Title
The Persistence of Memory: The Spanish Civil War in Contemporary Spanish Narrative

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9zc0d8fj

Author
O'Neill, Matthew J.

Publication Date
2011

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
The Persistence of Memory: The Spanish Civil War in Contemporary Spanish Narrative

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Spanish

by

Matthew John O’Neill

June 2011

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. David K. Herzberger, Chairperson
Dr. James A. Parr
Dr. Raymond L. Williams
The Dissertation of Matthew John O’Neill is approved:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my profound gratitude to Professor David K. Herzberger for his willingness to adopt this project, his editorial suggestions, and for his patience in allowing its completion. Equal thanks are due to Professors James A. Parr and Raymond L. Williams for their participation and assistance in the completion of this project. I owe a special debt to Professors Candelas Gala of Wake Forest University and Ana María Fagundo of UCR, without whose insights and encouragement I would never have begun.

Finally, my greatest thanks go to the friends and family whose support and good humor—not to mention insistence—have been of inestimable help to me along this study’s completion. Most specifically, thanks go to my sister, Kimberlee O’Neill, whose keen readings and idiosyncratic perspective on literature and history have forever altered my understanding of those disciplines and the power and value they can hold when we know how to read.
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Persistence of Memory: The Spanish Civil War in Contemporary Spanish Narrative

by

Matthew John O’Neill

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Spanish
University of California, Riverside, June 2011
Dr. David K. Herzberger, Chairperson

The primary aim of this study is to examine the widespread and formative presence of the Spanish civil war in contemporary Spanish narrative. Parting from Marianne Hirsch’s formulation of cultural production at a generational remove from any historical trauma—what she terms postmemory—and Pierre Nora’s organization of cultural production around both singular and collected cultural artifacts termed sites of remembrance—lieux de mémoire—the study explores the ways in which five contemporary Spanish novels rely on the conflict and its aftermath for primary source material, adopt and reconfigure the narrative commonplaces constructed during the years
between the war and the reestablishment of democracy, and will continue to shape forthcoming narratives of similar thematic bent. The study analyzes novels by four different contemporary Spanish authors—Antonio Muñoz Molina, Luis Mateo Díez, Julio Llamazares, and Marina Mayoral—from differing critical perspectives; potential points of connection that can be drawn between these novels and other works of literature, Spanish and not, accompany each piece of textual analysis with the aim of underscoring the very public reckoning with the events and consequences of the war that has taken place since its putative end in 1939.

The last two decades have witnessed a number of outstanding changes in public policy, culminating most recently in the 2007 Ley de memoria histórica, but these investigations, exhumations and legal proclamations only emerged after years of protestation and petition, both overt and subtle. One form that this resistance to collective national amnesia has taken is that of narrative produced since 1939, and this study separates one branch of that fiction—those novels that confront the war, written since Franco’s death in 1975—and identifies the ways in which that fiction constitutes a multifaceted lieux de mémoire to mitigate the inevitable forgetting that accompanies the passage of historical time. The aim of the present study, then, is to demonstrate that, despite differing approaches to the representation of those particular historical events, memories of the civil war, and, in the case of these authors, postmemories, persist and form an important segment of the literary and cultural imagination in Spain today.
# Table of Contents

Introduction..........................................................................................................................1

Endnotes..............................................................................................................................30

Chapter 1.................................................................................................................................33

Endnotes..............................................................................................................................119

Chapter 2.................................................................................................................................127

Endnotes..............................................................................................................................177

Chapter 3.................................................................................................................................181

Endnotes..............................................................................................................................255

Chapter 4................................................................................................................................260

Endnotes..............................................................................................................................366

Chapter 5................................................................................................................................275

Endnotes..............................................................................................................................386

Bibliography..........................................................................................................................400
INTRODUCTION

Imperfect Designs on the Indefinable:

The Civil War, Postmemory, and Contemporary Spanish Narrative

“Literature, then, allows us to explain the undefinable, and criticism provides us with the tools to attempt to put into words that experience.”

—Robert C. Spires, Post-Totalitarian Spanish Fiction

In his wide-ranging study of Spanish fiction between 1975 and 1989, Robert Spires wrangles literature, history, politics, criticism and theory, and science and technology, to approach an epistemic understanding of narrative in Spain after the death of Franco. Taking cues from Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari, Spires develops his analysis around the concept of “field,” which presents a radical departure from the Western philosophical tradition: “Whereas intellectual communities since the Greeks have explained reality as a linear or causal process, the current community increasingly conceives of it as an interconnected network or field” (3). This approach presupposes the existence of interdisciplinary dialogue across time, an intertextual correspondence in which past, present, and future exist eternally interdependent, because, “the person who discovers an area of knowledge is influenced by previously discovered fields that to one degree or another predetermined his or her discovery and that in turn will, to one degree or another, predetermine future discoveries” (3). The hope of this study is to outline the
manner(s) in which this dialogue connects earlier literary works and critical frameworks to literature relating to the nondefinable quantity in contemporary Spanish history; armed with a full field of literary and critical interconnections and aided by a theoretical tool—Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, devised for a different discipline—it becomes evident that the civil war continues to emerge in Spanish fiction in a number of distinct ways. Javier Cercas is one contemporary author whose works, both fiction and non-fiction, engage the topic openly and do so, like Spires’s analysis, from varying critical perspectives; as such, his works serve as a point of departure from which to consider the continued presence of the civil war in contemporary Spanish narrative.

Cercas, in a 2002 short story titled “La verdad de Agamenón,” describes the disastrous consequences of a meeting between a fictive version of himself, a Spanish novelist and journalist named Javier Cercas, and a physically identical man named Javier Cercas who works a banal, stable job as a mid-level administrator at the University of Granada. The narration, the reader eventually becomes aware, takes the form of an interview with a curiously well-read police detective, to whom the first fictitious Cercas explains the convoluted circumstances that precede his murder of the second Javier Cercas. The story revolves around questions of personal and professional dissatisfaction, the equal desires for novelty in daily existence and the reestablishment of normalcy after those new experiences, and the impact of personal agency in this dynamic of exchange. In the story, the two identical Javier Cercases, after an initial meeting, lock themselves in a hotel room for nearly a week to study and internalize the other’s history, habits, and
idiosyncrasies in order to execute what will be the great coup: each will, for an agreed upon time to be determined, assume the life of the other.

The reader follows the first Cercas—journalist, author, prominent polemic—as he assumes with relative ease the domestic banality of the second’s life; he takes over the other’s ordinary responsibilities at the university and becomes a husband and father to a new wife and children. His initial reaction to this shift is equal parts voyeur and well-trained actor: “así era como yo me sentía: como un delincuente impune, como un espía y un impostor y un usurpador y un mirón de mi propia vida, pero nunca como un farsante, que era como me sentía cuando aún no había dejado de ser quien era” (285). In their concerted biweekly contact, he learns that the second Cercas has installed himself equally seamlessly into the first’s life, and as they agree on the apparent ease of the switch, they continue the charade to increasingly successful lengths. The first Cercas recovers the pieces of his life that had been lost—his true marriage had ended, the self-centeredness and eventual success of his writing had led to alienation from friends and family—and though his presence in a new family does effect some change, he wryly observes that,

mi mujer y mis hijos notaban que la relación con su marido y su padre había cambiado, pero, como había cambiado para bien y como además las personas nunca nos preguntamos por qué nos ocurren las cosas buenas (sólo las malas), acogieron el hecho sin inquietud ni interrogantes [. . .].

(287)
The second Cercas, in turn, exchanges what had been his existence—wife, children, work, the trappings of modern domesticity—for the relative freedom and flexibility he had always desired but had sacrificed to become an middle-class husband and father; each of the Cercases, for a time, enjoys the novelty of their circumstance and eventually settles into an equally novel routine, a new reality that seems to content both men, each in his own way.

