friday, March 12, as millions of citizens and non-citizens alike took to the streets in protest of terrorist violence. On Sunday, March 14, Spanish voters expressed their frustration with the ruling party’s response to the tragedy by removing from power José María Aznar and the PP, replacing them with José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and the PSOE. Aznar’s defeat was seen by many as a victory for the marginal and those outside the political inner circle.

The PP president’s unilateral support of the United States and Britain in the war with Iraq has placed him at odds not only with France and Germany, but also with the Spanish electorate. His choice to align himself with the George W. Bush/Tony Blair power center had opened his country and its citizens to attack by those seeking to alter that balance of power. Then, the discovery that Al Qaeda

terrorists perpetrated the violent acts to punish Spain for its Iraqi involvement and the subsequent suspicion that the government sought to conceal this fact until after the elections polarized public opinion against the Aznar-led central power. Ousting the conservative leader who had increasingly excluded dissenters from active involvement in the political process gave the opposition parties an opportunity to renovate the existing power structure. Making good on a campaign promise to bring home Spanish troops from Iraq, the newly elected Zapatero quickly announced the retirement of the troops earlier than a previously agreed upon date of June 30, 2004. In efforts to govern “para todos con humildad,” the socialist president soon opened dialogue with the minority parties to secure their support for his new government. Those supporting the war in Iraq saw Spain’s election results as a victory for terrorism. Opposition saw it as a victory for democracy. The terrorists saw it as a victory against United States aggression.

Regardless of the respective positions, now, three decades after burying the dictator who isolated the country from the outside world with his *anti-España* campaign, Spain finds itself a member of the world’s power elite. The resultant shift has been accompanied by a multi-level repositioning of margins and centers within Spain. I predict that these internal battles will continue to be played out in the fictional world on the pages of Pombo’s novels, and his characters will continue to reflect not only the changing faces of Spain’s marginalized, but also the sociopolitical conflicts that are inherent in these never-ending center/margin power struggles.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>In the first book-length study of the novels of Álvaro Pombo, Weaver divides the novels into two cycles in the same way that Pombo himself has divided them. Within the divisions, Weaver explores how the characters find success or failure in their attempt to negotiate a relationship with the Other.

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## Appendix

Edited Interview with Álvaro Pombo  
 Madrid, Apr. 23, 2004

- P: What University are you working for?
- C: The University of Kansas, it's exactly in the center of the country, and I work with Robert Spires.
- P: In the Spanish department . . .  
 How long do you intend to do your dissertation, how many pages approximately?
- C: About 200
- P: About 200, that's very big. And I am one subject with others?
- C: You are the only one. This is what I have done. I have chosen four of your earlier novels, and what I am doing is a study on what I see they have in common. And then, when I am finished and defended and successful and working at another university, I'll go on and do as many novels of yours as I can, and I'll put them together.
- P: Yes, that's good because I've got out a new novel, another one. I'll give it to you as a present.
- C: Well, thank you, because I've not been to the bookstore yet to get the new one.
- P: That's just freshly made, freshly baked.
- C: Freshly baked, and you're freshly baked in the *Real Academia Española*.
- P: Yes, the *Real Academia Española*. Yes, well, I will be there; I will be reading my paper, my communication on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June.
- C: What does that involve?
- P: Well, it involves reading one sort of dissertation of about 1300 pages, 45 minutes, and then another person, another academic, she's a woman, answers me. It's a very formal happening.
- C: Does she have your presentation in advance?
- P: Yes, it's all published beforehand. It's a very formal occasion, and then they give you a medal; you are an *academic de número*, they say. I don't know the English equivalent, a numbered academic or something of that sort. Because there are only 46, I believe, in the Academia, and I've got one of them. So we are the immortals. The French call their academics the *les imortale*, but I think we Spanish are less *imortale* than the others. I think we are more mortal than the French.
- C: Is there a fixed number, and then you only move in when someone has passed away?
- P: Yes that's right. It's a question of dying. It's a bit ominous, somehow.