When the second Cercas begins encroaching on the first’s identity by submitting essays under their name and fulfilling a number of publishing-related contractual responsibilities—one of which, in a self-referential nod, is the collection of essays and one short story under the title La verdad de Agamenón, the volume in which the story appears—the first begins to reconsider the terms of the deal. The unwillingness of the second to fulfill the only real requirement of the bargain, that whenever either pronounces the experiment finished the other should acquiesce, accelerates the story to its denouement:

Bueno, basta ya, lo atajé. Se acabó. Acuérdate de nuestro trato: cuando uno de los dos se cansara de ser quien no es, volveríamos a ser quienes éramos. Pues yo ya me he cansado. […] Me he cansado: quiero recuperar a mi mujer verdadera y a mi hijo verdadero y mi trabajo verdadero, quiero recuperar mi vida de verdad. (292)

In a sprawling, four-page paragraph, the first Cercas admits his guilt in the murder of the second Cercas. The narration alternates between fragments of telephone conversations
between the two Cercases and the first’s explications and contextualizations of his emotional state and behavior to the detective. The conclusion is an extended examination of nostalgia and the loss of identity and at the same time posits the question of whether the recovery of an abandoned former reality is possible; recognizing his own agency in leaving that reality behind, the other question that emerges for the first Cercas is whether or not one should seek forgiveness for attempting to recover what was once his. The guilty Cercas is unequivocal:

Estoy perfectamente cuerdo. Entiendo que tengo que ser castigado: he matado a un hombre y tengo que ser castigado. No pido perdón. Lo único que pido es que no me tomen por loco, que me crean, que usted por lo menos me crea, que crea que todo lo que le he contado es la verdad, la pura verdad, sólo le pido eso. (294)

The insistence on the recuperation of his true identity, and the means he deems reasonable to do so, hint at Cercas’s position regarding the real-world dilemmas facing Spain even three decades after the establishment of social democracy.

In the section of La verdad de Agamenón titled “Cartas de batalla,” Cercas reproduces excerpts from several essay-based debates, carried out over months and years, dedicated to a number of specific political and historical topics—Francoism and its legacy, the Transition, the Historical Memory Law of 2006—and, more generally, to the confrontation of contemporary history at the commemoration of moments like the 25th anniversary of Franco’s death or the 70th of the military insurrection of 1936. Cercas’s
position is as unequivocal in these essays as is that of his protagonist in “La verdad de Agamenón”; Spain’s progress as a democracy since 1975 and its relatively comfortable position in Western Europe and the Eurozone have rendered the sacrifices of the Transition—the blanket amnesties and expedient excisions of certain historical realities from the public historical record—unnecessary, and an unabashed public reckoning is possible, reasonable, and necessary. In articles under titles like “El pasado imposible,” “Las raíces del presente,” “Cómo acabar de una vez por todas con el franquismo,” “¿Tenía razón Tejero?” and “La falsificación de la historia,” Cercas details the ways in which a reasonably stable, mature democracy can and must confront the “neblina de equivocos, malentendidos, verdades a medias y simples mentiras” (125), imposed first by an illegitimate regime whose primary concerns were the consolidation and maintenance of its own power, and subsequently by the political establishment tasked with the execution of the Transition. Encountering “La verdad de Agamenón” beside articles of this nature generates the possibility of a multifaceted reading, the first is the mimetic, centered directly on the personal circumstances of the protagonist, another allegorical, reflecting the challenges faced by a nation confronting its own past, and the third and most general is discursive, reflecting on the act of writing itself and the role it plays in confronting the civil war.

The juxtaposition of this story with the collection of articles that make up La verdad de Agamenón—culled from Cercas’s contributions to El país during the last ten years—makes an allegorical reading of the story indicative of the role of the civil war in contemporary narrative, and this reading is elucidated by first examining the details of the
protagonists’ experiences, the motivations that result from those experiences, and the consequences of those motivations. Ostensibly, the story revolves around personal and professional dissatisfaction and the fantasy of altering one’s circumstances in search of a different life. Both Javier Cercases find themselves approaching middle-age and grappling with the frustrations that accompany their respective lives; the first Cercas finds that, having garnered a certain acclaim for his work as an author, he not only loses the compulsion that had driven him to write, but also becomes trapped in his existence:

Ya no escribía por necesidad, sino por inercia, y el resultado no podía ser necesario, sino inercial: derivativo o simplemente malo. Atónito, comprendí que podía vivir sin escribir. Lo malo es que, a aquellas alturas, yo ya no podía dejar de ser un escritor, porque todo el mundo (los editores, los lectores, los críticos: todo el mundo) me consideraba un escritor [. . .].

(274)

This success produces contradictory results for the first Cercas in that his long-desired professional success irrevocably damages the stability of his personal life. The second Cercas, about whom little is known until the first arrives to occupy his life, had, years before, abandoned the possibility of a literary career to ensure the stability of his family life. The exchange of identities initially provokes curiosity and excitement, but these give way to nostalgia and ultimately regret; the protagonist watches his father’s funeral as a stranger and is forced to observe passively as the second Cercas overtakes the professional literary identity so dearly earned. The first Cercas expounds at length on
what he loses in search of a different life, and on the fierce necessity that drives his desire to recover that life:

[. . .] distinguí la irritación inconfundible del llanto en los ojos de mi tocayo, cuando sentí por vez primera una nostalgia hiriente de mi otra vida, de mi vida anterior y verdadera [. . .], y la tristeza y la nostalgia se me confundieron con una furia asesina contra mi tocayo, como si hubiera sido él quien me hubiera robado la vida sin aviso y no yo quien hubiera insistido en que me prestase la suya [. . .]. (290)

These competing needs, to abandon one’s reality and to cling to that reality, reveal a profound resistance on the part of the protagonist to forfeit his identity and his history, for as flawed and scarred as they might be. Underpinning the tension between those needs, as the final clauses of the preceding fragment make evident, is the recognition that the first Cercas was the first and most insistent proponent of the switch. The initial comfort and pleasure of an innocuous and monotonous, albeit comfortable, existence expose the wounds caused by disjointing a once-integral self, and the weight of that responsibility intensifies that sense of loss.

This disjuncture is the outstanding element of one allegorical reading\(^3\) of “La verdad de Agamenón,” and what connects the story to the purpose of this study. The potential metaphorical value of such a reading becomes clear by ascribing to each of the Cercases in the story one broadly-based identity corresponding to sectors of the Spanish population. The first Cercas is a committed student of history and vocal critic of the
concerted effort at forgetting that defines the Transition, while the second represents the equally globalizing “average Spaniard” whose concerns—family, job, mortgage—befit the condition of the modern, European Spain, as he informs the first Cercas early in the story: “Bastante tiene uno con preocuparse de las cosas que pasan cada día como para encima tener que preocuparse de las cosas raras” (276). This alignment shifts the well-trodden idea of the two Spains, reconsidered and reconfigured for the twenty-first century; the two Spains are no longer Republican and putatively Nationalist, *vencidos* and *vencedores*, and the division is no longer a question of openly applauding, or merely tacitly approving of, the worldview and methods of the regime or opposing them. The gulf is now defined, as Cercas draws it, by a combination of education and willingness to cope with the facts of the historical case and remedy the identifiable wrongs committed in the name of the state. When the first Cercas gives up his dedication to a critical stance toward his history by accepting the mundane concerns of the second, he abandons an essential part of his identity and manifests that loss intensely, ultimately in the premeditated murder of the man he irrationally sees as a usurper. Allegorically then, Spain’s attempted concealment of, and acquiescence to, the Francoist past—its refusal to acknowledge the verifiable injustices of the civil war and the dictatorship—produce a profound experience of loss that, unalleviated, only generates a violent, calamitous reaction.

“La verdad de Agamenón” fictionalizes the attitude that Cercas manifests in his editorial essays, many of which exhort a direct, pragmatic two-fold campaign: to recognize those people and events that, since 1936, have been forgotten, and to rectify
any intentional misinformation disseminated in support of an ideological cause. Whether this disjunction in memory has occurred through political wrangling or through time and disuse, the actions undertaken in defense of Spain—both blocs inevitably claim this intent as unique to their effort—warrant exploration and explanation. Cercas, in both fiction and essay, urges and participates in the creation of a full and faithful rendering of those actors and actions for precisely the reasons that motivate the protagonist of “La verdad de Agamenón.” Exile, censorship, and the deterioration of memory and physical body over time all inhibit the recuperation of unarticulated, silenced, and buried segments of memory that belong to the social and political history of the twentieth century in Spain; this void, Cercas argues, perpetuates, albeit without the repressive institutional apparatus, the culture of silence that reigned during the dictatorship, and promotes the continued public unwillingness to confront the realities of the past. José Carlos Mainer has argued, with respect to the cultural production in Spain in the 1970s, that film and literature discovered an elegantly simple solution to the potential national crisis of identity that would follow Franco’s passing: “the recovery of a person’s past through his memories” (20); as a component of the Spanish aesthetic lexicon, the coexisting generations of authors during the Transition plied, revised and inverted this narrative tack as a matter of course, but the authors with whom this study contends face a limitation that necessarily colors their capacity to access those memories: chronologically, none possesses a memory that includes the war itself, or even the first postwar decade. A different critical tool, therefore, becomes necessary in assaying the
manner in which authors in contemporary Spain penetrate memory in their approach to the civil war.

II

In her 1997 book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch traces, as the title might suggest, family histories—most centrally her own—through photography and narrative centered on the Holocaust and the fate of Eastern and Central European Jewry in the second half of the twentieth century, and develops, with philosophical underpinning based on the work of Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, and Henri Raczy"mow, the concept she terms “postmemory”:

I propose the term “postmemeory” with some hesitation, conscious that the prefix “post” could imply that we are beyond memory and therefore perhaps [. . .], purely in history. In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by a deep personal connection. (22)

In pragmatic terms, postmemory is the experience of another’s memory and history, that is, a form of intimate familiarity with the past “mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (22). In Hirsch’s study, postmemory is the means by which subsequent generations of the Jewish diaspora—the familial dynamic plays a literally formative role; the proximity of both family and community permits the necessary intergenerational contact to craft the narratives that constitute postmemory—contemplate, validate, reconstruct, and reintegrate the traumatized history of preceding
generations into contemporary consciousness. Hirsch focuses on the acts of memory and postmemory carried out by survivors and descendants of the Holocaust—photographs and their exhibitions, the visual arts and their installations, memory books and memoirs—that create and define the relationship of the new generations to the temporally distant yet consciously immediate catastrophe. Her analysis parts from the consideration of photographs, and the larger share of her analysis contends with the discovery and explication of evidence primarily visual. As such Hirsch opens her study by exploring the framework for photographic analysis built by Roland Barthes in the theoretical vignettes collected under the title Camera Lucida (1981).

In reading photographs, Barthes identifies the generalized cultural knowledge that an observer brings to the photographic object as the studium, “which does not mean, at least not immediately, ‘study,’ but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity” (Barthes 26); this appreciation is “the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in people” (27), and represents the first interest one takes in the photograph. The punctum, produced by some element or another of the photograph, is the element of the photographic text that “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces” (26); this element of the text grants it particularity, specificity, and piques the interest of the reader, an interest that ultimately leads her to generate a narrative rendering of the image that allows an attempt at uncovering an organization for it. For Barthes, the punctum of any particular photograph is unique to the viewer—his essays use as a point of departure a photo of his mother as a child in her winter garden—and that viewer’s
attempt to identify and qualify that piercing element results in the inevitable
textualization of that image, despite the knowledge that, as both Barthes and Hirsch
reaffirm, any narrative sense-making of the photo will always necessarily suffer a
distancing from the reality of that which the image represents. Hirsch theorizes the
concept of postmemory precisely to account for and characterize the difficulties of this
distance and to underscore the role that visual media and narrative recollections continue
to play in the insistent narrative conditioning of the history of the Holocaust.

Hirsch isolates, by way of her personal familial experience, the **studium** for her
tome around photos, narratives, and hybrid texts related to the Holocaust from throughout
the Jewish diaspora. In order to shift the basis for her study from the purely photographic
to a corpus of works in distinct media, she takes advantage of a critical turn that
associates the image and its again, inevitable, narrative identity:

> If Barthes can recognize his mother’s essential being in the winter-garden
> picture of her, it is only possible through the description and narrative in
> which he articulates his response to her image. [...] his mother’s picture
> exists only in the words he uses to describe it and his reaction to it: the
> image has been transformed and translated into a “prose picture,” what W.
> J. T. Mitchell has called an “imagetext.” (Hirsch 3)

Having resolved the apparent disjuncture between photos and logos, Hirsch commits her
analysis to finding the **punctum** of the imagetexts that she selects with the aim of drawing
out the aesthetics of postmemory. Hirsch pulls various **puncta** from different “prose
pictures”—family photographs collected from albums and shoeboxes, collections of art photographs, gallery and museum expositions, memoirs both legitimate and fictional, and even the graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman—and analyzes the manner in which these visual and textual arrows function in their text of origin and how the roles they fulfill characterize the concept of postmemory. One of the primary difficulties she addresses in her analysis is the perceived gulf between the documentary and the aesthetic in Holocaust remembrance; documentary images, for scholars like John Frohmayer, “are a form of evidence. [. . .] they can be held up as proof to the revisionists” (Hirsch 24), while aesthetic artifacts “introduce agency, control, structure and, therefore, distance from the real” (24).

Hirsch cannot divide the documentary from the aesthetic and sets about “highlighting the aestheticizing tendencies present in all visual representation” (24, emphasis original). She seeks to apply the same critical principles to each medium presented, and by this analysis, hopes to address “the question of how different media—comics, photographs, narrative, testimony—can interact to produce a more permeable and multiple text that may [. . .] eradicate any clear-cut distinction between documentary and aesthetic” (25). As analysis below hopes to articulate, a similar dynamic exists in a branch of postmodern fiction in Spain and problematizes the traditionally held distinction between the disciplines of history and literature; in his contribution to the 1998 collection *Intertextual Pursuits: Literary Mediations in Modern Spanish Narrative*, David Herzberger identifies the decline of the assumption of “mimetic adequacy” once granted to endeavors, like history, considered beyond the reach of subjectivity:
The absence of the real compels the collapse of generic differences (one genre is no longer able to reproduce life more fully than the other, since life is not presented but invented through language). The traditionally differentiated discourses of history and fiction thus bleed into each other and form an undifferentiated field of narration. (132)