- C: Do you say thank you, or ... ?
- P: Well, you say, thank you for dying. He [the person he replaced] was a very famous person, a president of the academy as well as an important doctor of medicine and also was a historian and essayist. And then someone else will take my place.
- C: Do you then have do things with them?
- P: Yes, I have to make a sort of eulogy of his figure. Part of my speech consists of making a eulogy or some sort of *elogio* of him.... A lot of people go. It's a formal occasion. It's a formal declaration.
- C: And after that, then, you just belong...
- P: After that you belong to the Royal Academy whose main job is the writing and publication of the *diccionario del Real Academia Española*.
- C: And to clean up the language, right?
- P: And to clean up the language, right, if that can be done. The Spanish language, as you know, is similar to the English language. It is a very sort of mixed up language. I mean, there is no pure English. Oscar Wilde used to say there are two ... the English from England and the English from America are two languages. That's not exact, but well, we've got all these sort of American, Latin American or Hispano-merican stuff, or it's quite a big thing.... Then in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they had this neoclassic idea, illustrated idea of cataloging of languages. Well, anyway, it's more honorific. They said they do work, but it's more honorific than anything. It's considered a great thing in Spain. I don't think you have any equivalent thing in England or in America, the States. It's equivalent to the *Académie Française*...it's inspired in the *Académie Française*... these ideals of making a big dictionary and collecting the whole language and being able to catalogue it.
- C: And then we can say this is our standard to which we will pay no attention, but we have a standard.
- P: Yes, well and of course, nowadays, the standards are a very complicated question because standards are very good, but on the other hand, language is a living thing, and it is changing all the time. Language is a very strong, living structure, much more powerful than the individual speaker.
- C: So then, does the Academy decide which changes they will accept?
- P: Well, yes, there are a number of things. You will discuss new words. It's a question of neologisms. Nowadays, for example, there is a very curious problem with which we call Spanglish, I suppose you have the same thing in America, which is the opposite way; you have the English Spanish or whatever you want to call it. There are English people, American people from the States influenced by the Spanish spoken by all the immigrants coming in. Now we have Spanglish, we call it . . . people say things like, for example "window" . . . *ventana*, they say "windova." Windova is not English or Spanish, but is a combination. But on the other hand, it is a very real thing. People are talking like that. It's got to be taken into account, somehow. And it is an interesting task nowadays for writers and people of letters. It's an interesting task to be vigilant about the language, about how things are said. Because of course, I used to say the limits of my language are the limits of my world. It is true that the way we say things, the way we think things, there is this connection of thinking and saying.

The language gets impoverished, for example. For lack of care, we stop thinking the right thoughts somehow. Speaking properly is thinking properly in many ways, too. In this sense, it is an interesting task, but on the other hand it is a very honorary thing. Because we only go to the academy once a week from 5 to 8 or something. I don't think it is time enough to work, and I am not prepared to spend much more time than that. I am busy doing other things.

C: Are you on your next book already?

P: Yes, I am on my next book already. But it's a bit early to say.

C: Do you ever not have anything in your mind working? When one book is finished, do you ever have a blank space.?

P: Oh, yes. In fact, one way of liberating one's self from the last book is writing another book. The book is like an affair ... I don't mean love affair, it's the sort of affair, I mean it's like a business which you've got to solve the best way you can, and then battle the next thing.

C: Let's talk about what I need to know from you. First, I'll tell you which four I've chosen, and you will ask me why. I started with *El parecido* because it was your first, followed by *El héroe*, followed by *Los delitos insignificantes*, and ending with *Celia Cecilia*. And the reason that I started was because I read *Celia Cecilia* in a class I was taking, and I have to tell you that I liked that woman. I liked that woman because she reminded me of me, so I thought if anybody can write a woman that makes me like her like that, I've got to like that person.

P: You see, this hasn't been a very popular book in the States. I like that book, I think it is a very amusing book. And it's also a serious book that people for one reason or another, I think, liked it.

C: Well, you made me laugh. She made me laugh.

P: It's the language. It's an imitation of ordinary language, the way a middle-aged girl has been working for a man for a long time, but she is nothing to him, just a secretary. On the other hand, what goes on in her mind I thought was very amusing.

C: But it hasn't caught here, has it?

P: No, for some reason no, I don't know why... it hasn't.

C: And we studied it with the idea of how you worked in the fact that she is a product of the means of communication.

P: Well, she is in part a product of the means of communication in the sense that everyone watches a lot of television nowadays. And what happens in television and what happens in real life sometimes sort of gets mixed up. And after all, you've got the Simpsons in the States. They are watching television all the time. We are all watching television, somehow. One of the most amusing things for her, in her lounge every single day, [is someone] like Hermida, who is a personality who is out of it now, but he was very popular anchor man, a popular showman, very important here, tremendously popular for many years. He was a correspondent in NY with the Kennedy era. Hermida was in New York. He was correspondent to Spanish television in New York during the Kennedy administration and when the Americans went to the moon. He reported that. He is very pro-American; he loved New York. I think he has modeled himself a bit with the Kennedy image; he was very young and handsome, with very dark hair with a very personal way of doing things, having a sort of glamour. He's an old man

now, but he had glamour when he was young. My girl, my character, she practically lives with this figure. And suddenly this figure calls her because he wants to know about the life of the writer. And then she enters into this fantastically, absolutely unreal world of television plateaus sort of thing, and I think that novel is amusing. I like the novel.