One of the seemingly paradoxical conclusions to which both Hirsch and Herzberger both arrive—we will return to the conclusions for the Spanish context below—is that this amalgamated, seemingly indefinable narrative does not divest narration of power and value. Rather, it invests the texts in question with a reality that, in the paradoxical fashion typical of fiction in the postmodern vein, derives its power and value from the context from which it springs and simultaneously imbues that reality with powers and values frequently distinct from those which grant the narrative power and value. As she demonstrates by the texts chosen and their capacity to represent the unspeakable, Hirsch underscores the ability of photos and narratives about the Holocaust to draw significance from the historical event itself while at the same time renovating and reinvigorating the study and understanding of those circumstances. This process is not, of course, without pitfalls; Hirsch likens the existence of this problematic for survivors of the Holocaust to both Henri Raczymow’s concept of mémoire trouée—“memory shot through with holes” (Hirsch 23)—and Pierre Nora’s idea of lieux de mémoire—“sites of remembrance” (22)—and these two expressions find continuous outlet in her explication of the texts proposed for analysis.
Hirsch converts the seemingly two-dimensional, incommunicative object into a dynamic textual experience charged with preventing the natural process of forgetting over time. In order to arrive at a fully inclusionary analysis of texts related to the matter, she begins with what Barthes understands as an inert artifact, the photograph, which, without the imposition of textualization, is essentially dead; recasting these photographs in the image of Mitchell’s “imagetexts” broadens the field of analysis in an almost literally boundless way. By adjusting her analysis to those works that participate in the active maintenance of memory—those works that fit the profile of Nora’s understanding of lieux de mémoire—she creates a critical stance from which to examine the polifaceted, multimedia body of work that is the representation of the Holocaust. Nora defines lieux de mémoire as “mixed, hybrid, mutant, and bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity, enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile,” (22), and claims that their function, writ large, is, “to block the work of forgetting” (22). Sites of remembrance of the civil war, both literal and figurative, are innumerable, and some, like the Cementerio del Este and the sanctuary at El Collell, have garnered renown for the atrocities executed in each, and are literally shot through with holes; others—like the prison at Carabanchel or the monuments within the Cementerio del Este to the Condor Legion and the Blue Division—are no less visible or tangible, but require some level of historical investigation to unpack the varied levels of significance that those places represent.

There exist as well sites not at all tangible; Spanish narrative fiction since 1939, taken as a whole, represents one such multivocal site of remembrance that resists any
attempt at standardization. The collected works of authors too numerous to list here between the mid-1930s and the end of the dictatorship stand as a collected site of remembrance of the effects of the war and the regime, and that site—as a secondary portion of the analysis in the following chapters hopes to demonstrate—has been amply rent and rendered by generations of scholars in the dual processes of dissecting what and how those texts mean, and making explicit the unfailingly complex matrix of referents defined by Nora as lieu de mémoire. Another particular branch of narrative, the fiction since the end of the Franco dictatorship, is the central focus of the study at hand and will therefore occupy the majority of the forthcoming analysis. Hirsch’s analysis is primarily photographic—her interest in theorizing on the topic, she admits, led her to organize her volume, “as an album in itself, but not one that is organized chronologically” (12)—and much the same could be said of the present study, excepting the photographic focus; it is neither comprehensive nor conclusive, but draws from texts that nonetheless point up the persistence of the civil war in contemporary literary memory.

Antonio Muñoz Molina’s 1986 novel Beatus Ille appears to explore the limits of postmemory; a hapless university student stumbles into the biography of an apocryphal member of the Generation of 1927 and begins trying to reconstruct—by wading through ambiguous clues, felicitous manuscripts, and idle chat—the dramatic final days of the poet, purportedly murdered nearly a decade after the war’s end. The novel appears, then, to be definitional of the process of postmemory—a generationally-removed, personally-invested subject seeks to identify his connection to the events that destabilized his family and their home in July of 1936. The revelation that the protagonist’s research and
discoveries are a calculated plot on the part of the still-living apocryphal poet

problematizes the nature of this knowledge of the past, but hardly diminishes the value of
postmemory as the backdrop of the analysis of these novels. This intentional
reorganization of history by an active agent of memory does provoke questions about the
authenticity of the history presented, but it also underscores again the viability of
postmemory as a pathway to familiarity with the past. That is to say, the simultaneous
presence of the false narrative trail and the later-revealed authentic—though fictional—
version of the story reemphasizes the treacherous and mutable nature of any knowledge
of history. This volatility over time and the resulting flexibility in textual approaches to it
are pivotal elements of postmemory. The composition and subject matter of Beatus Ille
correspond to multiple critical traditions as well; for that reason, the novel serves equally
to demonstrate that postmemory is not unique to the recounting of historical trauma, and
that, as Spires argues, critical work in any discipline relies on its precursors and
conditions future critical approaches.

The work of Luis Mateo Díez corresponds equally to the criteria of multiple
critical traditions; in two novels, Las estaciones provinciales and La fuente de la edad, he
exises the war entirely from the narrative he presents, and its absence emphasizes further
the informing logic behind the concept of postmemory. For postmemory to function,

overt exhibition of the historical trauma in question need not occur; the accumulation of
referents, both pointed and subtle, can construct a narrative reality with evident
representation power. The construction of that reality relies on episodes culled from
others’ memories, responds to the expression of extant postmemory, and, Spires might
argue, informs the continued shaping of postmemory. Díez credits the filandón—the particularly Leonese tradition of storytelling, in the domestic setting, by tight-knit groups—with playing a formative role in his approach to narration, and much in the same way that Llamazares draws on the lore of the maquis for his novel Luna de lobos. Díez spins meandering, anecdotal tales that recall in detail an era beyond his own capacity for memory. When the civil war does appear in Las estaciones provinciales or La fuente de la edad, its presence is interstitial and serves to punctuate some circumstance in the narrative’s present; the narrative reality of the provincial capital of León in the early 1950s, riven both ideologically and economically and crippled by rampant graft and unabashed egocentricity, provides an overwhelming body of evidence for the lingering of the war’s presence a decade beyond its formal end. Díez amasses characters and caricatures and, relying on the storehouse of decades of stories from every corner, unleashes a portrait whose traditional narrative scheme belies the unrelenting critique of the reality imposed by an irrational and brutal conflict.

Luna de lobos relies less on intentionally and playfully convoluted narrative frameworks than does Beatus Ille, but Llamazares stresses the manipulation of historical time—its compression and extension, as circumstances dictate—in such a way that the elasticity of historical discourse becomes both evident and indispensable. Llamazares, in a very brief narrative, depicts a doubly-marginalized group in the historiographic orthodoxy of the regime; the figure of the maquisard not only perpetrated the standard crimes against the eternal Spain by fighting for the Republican cause, he also engaged, while avoiding capture and punishment, in banditry and other murderous pursuits.
Llamazares—taking his cue not from the official line of history but from the living heart of postmemory: popular lore—profoundly humanizes the men hidden for more than a decade in the mountains of León, only to progressively strip his protagonists of that humanity as their flight lingers and their possibility of survival withers. This is merely one of the paradoxes present in Luna de lobos, and Llamazares’s novel, absorbing the ample tradition of overt, pointed paradox in Spanish literature—in this study represented by the works of Pío Baroja—approaches the civil war by eviscerating the possibility of standard binary oppositions like good and evil under the circumstances experienced throughout rural Spain between 1937 and 1946. Llamazares, paradoxically, presents one binary opposition after another in the novel, but the accumulation of juxtaposed atrocity and humanity only accentuates the futility of those oppositions; postmemory dictates, among other lessons, an acceptance of the eternal ambiguity of human endeavor.

Recóndita armonía by Marina Mayoral fuses two distinct lines of postmemorial discourse. The civil war—its confusion and its inexplicability—dominates much of the novel as the backdrop and conditions the movements of the protagonists; the identities of the protagonists, in turn, represent a connected but entirely distinct reality, the conditions of which—as Carmen Martín Gaite’s work observes and attests—bear close attention. Mayoral absorbed the very particular Galician narrative of the middle decades of the twentieth century; the civil war annulled the pioneering statute of autonomy approved in Galicia during the Second Republic, and, in accordance with Franco’s project of reestablishing national unity and autocratic rule from Madrid, prohibited the teaching and public use of the Galician language. Both the region and the language—several of her
novels are written in Galician, later translated into Spanish—represent central thematic lines and mark the fidelity to the history of the region as prominent characteristics of Mayoral’s fiction. In the specific case of Recóndita armonía, Mayoral challenges the stereotyped roles ascribed to Spanish women during the civil war and under Franco by crafting as protagonists two fearless young women who tromp unobstructed through university halls and front-line trenches as witnesses to the chaotic 1930s in Spain. Complementary to Mayoral’s novel are two texts shaped by the experience of the war and therefore foundational in the postmemorial consideration of the role of women therein: Carmen Laforet’s Nada and Carmen Martín Gaite’s Usos amorosos de la postguerra española. Both texts, one fiction and the other a hybrid memoir/historical essay, perform precisely the type of narrative conditioning Hirsch presents in her analysis; born in 1942, Mayoral inevitably only experiences the civil war through the works and words of others, and this particular branch of the war—its consequences for young women—draws heavily on the works of Laforet, Martín Gaite, and the growing number of female authors of the mid-century whose works are, however belatedly, joining the canon.

One of the critical positions each of the foregoing chapters supposes is the potential productivity of readings that seek to identify and establish sites of connection between texts, both critical and literary, that can lend depth and texture to the understanding of the role of the civil war in contemporary literature. In the introduction to the aforementioned Interxtextual Pursuits, Jeanne Brownlow and John Kronik advocate the continued search for these points of connection regardless of their being theoretically passé; their assertion is that “the detection of transtextual mutations and
transgressions remain a paramount adventure in the literary-critical enterprise” (23). The central and final aim of the study at hand is to highlight the repeated sites of connection that bond contemporary authors in Spain to their national literary tradition and the broader literary-critical corpus that inevitably inform the manner in which narrative comes into being. The accumulation of these sites, Brownlow and Kronik argue, is indicative of the processes involved in carrying out intertextual readings in the twenty-first century:

Just as chaos is no longer a tumultuous state or condition but a revision of order, so is intertextuality no longer a formalized contract between two distinguished and distinguishable parties, but a wide-ranging instrument of relevance retrieval whose function is the accrual rather than the immediate exchange of knowledge. (12)

Just as Hirsch’s concept of postmemory serves as a tool to recover and draw out meaning in artifacts from generationally-distant actors still affected by a catastrophic trauma, the procedures of intertextuality, freed of the necessity of direct “intentional, influential, or determinate” roles, is nonetheless “always present in writing and always a force that drives the readerly act” (12). This observation is an apropos point of departure to close this introduction with a discursive, intertextual reading of Cercas’s story and essays.

The readings of “La verdad de Agamenón” above, the mimetic and the allegorical, can help extract important elements of the story, and intimate, if only tentatively, a third reading of the discursive motivation and objectives that can connect
the critical tool of postmemory to the branch of contemporary Spanish fiction that confronts the civil war, whether blatant or indirectly. Cercas, author and real-world intellectual working simultaneously in a number of media, was born in 1962; in the simplest and most direct terms, any writing he dedicates to the civil war or the contemporary debates surrounding it will, as a matter of chronological fact, be tinged with a narrative conditioning that Hirsch has defined as characteristic of postmemory. This distancing, despite its inevitability at present, is effectively bridged by decades of scholarly work and artistic and literary representation of the war, because the work of engaging and valuing historical memory by way of both literature and criticism finds continual outlet and expression. When Herzberger’s observations regarding postmodern fiction in Spain—that the textuality of all narrative forms irrevocably conditions any knowledge of the past and defines the present, informed by its attendant mutability, ambiguity, and provisionality—are understood not to reflect oddities occasionally surfacing in the literary landscape, but rather to attempt a functional, systemic perspective on the manner in which we comprehend the—again, textual—nature of our reality, the evidentiary aspects of both fiction and history become both contradictory and indispensable. Both forms of narrative assist the continued recovery of the past, much in the same way that Barthes seeks his dead mother in photographs and Hirsch seeks to uncover the varied renderings of the Holocaust; the texts examined, as Brownlow and Kronik argue, become invaluable tools for the retrieval of meaning and relevance.
The artifact in question in this introduction, the collection of generically disparate works under the title *La verdad de Agamenón*, participates actively and without pretense in this discursive project, as he admits in the prologue:

Todo escritor que no acepte ser un mero escribano contrae un apasionado compromiso con el lenguaje, pero al contraerlo contrae también, lo sepa o no—y más le vale saberlo—, un apasionado compromiso con la realidad, porque, como no ignora ningún escritor con alguna conciencia de su oficio, la escritura de una frase, por banal o anodina que parezca, entraña la toma de unas decisiones que no son únicamente lingüísticas; [. . .]. (18)

As the collection of varied writings in *La verdad de Agamenón* attests, the coincidence and coalescence of distinct narrative forms approach the reality they attempt to quantify in a problematic way, but the contradictions and ambiguities attendant to writing the past are as troublesome to this discursive project as they are essential. Even the preceding definition of what might be deemed Cercas’s definition of the writer’s responsibility is undercut in other parts of the prologue in which he proposes that the publication of a compilation of earlier works reveals at worst nothing more than the egocentrism of the author under whose name those works are published, or at best an ex post facto attempt at the attribution of meaning and coherence to such a collection. And, in turn, this position, after Cercas presents it, is submitted to immediate vivisection: “No creo en las virtudes salvíficas de la coherencia intelectual a machamartillo [. . .], pero tampoco en las de la incoherencia sistemática, no digamos la rapazmente calculada” (15). For Cercas, writers
of all stripes, non-fiction and fiction, “no sólo nos enseñan a leer la contemporaneidad, sino también a leer la historia; es decir, nos enseñan a leernos a través de del presente y a través del pasado” (20), but the responsible party demurs in the recognition that “casi todo lo que nosotros pensamos ya fue pensado, y casi siempre mucho mejor de lo que nosotros sabremos llegar a pensar” (21).

The prologue, with respect to writers and their words, tempers earnestness with cynicism, and when the latter overreaches, cynicism with earnestness; it privileges the necessary presence and power of history but requires at every turn that writers be willing to “recoger, corregir, reescribir y ordenar” (16) not only texts they find in their readings, but those they produce as well. Across the articles collected in La verdad de Agamenón Cercas develops a consistent theme that echoes the prologue. Writers, or what he considers the “escritor responsable,” must be cognizant of the generations of writers preceding the moment in which they write and, if only occasionally, reflect on those figures and the ways in which those works inform their own. In the prologue alone, Cercas recognizes Homer, Juan de Valdés, Lewis Carroll, Antonio Machado, Borges, Bioy Casares and Italo Calvino, among others, in outlining the project, assuring the reader at the same time that the articles in the collection hope to rely on a self-sustaining logic to validate their inclusion rather than “en el acopio indiscriminado de nombres intimidantes” (21); this position, ultimately, leads Cercas to define his craft as the simultaneous aims to both “prolongar o afinar” the dialogue with those forbears and “delimitar un territorio propio” (20) in the world of letters.
One evident conclusion from this conversation that Cercas maintains with his literary self is that writers rely on other writers, but this stance suggests a corollary not explicit in Cercas’s brief essay, but made explicit above in Brownlow and Kronik’s assertion of the dual purpose of intertextuality: reading and writing are mutually dependent exercises, and every writer’s work is the result of the accumulation of readings, which, in turn, are only ever produced by writers who had always already been readers. The discursive project that the presence of “La verdad de Agamenón” within the pages of La verdad de Agamenón implies, and the project that most centrally informs the study presented here, is the exposure of contemporary narrative in Spain, doubtless definable as an avatar of Nora’s concept of lieux de mémoire, to potential sites of connection—that is, to different writers—that permit the reexamination of the civil war and generate readings that continue to detail the conflict. While a close reading of the story can identify particular lexical, stylistic, or thematic predilections on the part of the author and allegoresis can ascribe metaphorical value to a number of elements in the story, the discursive reading relates Cercas’s work to the broader endeavor of expressing a connection between the intertwined fields of contemporary literature and contemporary history, or, more directly, between the fictions and realities that are inseparable in the discursive project of confronting and rectifying the ideologically-imposed alterations that prohibit a conscientious knowledge of the recent past. The articles dedicated to questions of contemporary political machinations and the silences imposed by the Franco regime and the “pactos de olvido” make explicit the need for the recuperation of the silenced and ignored aspects of that history, and for Cercas, the most effective solution to this
intentional excision from the historical record is as simple his responsibility as a writer: to continuing writing, to tell the stories that need to be told.