C: Then I decided that she was a product of everything that went into her, from her childhood on.

P: Well, she was a very ordinary Spanish girl, not an intellectual or anything. She's an ordinary girl. She's a very clever girl, she loves her work, she's knows she's been working for a very important person, she feels in part like a sort of wife. She feels sort of wifey toward him; she's not a wife, but she feels sort of like one. I like the novel. I think it deserves a second reading. I'm glad that you mentioned it.

C: It was my favorite, and that made me think that I needed to go back and see what else you've done. But I also had to find a connecting theme. Do you read the criticism when it comes out?

P: I read part of it. The thing is, Graham Greene, the writer, used to say, "I finally don't read anything, they make me vain, all of them, good and bad. All of them." I'm a bit like that, I read some. yes

C: Well, the majority of them analyze your narrative style.

P: Yes, I find this interesting. I've found it very difficult to enter into the states; I don't know why, because I think I could be very accessible to the Anglo-Saxon readers, more accessible perhaps than to the Spanish readers.

C: I have to tell you that one reason I am doing my dissertation on you is that my director agrees with you. I believe he sees you becoming more and more read.

P: I'd be delighted. I know very well the literature of the states and the philosophy, you know, James and T.S. and all the others and all the people of the Anglo-Saxon approach of philosophy. I am a professional philosopher.

But I think it will be nice to see; it is very difficult, you know, to get a book translated.

C: I've read two of your translations, the English ones, and I'm okay with them, but I read them better in the Spanish.

P: I think she's (his translator) a bit, very sort of standard English, which I don't think represents my own version of Spanish. My Spanish is very colorful. When I went to Cambridge with the book, and they said well, they thought, "we think you are more uncouth than that, your prose is more uncouth, more... wilder, your prose is wilder than what she makes of it." She's a very good girl, an awfully nice girl, (the translator), and I don't think I'm an awfully nice boy. I'm not as nice as she is.

C: We have the word "ornery" in the United States, mischievous . . . a little bit . . .

P: Yes, mischievous, but it is fun to have. I've still got a few years left to go.

C: That was one of my questions. Do you plan to write for another 20 years?

P: Oh, yes, well I'd like to write for another . . . I'm 64, that is retirement age, you know? But I have no intention of retirement. At all, well, I mean, of course, I intend to go on writing.

- C: When you write your novels, do you try to put them within a political context?
- P: Yes, I do. In fact, yes. I am not politically minded in the sense that, I'm not a writer like, for example, the type of writer like Sartre was, who had these engagement things. I think a writer should write without... they should be engaged in the important things as persons, as people of the country. I mean, for example, I vote; I have political opinions. As a writer one's got to write what one knows . . . and there are in my books, in my latest books, I take positions in front of the church for example, not directly political subjects. But ...
- C: Social situations that you at least want to draw some attention to?
- P: Yes, for example, this novel, the last one, deals with the relation in Mexico from 26 to 29 (1926-1929). The relationship between the church and the state, for example, which was very complicated in those days. In that sense I take part in politics. Through history, for example. What I am saying there is that the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico of those days wasn't particularly, well, she was very prepared to make arrangements with PRI. She actually created treaties with the Cristeros, who were fighting for the rights to express themselves. Of course, this is fiction, and I am not as engaged in political criticism as, for example, Gore Vidal in America. Gore Vidal, apart from writing very splendid historical novels, has published this huge book about the state of the USA. It's a huge book, and it's amazingly good. Well, I'm not that type of writer, or Norman Mailer. I'm not that committed.
- C: Let me tell you the reason I ask. My connecting thread of the novels is that I look at your characters and how your characters all seem to be in today's very popular term "marginalized." But also they represent the politics of the time. I feel I can draw connections between some of your characters and what they might represent politically at that time. That's my presumption, and so, sometimes I'm a little bit leery because there might be a bit of a stretch. But it is interesting that I can do that, and I didn't know whether there was some time where you said...
- P: Well I've certainly tried to represent living people. I get them (the people) from reality, and that means that they are politically engaging things. And of course there are some novels where I refer, [to] the Franco era for example, it's easy to see that and also the period like the transition in Spain, for example. I think you are perfectly... that you are entitled to draw this conclusion.
- C: So you when you read the dissertation, you won't laugh and say....
- P: No, I won't, I think you've seen a point which is there. It's in the books, but I don't think it's too visible.
- C: It's only a background.
- P: It's a background, it's definitely the background .
- C: Because it is the story that moves it (the novel) along, but there's that background . . .
- P: There's a political background, absolutely, a social political background, undoubtedly. For example, a children's story ... (*Aparición del eterno femenino*). I'm very fond of this book... I'm giving it to you... It's an interesting book. Its supposed to be the life of a young child, and his life is taken from when I was young, reflects the education during the Franco era. Certainly, it is political background certainly there. I think you are quite right.