When, at the conclusion of “La verdad de Agamenón,” the first Cercas fully exposes his guilt to the detective charged with his case, it becomes apparent that this—the telling—is the only remaining resolution for those whose exclusion from their own identity is total, and particularly for those who actively seek to effect that exclusion:

“Desesperado, comprendí que estaba preso en una pesadilla hermética, comprendí que no podía hacer nada. Nada excepto lo que hice, claro” (294). The action of the story, his murder of the interloping Javier Cercas, is the single possible solution to the seemingly impossible reality which he himself sought to assume and which subsequently became incomprehensible and odious to him. Here a final component of the allegorical reading of “La verdad de Agamenón” is instructive as well. Tracing the corresponding identities of the two Cercases highlights two broad sectors in Spanish society, those who prefer to leave the past buried in whichever grave it might lie, and those who hope to unearth that which is forgotten; in that both men choose to execute the switch—deciding freely to abandon their own pasts—Cercas suggests that, in the sacrifices and omissions necessitated by the Transition, Spaniards as a whole elected to abandon their past in the hope that a new reality, however unknown and unknowable, might offer some respite from the weight of the looming, dissociated history. The guilty Cercas understands that the facts of the case are known—as are many of the events of the civil war and the dictatorship—but pleads for a faithful recognition of them, and that his attitude toward those events and people be understood: “No me haga contarlo otra vez, por favor, todo el
mundo conoce la historia, yo nunca la he negado, lo único que quiero es que me entiendan, que entiendan por qué hice lo que hice” (294). The exasperation in the request, that he not be required to repeat his story, reveals a paradox that informs much of the analysis in the chapters ahead, and the story is buttressed by the essays in the volume in discovering the definitive difficulty, and necessary task, of the discursive project in question. The guilty Cercas begs to be relieved of the weight of his story, but cannot be relieved of his(s)tory without the act of telling.

“Dicen que perdí los papeles” (294), Cercas tells the detective, but the meticulousness of his essays’ argumentation and critical verifiability make the double entendre apropos. Within the bounds of the story, the murderer Cercas maintains a tenuous and debatable sanity, but the historical and literary chain of evidence regarding the war has not been lost despite the regime’s best efforts, and its recuperation and integration into the public consciousness is of inestimable import for Cercas and, for this study, the raison d’être. This task is carried out across chronological and generic boundaries, and the shared labor of the recomposition of the history of the Spanish civil war benefits from the expanded expressive capacity made possible by explicating contemporary fiction through earlier Spanish fiction, literary history and theory, and essay and memoir, as the following hopes to show. Identifying sites of historical and literary connection that function as sites of remembrance and exploring the ways in which they function as such opens an exceedingly broad field of possibilities for analysis, the only requirement of which is that is no one set of sites within that field be considered final and irrevocable. To again echo Spires’s initial premise, the complex field of
interconnected expression casts an exceedingly broad net over cultural production generally, but identifying and characterizing the lieux de mémoire—specified in the general field of contemporary literature and the particular field of any of the novels studied here—can regardless produce readings and analyses that help elucidate aspects of the ever-shifting (con)textualization of history, for as imperfect, in all senses, as they might be:

We must recognize, therefore, that our analyses, rather than leading to univocal interpretations, can at best only partially or inaccurately reexpress the literary text, which in turn can only partially or inaccurately reexpress some specific human experiences that the artist has transformed into blocks of sensations. […] Yet the combination of these two modes (literary and critical) may be the best source we have for expressing in language the episteme of any given epoch. (Spires 3)

With both the critical perspective and the caveat in mind, then, we turn to the analysis of several possible examples of the loci of shared literary and historical meaning with regard to the Spanish civil war.
Endnotes

1 The content of these essays will be examined in greater detail in the conclusion to this study.

2 The term “mimetic reading” here is employed to mimic the work that Auerbach carries out in the mimetic readings in his 1946 tome *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*; that is, the first level of reading in this analysis approaches traditional analytical close-reading. The present annotation hopes to clarify any potential confusion between this use and either the classical term from antiquity or the relatively contemporary Girardian iteration.

3 Allegorical readings, for as antiquated as they might seem, continue to function in a valuable way to establish an accord in the communication of meaning between writer and reader; despite the then—1998—incipient theoretical factotum of “discourse,” Brownlow and Kronik argue that more traditional procedures for the reading of texts, in their continued application, hardly ever disappear: “just as with allegory writers continue to allegorize and readers continue to practice allegoresis on texts” (23). Rather than disappearing, they become part and parcel of renovated forms of reading; the recognition of multiple, simultaneously operative discourses in Cercas’s story and essays opens the field of readings to equally numerous potential allegorical readings, of which one is presented here.

4 The standard rendering of the critical topos of the two Spains is well-known to Hispanists, so much so that users maintain a Wikipedia page dedicated uniquely to the idea. Though many thinkers—among them Larra, Menéndez Pidal, Ángel Ganivet, Ramiro de Maeztu, Unamuno, and Antonio Machado—considered different formulations of the idea, one iteration, derived from the divisions of the civil war, has occupied both public and intellectual discourse since the Second Republic. Under this scheme, the military insurrection against the Republican government divided the nation between the two factions, and at the war’s end, members of each side were reinscribed into the categories of vencedores and vencidos depending on their allegiance. After 1975, the existence of such a division became antithetical to the purposes of the Transition, which, by pardons and other official decrees, promoted the unity of the modern, democratic Spanish state above all else. This process relied on the attempted erasure of historical ideological divisions still prevalent after Franco’s death and, perhaps more importantly, on the sublimation of public memory with the aim of executing the orderly transition to social democracy. Both of these concepts figure prominently in any examination of contemporary narrative that contends with the civil war and Cercas’s essay and story are no exception. The essays depict a newly divided Spain, but Cercas abandons the ideological debate, which dominated the public and intellectual conversations for decades, for an empirical one—a closer analysis of which appears in the final chapter:
Salvo nuestros irreductibles talibanes, nadie busca ya revancha, nadie busca ya juzgar a nadie; se trata simplemente de abordar por fin un problema aparcado durante treinta años por imperativos de la realidad, de empezar a administrar la memoria pública del franquismo de una forma razonable, pedagógica y consensuada, y de reparar de todas las formas posibles las injusticias infligidas a sus humillados y ofendidos. (145)

5 A number of critics cite this phenomenon as critical in the maintenance of cultural life in Spain across the span of the dictatorship, as analysis in each of the fours chapters below hope to demonstrate amply. Mainer defines the difficulty, and, quizzically, the strength, of the forbears’ position in this chronology:

In other words, shortly before 20 November 1975, the children of the war had discovered the strong powers of the past inside themselves [by way of narratives born of memory], like a kind of unspeakable cancer. But precisely because of these powers of the past, the years from 1973 to 1975 were also an uncomfortable present with a not-very-promising future. (20-21)

6 While both Mayoral and Díez were born in 1942, any memory they might access to that decade is unlikely to be free of narrative intrusion. Muñoz Molina and Llamazares, both born in the middle of the following decade, the 1950s, evidently suffer even greater distance chronologically.