- C: The idea of marginalization . . . of course you can make a character marginalized by describing him so. Women can be marginalized because they are women. You and I are marginalized because we are over 50 ...
- P: The important thing is that we are all marginalized if we are not careful, I am 64 . . . 64 suddenly seems to be the end of it, and it certainly isn't the end of anything.
- C: Who is your favorite character?
- P: Celia is a very interesting figure, I am quite pleased with my character there. I like my character, but it is difficult to say which is my favorite.
- C: Of these four that I am doing, who would be your favorite, because they are quite different. You've got *Delitos*, which is very serious, you couldn't say there is a favorite in that one
- P: *Delitos* is a nasty novel. I've got no favorites there.
- C: Why did you write it?
- P: Well, I had to write this novel. One doesn't write only about people who do funny things. It is a very bitter, somber novel, and I think it is well constructed, and it is similar to *El parecido*, but it is better constructed.
- C: And it is almost as if you have a grown up of Kus-Kús from *El héroe*.
- P: *El héroe* mixes humor with drama, whereas in *Delitos*, it's just drama. It tries to deal with people who cannot communicate and finally commit suicide
- C: And I guess my take on that one is simply that it has to do with our failure in relationships when there is no communication
- P: Yes, the theme there is the impossibility of communication. Not because they (the characters) are homosexual, but just because they don't communicate. The trouble is that people communicate with great difficulties. And it belongs to a period in my life in which I very much believed that there was no possibility of any type of communication of any sort. And then I changed from that to my new novels in which people really attempt to communicate and can't communicate somehow. It's not easy. It is a complicated thing. You could work on it, especially in your day-to-day lives. One needs to communicate for a short time in an interview, or for a few months, or for a few days, and the other thing is to communicate throughout life.
- C: So is that why you have what you call that first cycle according to the interviews I've read, and then you say you closed that cycle with *Delitos*? Was that because you changed a little bit in your ideology?
- P: Yes, I actually became. . . after *Delitos* I stayed three years without publishing anything. I wrote finally *Metro del platino irridiado* in which I described the situation of the family where the woman there wants to communicate, she wants to maintain the relationship, and she maintains the relationship despite everything. So this is the theme of the book. And I think that's already the new cycle, the second cycle.