7 The Cementerio del Este in the Ciudad Lineal section of Madrid became synonymous with extrajudicial executions by both the Francoist army during the war, and the newly established dictatorship after 1939. The monastery Santa María del Collell, northeast of Barcelona and on a popular escape route for emigrants to France, was the site of a mass execution carried out by Republican troops in 1939; among the victims was Rafael Sánchez Mazas, the ideological father of the Falange and the biological of the novelist Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio. Sánchez Mazas, as Cercas fictionalizes in the 2001 novel Soldados de Salamina, survived the execution and became a minister in Franco’s first governments as well as a member of the Real Academia.

8 Surviving witnesses of the civil war have, with the passage of time, evidently become more and more scarce. Seventy years after the official cessation of hostilities, a number of organizations have dedicated time and effort to the uncovering of the forgotten and buried stories of survivors and those whose presence and participation in the political life of Spain during the Second Republic and the civil war was effectively erased by the imposition of the Franco regime. In Spain, organizations like the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica, the Asociación de Ex-presos y Represaliados Políticos, and the Federación Estatal de Foros por la Memoria all continue to work toward the archiving of testimony of survivors and victims of the Francoist army, during the war, and the subsequent regime. In the U.S., one project of particular interest is
housed at the University of California, San Diego; an interdisciplinary team of faculty maintains an audio-visual collection for much the same purpose, titled “The Spanish Civil War Memory Project.”
CHAPTER 1

So Much for Quiet Country Living: Tradition and Innovation

In Antonio Muñoz Molina’s *Beatus Ille*

“Que hay otro ser por el que miro el mundo,

porque me está queriendo con sus ojos.”

Pedro Salinas

The sentiment proposed by this member of the Generation of 1927—the connective and transformative power of a lover’s gaze—echoes throughout Antonio Muñoz Molina’s first novel, *Beatus Ille* (1986). Virtually all the relationships presented in the novel repeat this leitmotiv in varying degrees, at times even erasing the temporal boundaries between characters, allowing those in the present to live vicariously in the past. The intensity of the relationships presented remains constant, between 1933 and 1969, as lovers and friends repeatedly struggle against the inevitable passing of time and the imposition of circumstances beyond their control. In *Beatus Ille*, this circumstance, and the central external referent of the novel, is the civil war, and the insertion of flashbacks and retrospective narration evokes both the war itself—from 1936 to 1939—and the years immediately preceding and following the conflict. The narrative schemes are complex, combining first-person eyewitness accounts with numerous subjective third-person testimonials, and the result is deeply nuanced narration that slowly unravels various fictive mysteries long dormant in the sleepy Andalusian town of Mágina.
The narrator of *Beatus Ille* is the apocryphal Republican poet Jacinto Solana, a supposedly forgotten member of the Generation of 1927. The protagonist is Minaya, a university student who in 1969 leaves Madrid to begin writing a doctoral dissertation on the life and works of Solana, supposedly murdered in a gun fight with the Guardia Civil in 1947 in Mágina. Ostensibly, it is Minaya’s journey to Mágina, a literary rendering of the author’s provincial home, Úbeda, and his investigations there which comprise the plot of the novel; nonetheless, there remains one last narrative twist, a hallmark of an author often considered the premier narrator in contemporary Peninsular letters. Not unlike Augusto Pérez, the protagonist of *Niebla* by Miguel de Unamuno,¹ Muñoz Molina’s Minaya directly confronts his creator and accomplice, the narrator Solana. Although Muñoz Molina, unlike Unamuno, does not introduce himself into the text, the effect of this narrative device is the same; Minaya, until that point assuming the veracity of Solana’s death, encounters the narrator Solana, and is forced to recognize his role as pawn in the development of the novel.

With this meeting, the complex narrative framework of *Beatus Ille* is completed, and the concept of narration as artifice brought to the fore. Muñoz Molina employs a fragmentary narration that takes place over a number of distinct historical moments. The earliest is 1933, when Solana leaves Mágina to seek literary fame in Madrid, and intervening moments in 1936, 1937, and 1947 combine with the narrative present-time of 1969—the moment in which Minaya travels to his uncle’s home in Mágina and begins his investigation—to create a porous, fluid time frame in which places, faces, and times mix freely, overlapping and at times colliding. This effect is exacerbated by characters
whose similarities, both physical and otherwise, render the passage of time obsolete, by
the claustrophobic atmosphere—the home of Minaya’s uncle, Manuel—in which the
majority of the novel’s action takes place, and by events which, although separated by
twenty or more years, constantly feed off of past events and intensify an ominous
circularity for the inhabitants and guests of Máginga.

For the purposes of the study proposed here however—the presence and influence
of the Spanish civil war in contemporary narrative—it is the first of Salinas’ verses that
holds special meaning: the protagonist of Beatus Ille—the doctoral student and aspiring
author Minaya—is tied intimately not only to his familial past in Máginga, but also to the
conflict itself and Máginga’s role therein. Moreover, as Minaya delves deeper, he
becomes increasingly entangled in Máginga’s history and his identity hostage to his
ancestors and the Máginga they inhabited. Through his ever-deepening biographical
investigation of Jacinto Solana, Minaya begins, as Salinas suggests, to see the world of
Máginga through others’ eyes.

History, therefore, is paramount in the analysis of Beatus Ille. The novel,
however, resists facile categorization; Muñoz Molina and his contemporaries² are a
group—wide-ranging thematic and stylistic interests, in addition to considerable age
differences, prevent the imposition of a generational scheme—that is steeped in the
traditional Spanish canon, but that has also witnessed the revolution in Peninsular fiction,
and in philosophical and critical culture as well, since the 1960s, carried out by authors
like Luis Martín Santos, Juan Benet, Juan and Luis Goytisolo, and Carmen Martín Gaite,
among others. One of the most significant aspects of this intellectual shift is the renewed approach to history, the once venerable task of recording facts and communicating “what happened” in any given moment of the past. The basis for this novel approach is the assertion that history is ultimately a form of narrative, and as such is beholden to and defiant of the same norms of other narrations. The conclusion, then, is that history is at its core unknowable, or at the very least unverifiable, and therefore mutable and subject to change with time.

In Beatus Ille Muñoz Molina takes advantage of this malleability, presenting numerous and varying accounts of events often central to the development of the novel, with few if any markers to guide the reader toward a “true” version of events. The combination of narrative uncertainty and traditional historical narration is an essential characteristic of the writing of Antonio Muñoz Molina, and Beatus Ille illustrates the dexterity with which the author plies his craft. Once the role of history in the most general sense in the texts of Muñoz Molina is understood, the salient issue of this chapter, that is, how the civil war influences, and in a sense controls, the protagonist of Beatus Ille is more easily elucidated.