- C: I had a note to myself to ask you, since we were doing this interview in English, how you actually in English describe this *falta de sustancia*. The literal translation is “lack of substance.” But what is substance?
- P: That’s very interesting for the English scholars. As you know there was a philosopher, an English philosopher called David Hume and before him Locke. They made a thorough criticism of the philosophy of the scholastics of Aristotle. One of the central concepts there is the concept of substance. *Hipocamen* in Greek, *sustancia* in Latin. In classical philosophy *sustancia* meant that which with which you can define something. The empiricist philosophers, and then after them, Kant, decided that we could not reach the substance directly. So we could only conceive phenomena, appearance of things. The consequence of having a world without substances, only with phenomena, would be a world which... the first subject of course, was the *noe* [?], the human being, you and I and the other person. There was nothing called “human substance”...one person... he questioned those ideas. I think when you write about the cycle, you will have to quote, somehow, David Hume and his criticism. The lack of substance would be a world in which nobody would get a hold of the other because there would be nothing to hold. Only fleeting pressures, fleeting emotions, but nothing to hold them together except that we are accidentally together for a minute. We talk together, we understand more or less each other. There is nothing substantial. I know that in English the saying “lack of substance” is perfectly meaningless. It is not in Spanish. Lack of substance is equivalent to “la levedad del ser,” the weakness. If you translate the lack of substance... the lightness of the world..... the short story of the lightness of the world... a world without heavy substance, a weakness, it would be a world where people would not know how to tell the truth to each other. False, for example. The substance is a concept that we still use in Spain. We talk about the substance of food.... I think you should have a look at the notion of substance of David Hume in order to explain.
- C: I have another question for you. Your first book, *El parecido*, published in 1979. Do you remember when you wrote it?
- P: Yes, when I wrote the first part of it I was still in England. I finished it in Madrid.
- C: Because I noticed the discrepancy. In an interview at one point you said “when I was writing it in 77...” about a character or something....
- P: I started it perhaps in ‘77 when I was in England. I was writing other things too.
- C: Because I have attached its political context to the transition and so . . .
- P: That is a book of the transition. The political context there is the transition.
- C: I wanted to clear that up. Because you tend to pay a little attention to what’s going politically, do you set out with a purpose when you write a book? For example, “This next book I am going to write to draw people’s attention to....?”
- P: Yes, there is something of that. Yes, it’s not as much as a thesis, nothing as strong and clear cut as a thesis. Perhaps it is sort of an intention. Oscar Wilde entitled his book *Intentions*. Well, my intention is somehow to draw attention, I think that is the best way to put it... drawing attention to some issue. But nothing as precise as the *Grapes of Wrath*, to write in order to show what happened... etc.
- C: So you wouldn’t call yourself a writer of resistance, necessarily.

- P: No, no.
- C: But there are things that you would like to say...
- P: I don't think I would call me, I think, in any way, a politically-minded writer, not strongly.
- C: Do you think a writer has a responsibility to be?
- P: Yes, I think he does, but as a person, as a private person, or as a public person if you like. But I don't think one should mix in books the political responsibilities and the personal responsibility.
- C: Unless you are a political writer...
- P: Yes, well a political writer or a journalist. Journalists writing about international politics must commit themselves to some view or other. But I am doing fiction, and fiction illuminates the world in sort of an indirect way. Illumination, which comes from fiction, is indirect, is oblique.
- C: Did you ever have a desire to be a journalist?
- P: No, I mean I've written. I've written for papers, but I write for no papers now. I've enjoyed my time writing for journals, but one's got to love a lot the actuality and the comings and goings and the goings on, and I don't think I'm that.
- C: When you are doing your fiction, do you look back into the political situation at that particular time. For example, "I'm creating a person at that time, the political situation would have been here and this would have been happening and so that person would have been probably doing these kinds of things?" Do you purposefully do that with your writing or do you just let it happen?
- P: Let me show you, for example with this book... John LaClare, this is his last book. He takes the world situation and writes a book using the world position, using the states of Iraq and Europe, taking full account of the political situation. And the characters he picks, they are engaged in political activities. They are spies or they are informers or they are whatever. He is politically minded; he is a good popular writer, a splendid political writer. Splendid popular writer. Now then, I am more sort of a sophisticated writer. Yes, I use politics, but I use politics very much as I use them in my life. For example, I'm sort of a socialist persuasion, or social democrat if you like. Or what you call the democratic party, I would be voting democratic in the States right now.
- C: So Zapatero right now doesn't make you as nervous as ....?
- P: Less nervous than the others, for example. I voted for him in the last elections, and I would be voting Kerry, I suppose or something of that sort. But then, I don't reflect that; I don't put that directly into a novel. So as a reply to your question, my answer is no, I don't invent figures in political terms. I use the politics as background. I do a fiction which is very much the development of images or obsessions or ways of being which I particularly have, so it's very much a personal venture. It's a question of finding in myself the vices or the virtues that I later express. So really it is not, I don't go from the exterior work, from outside, but the other way around. I go from the inside to the outside. That means that I'm sort of, if you like, a more difficult writer. I am more difficult. Sometimes I can be more complicated. Even in the

popular novels like *Telepena*, for example, because what I describe is the inner goings on, with how people see themselves or the world. I tell the inner story.

C: Do you think you are an outsider as a writer?

P: No, not now. I was, but not now. The fact that they are accepting me in the Academy. At this moment I'm an institutionalized writer. At this particular moment.

C: But you know you've come a long way then, from when you came back from England when you first started

P: Yes, I started publishing very late. I started publishing at 37 or something. And the first 10-15 years I was a bit of an outsider

C: You struggled a little.

P: I struggled quite a lot. I had to keep myself doing odd jobs and things. And in those days I was really a bit of an outsider, but I don't think I am now. Anything I publish or anything I say is immediately in the press.

C: This thesis will have to do with your characters and their marginalization and how they have to negotiate in order to survive and how that reflects a lot on what is happening in Spain at the time that those novels are written.

P: Well, one thing you could say is that it is not politics properly speaking. But I would say, politics in the sense of the ways of life or ways of experience in America; the politics being not only the politics of politicians, but the politics of the people. For example, this book by Norman Mailer. He's describing not only politics but how the time was, what was happening during the Vietnam War, not only telling you what the politicians were doing, but also the people.

C: So in your very first novel *El parecido*, you have Doña María. She's very much. . .

P: She's very much Franco's character. She's very much a mirror image of this Spanish lady. She's a grand lady, she's authoritarian, she doesn't understand life very well. She loves her kid but she doesn't know what to do with him. She's a very Spanish, authoritarian character, you see. This is a reflection of an authoritarian situation. I think it is. I think the whole novel reflects that point of 1976, 77, 78. Things were changing, people were changing. There was still that grand march, that funeral march, big Roman Catholic, you know, stiff, not very religious, but very pompous. It is not real faith... high in ceremony, perhaps faith is lacking or something is lacking. Some kind of emptiness at the core of it... very sort of (*farse*). We would rather have a much more protestant approach to faith, much more intimate. Communion with whatever God is rather than this sort of liturgical (*farse*...)

C: Maybe less fear. You know a lot of ours is fear of what would happen if we failed to do it right.

P: Well, I think the Church nowadays is resenting all the world, because people ... I don't think they know how to change; I don't know.

C: Do you think they fear the change?

- P: They fear the change, they fear the freedom of people, and they don't have faith enough in the Holy Spirit or something. Something of that sort. It's not political. I think it's got to do with their own faith and their faith in the Holy Spirit and the grace of God or something. That's why they are so tense.
- C: You talk like a protestant.
- P: I talk like a protestant because I am very much a Christian, a basic Christian with feelings of Luther . . . let's communicate, let's be very honest with God, let's stop with external things. You've seen all the processions of Holy Week and all this stupid stuff. It's beautiful.
- C: It's beautiful, what a tradition.
- P: Incredible, yes, but there's nothing in it. There is no faith in it, it's just incredible. There's nothing in it. How much better, you know, are the Quakers. It seems that Roman Catholics, that God can be reached just by the phone . . . just phone, call God, and he can be reached, and that's silly. And the enormous sea of mediation . It seems very silly to me. Look at marriage for example, the royal wedding we are going to suffer next month. With the royal wedding, they cannot understand it. The girl is apparently atheist, has said so. The girl has said she doesn't believe in anything, like many in Spain. She's not against anything, she's not for it. She's an atheist. Well, the Church is still calling the King and Queen, His Catholic Majesty... it is absurd nowadays. The guilty one is not the King, but the Church insisted in doing this stupid marriage, the ecclesiastical marriage. There is only one law in Spain, the Constitution, and people marry before a judge. Like everybody does. Your religious feelings and religious persuasion are private through your church or your synagogue or whatever...
- J: Not if you are George Bush and the Republican party.... I'm curious, you have been charged with homophobia . . .
- P: Not with homophobia . . .
- C: In your earlier works . . .
- P: That's very silly, because I'm not homophobic . . .
- C: But they said, (did you read any of it?), that you created characters where it is very clear that that is what you were saying, and that you were showing that the only result coming from homosexuality is punishment by death because your characters were dying off. You know, look what you did to Gonzalo and Ortega...
- P: I'm thinking about that later on you know. I mean my latest book, not this one. The thing that this has to do with is the question of writing novels with a thesis. I don't write novels with a thesis. I describe situations, human situations. I am homosexual myself, and I never hide, a state it clearly and naturally. But the thing is, Spanish homosexuals are very militant in an old fashioned way. I think they are imitating American attitudes of 1968. We have changed a lot since then. I am describing part of the homosexual situation . . .
- C: Of that time . . .
- P: Well, at that time. And understanding a particular case of a relationship between a man and a boy in that novel. Of course sometimes homosexuals think . . . they always say "you are not militant enough."

- C: What do they want you to do?
- P: Well, I don't know what they want. They want a lie. They don't want the truth. The truth is that homosexuality is like any other human thing. It has got dark sides and clear sides and dark sides ... and it's stupid to present anything as sort of perfection because it's not. It's like presenting heterosexual marriage as perfect; it's ridiculous. If you write a novel or a piece about ... it's like saying because somebody wrote "Who's afraid of Virginia Wolf," because Albee wrote it, he's against heterosexual marriage, but he's not. This is ridiculous. Nobody would say it, but homosexuals say so. No one says "Oh he was very much against heterosexual marriages." He wrote a piece in which two people try to get rid of each other. They cannot stay together, they cannot stay separated. They can't stand each other, they can't stand [to be] away from each other. Is that his view about the whole of heterosexual marriage? I don't think so. I'm sure it isn't. I wrote a book frankly talking about a particular type of people. My idea is that the older person was a coward. What I am saying is that any relationship, homosexual or not, needs bravery. And fortitude, and truth. If you don't have truth and strength and you are not brave enough, things deteriorate. My accusation against, homosexual, heterosexual, or whomever, is if you are a coward, if you don't do the right thing, things deteriorate. I think it is ridiculous. This is because they are thinking in a sort of imitation, the gay movement, for example, in Spain. It is much more interesting. The lesbians are much more interesting than the gays. The gays are really pathetic. They are simple. Lesbians are much more complicated and much more interesting. They are, for example, the whole program about adopting children, the whole program about creating new families, the whole in the lesbian world; they are doing it in depth. We (gays) are pathetic.
- J: You and I are the same age. My view of homosexuality has changed. I was taught certain things growing up, and I read your thing on Kus-Kus, and he seems to have these attitudes growing up that I had as attitudes growing up.
- P: Yes, exactly, hostility . . .
- J: Hostility and fear that something could happen to me, and I could become homosexual.
- P: Exactly, that is true, he is perfectly right. That is the description of the boy.
- J: Has your view of homosexuality changed?
- P: Oh, yes, very much. I think in my books as well. For example, the one before this one has changed completely. But I changed with a reason. I have adopted over the years a more open attitude. What I am saying is that homosexuality, standard gay people, have very simple-minded attitudes in Spain nowadays.
- C: Do you think it's more in Spain than the United States, as far as simple-mindedness?
- P: You've got more people in the States, it's a huge place. So the main point we've got to remember about the United States... it's a huge amount of people. Some of the most advanced and most powerful theories, ways of being out, come from the states at this moment. Of course, I've only read what is published. I read what's published; it's amazing stuff. And the gays somehow, this particularly group, the gays, are not renovating themselves. They are behaving like the Stonewall type of things in 68 or 69. The sort of... well, all sorts of things have happened after that. We've got AIDS for one thing. There is a revolution. I think the lesbians are doing much, much better. They are saying much more deeper things about sexuality. Homo and heterosexuality.

- C: I read somewhere where perhaps someone was theorizing on that very thing, and they thought that perhaps because of the immediate equal rights for homosexuals that came with the transition that there was never any fight that ever had to be made, and so therefore now, there is no reason to get upset.
- P: Well, homosexuals are perfectly well accepted nowadays. I think it is bad for them. I think such an amount of acceptance is bad for their intelligence or something. I don't think they are thinking. I don't think they are thinking enough...we are not thinking enough. It's politically correct. It's all politically correct nowadays to be homosexual and to say it. I've been saying it for years and years before now, but nowadays any young kid who wants to be homosexual and to live with another one. It is easy nowadays. When I started saying it, it was a very hard word. It was terrible really. Nowadays it's almost fun, well, it's politically correct. And I think this is reducing the degree of reflection and the degree of ... my colleagues are sometimes irritating [...] and then they say these stupid things like, of course, "you've treated homosexuality badly because you have the people dying." People die in novels, heterosexual people throw themselves [under] trains like Tolstoy in killing his heroine. If you think for a moment, for example, what Tolstoy did with Ana Karenina, well, you wouldn't say he was writing against heterosexual marriage. And so we (gays) are simple minded, as a group nowadays in Spain, we are simple minded. We've got to be careful; we cannot be silly. One can't be silly, whatever you do. With the public manifestations of Bush, for example. I don't know how he is really, but he sounds so silly sometimes. I think he is more clever than he looks.
- J: He's got to be...
- P: He was elected by a very slim majority. I wanted the other one.
- C: So did we...
- P: But he was elected by 500 votes and . . .
- J: But it does prove that the United States is a government of law; it's a people of law. The law says that's what happens, he is president.
- C: And we can change it... we'll try.
- P: Do you think you'll change it now, this time?
- J: Yes... we are going to try.
- P: Because for me, it is as important the elections in the States as here. I follow the elections in the States just as ours. I read all the papers.
- J: If Kerry does not stumble, if Kerry does not fall, if Kerry keeps going and doesn't do something silly or stupid or some ghost comes out of the closet.
- P: Like, for example, with the war, Kerry is having some sort of conflict. He accepted the war, he now . . .
- J: He is also a real soldier. Bush is a fake soldier. He is fake.
- P: When I saw him wearing all the clothes, that was silly.

- J: But he could do that against Gore, but not against Kerry.
- C: We are hoping Kerry has more depth.
- P: I think so.
- J: Kerry is smart.
- P: I think so. I think he is as American as the other one. It seems that Bush is all-American, but that isn't true. Kerry is just as American.
- C: Bush is a created American, I believe.
- P: Kerry is an intelligent figure. He a national type of man. He's got a long political experience.
- J: There's more Republican, professional money behind Bush. The business money is behind Bush. And the business money in the time of war does seem to . . . they are going to push for "don't make a change."
- P: How about popularity? Because Bush is still very high in popularity.
- C: No, he is less so.
- J: His popularity is down, his personal popularity.
- P: As a culture we are very loyal to your president.
- J: Spanish press gives American politics good play.
- P I always say it is as important what happens there as here. We are of the Kennedy era, you and I. We were exalted and inspired by Kennedy. Ask not what your country can do for you... all that stuff.
- J: It was very good for us. I shook hands with Robert Kennedy.
- P: I remember when Jack was killed. I went to the American Embassy, just there that afternoon. I was teaching nearby, and I was there. And I stayed there doing nothing, just in front of the door, doing nothing. Many people, we were, at least my generation, your generation. Lots of things have been said about they stood for what they appeared for at that time.
- J: Exciting, intelligent, and young.
- P: I think Kerry reminds me a bit, in a sort of more wise way . . . because of course, he's been in politics for a long time, he knows Washington.
- J: He's got a lot of money. He was a Vietnam veteran and a protester.
- P: He's courageous, because he went and fought there and came back and...
- J: George Bush is a fake when it comes to military, and I think Kerry will carefully use that. That will subtract from the sitting president's power during a conflict. Because the next man will come in, and he is not a fake. He knows what to do, he won't back down. And Kerry's



already making statements about making connections with the other foreign nations. Where Bush has failed to do so.

- P: I think that is one of the greatest things. Not to try to connect immediately with all of us. Poor Aznar... let's get together, we want to get together. When the September 11 thing happened with the twin towers, we were absolutely like one heart with America. We, all of us, communists and everybody here, we were one heart. Bush has this falsely patriotic thing... Kerry is just as patriotic.
- C: He has delusions of grandeur, I think, Bush does.
- P: He's got these people . . .
- C: The conservative Christians.
- P: And this notion of "God tells me to do this, and then I've got to tell you, and then you've got to do it," this makes me absolutely frightened. It's very powerful in America, isn't it?. Well, in God we trust.
- C: We do, but...
- J: It's always been there, the people who came to America were that way, their children were that way; it's always been there. That fact. The Spanish people look at me and say, "We have our religion, don't ask us about it." But Americans are always trying to tell us how they feel and want to discuss religion.
- P: Well, the Germans also with "Gott mit uns..." is the same. It is very dangerous. I hope that Kerry wins, but I don't know.
- C: Well, if he's had any secrets, someone with whom he's had a relationship in the past that he's not shared, a skeleton in his closet. A woman, a relationship that we don't know about...
- P: But there's no woman.
- J: Ah, there are some. Because he was unmarried. He changed wives, there's got to be some women involved.
- P: People like myself who are very fond of Americans are not very fond of Bushes. That's not all of America; it's not even half of it.
- J: I've had a position all of my life saying that democracy is the hope of the world . . .
- P: It is the hope of the world . . .
- J: Because democracies don't attack first . . .
- P: Preventive wars. They are just the opposite of that . . .
- J: That's right. But now, George Bush, my president of United States, a democracy, has attacked.
- P: It's silly, it's very silly. It's very un-American, I must say. It's the opposite of the plan Marshall. That's so un-American, I must say.

**J:** Yes, and that message has to get out to the Americans, and they've got to get rid of Bush.

**P:** Yes, but I don't know. We'll talk about it. Any questions, you'll write to me. I don't have email, but if you send me your email, I can get a friend of mine to write you an email.