II

A number of critics have noted both structural and thematic parallels throughout the works of Muñoz Molina. In his article, “Antonio Muñoz Molina’s Beatus Ille and Beltenebros: Conventions of Reading in the Postmodern Anti-Detective Novel” (1994), Lawrence Rich establishes structural connections between Beatus Ille and Beltenebros.
placing them squarely within the frame of the postmodern “anti-detective” genre. According to Rich, “There is general agreement that the anti-detective novel is a characteristic literary expression of postmodernism. [. . .] many postmodern texts attempt to balance the fulfillment and subversion of reader expectations” (577). He analyzes both the narrative structure and the story development of the two novels, exploring the devices traditional to the detective genre, and examining the ways in which Muñoz Molina employs them. Each novel employs these devices only to alter the expected outcomes, challenging, argues Rich, the reader to engage the text in an active manner. The anti-detective genre, according to Rich’s analysis, is not merely a negation of traditional readerly expectations, but rather a delicate balancing act of acceptance and negation: “Thus, Beatus Ille and Beltenebros are postmodern recreations of popular genres which incorporate, displace and build on conventional reader expectations, rather than only defeat, disappoint or deny them” (579). These two novels are not the only effort by Muñoz Molina to undercut established generic conventions; as further analysis will show, the subversion of traditional subgenres, like the detective novel, is common among not only the works of Muñoz Molina, but also the body of work which the critic Linda Hutcheon has defined as historiographic metafiction.

In her 1994 article “Antonio Muñoz Molina and the Myth of the Spanish Civil War,” Maryse Bertrand de Muñoz uses three novels, Beatus Ille, Beltenebros, and El jinete polaco to analyze the thematic interests of Muñoz Molina. Bertrand de Muñoz contends that the Spanish civil war in each of these novels is no longer a concrete historical fact, but rather a mythical event, removed from the boundaries of history: “For
an event to become a myth, it must be taken out of historical time and space. A myth always deals with events which took place in a distant and imaginary past and this implies that it attaches no importance to chronological time” (428). The Spanish civil war has achieved this atemporal status, and Bertrand de Muñoz argues that the conflict is a mere allusion for the novelists of today: “Using techniques borrowed from other genres or parodying sub-literary genres, they [novels which allude to the civil war] present an impartial view, one free of rancour and hatred, of the events of 1936-1939 and of their consequences” (433). Rather, these novels use the scenery provided by the conflict to offer more universal analyses of the human condition:

Muñoz Molina uses the historical tragedy of the thirties as a backdrop against which eternal passions are at play, as a remote recollection, not as a motive of acute pain. He does so not to justify an ideology but in order to represent the human condition, perhaps degenerate, yet eternal. He thus transforms the Civil War of 1936 into a myth, frees it from ideologies and makes it possible for art to flourish. (434)

For Bertrand de Muñoz, all three of Muñoz Molina’s novels are dehistoricized; in each novel the conflict plays a decorative role, serving as a stage upon which human universality is represented. The present study aims to demonstrate that, although universality may indeed be a central concern, Beatus Ille is inextricably linked to the historical moments in which it takes place. As Hutcheon makes clear in her study of historiographic metafiction, history is being reconfigured by new conceptions of
textuality, rather than eliminated wholesale, or relegated to the role of mere costumery (Hutcheon 16). Nonetheless, the incorporation of what Bertrand de Muñoz considers myth marks an evident parallel in the thematic orientation of the works of Antonio Muñoz Molina.

Another critic who has cited the thematic and structural parallels in the works of Antonio Muñoz Molina is María Luisa Fernández Martínez, in an article titled “La proximidad de los fantasmas: Beatus Ille y El jinete polaco de Antonio Muñoz Molina” (1997). Fernández Martínez focuses on the importance of imagination, and the intersection of imagination and memory in the novels studied: “Ante la imposibilidad de una explicación de la realidad, sólo es factible ofrecer acerca de ésta una visión fragmentaria y discontinua. Se plantea entonces la opción de (re)crearla a partir de datos dispersos, contando únicamente con la imaginación” (79). The (re)invention of the past serves as the narrative base for both of these novels, a fact made clear by Jacinto Solana, the narrator of Beatus Ille, in the first pages of the novel:

Ahora, cuando se ha cerrado la puerta, puedo, si quiero, imaginarlo todo para mí solo, es decir, para nadie, [. . .] puedo imaginar o contar lo que ha sucedido y aun dirigir sus pasos, los de Inés y los suyos, camino del encuentro y del reconocimiento en el andén vacío, como si en este instante los inventara y dibujara su presencia, su deseo y su culpa. (9-10)

As Fernández Martínez contends, both novels are structured around the volatile confrontation of memory and imagination. To this end, both novels employ fragmentary
narration to mimic with the written word the chaotic, and at times creative, process of memory.

Fernández Martínez also argues that both of Muñoz Molina’s novels use this fictionally reconstructed past to install order in the present. In *Beatus Ille*, Solana uses the combination of his fragmented memory and a subjectively conjured past to shape the investigative path of Minaya; in other words, he employs a past univocally imagined to create, and at the same time manipulate, the present. It is in this process that the ghosts to which Fernández Martínez refers are revealed. When the present is determined by the imagined past, the ghosts of a bygone age again become central characters in the development of the present. Fernández Martínez analyzes the characters and objects found in both novels to show that the past is always brought to bear on the present in the narrative schemes of Antonio Muñoz Molina. Portraits and paintings, books, statues, and especially mirrors, are ever-present props in *Beatus Ille*, and each item carries with it a link to the past. In much the same way, characters like Doña Elvira are reminders of the proximity of the past, and their presence a constant sign of the impact of the past on the present.

The cross-section of historical moments during which Muñoz Molina sets his novels makes evident one of the key elements of *Beatus Ille*. Muñoz Molina’s novels make use of the historical context of the civil war and the postwar period in a paradoxical way, and much of the scholarship with regard to these novels focuses directly on this incongruous combination. The contradiction is this: in *Beatus Ille*, *Beltenebros*, and *El
jinete polaco, to name only three, Muñoz Molina applies elements of the historical novel—retrospective narration, extant names, places, and events from the era—as the anecdotal base for his novel, while constantly questioning within that narration the veracity of the protagonists’ memory, and underscoring the subjectivity which plagues the act of remembering. Ultimately, the elements which constitute the traditional base for the narrative are betrayed, however, by the revelation, in Beatus Ille, that Solana has served as the novel’s narrator, inventing and imagining parts of his own life story along the way. When, at the close of the novel, Minaya is faced with Solana’s admission—that he fictionalized certain events of his life and supposed death in order to ensure Minaya’s continued participation in the “writing” of Beatus Ille—the line between history—in this particular case, the biography of Jacinto Solana—and fiction is irreparably blurred, and doubt is cast over the events of Solana’s life that took place during these concrete points in historical time.

These critical opinions mark an initial connection between the writings of Muñoz Molina and the retelling of the past. His early novels, Beatus Ille, Beltenebros, and El jinete polaco, primarily confront the recent past in Spain and build fictional frames around that history. Pure historical fiction, however, these novels are not; Muñoz Molina incorporates history in order to problematize the past, underscoring both the subjectivity inherent in the act of narration, and the textualized nature of the knowledge of the past. The paradox mentioned above—the incorporation of both concrete historical referents and interrogation of the elements that constitute historiography—can be better understood by examining the theories of Georg Lukács, whose ideas with respect to historical fiction
have often been central to critical evaluation and definition of the genre, and those of Linda Hutcheon, whose concept of historiographic metafiction has become central to the analysis of the role of history in postmodern discourse. The present study, applying Lukács’ definition of historical fiction and Hutcheon’s theory of this particular brand of postmodern fiction, seeks to analyze the ways in which Antonio Muñoz Molina, taking advantage of contradiction and complementarity, (re)presents the Spanish civil war both as historical fact and subjective fiction in his novel Beatus Ille.

III

In his essay “The Classical Form of the Historical Novel,” Lukács first outlines the chain of historical events which led to the genesis of the historical novel as a genre. The historical novel, for Lukács, comes into being after the French Revolution, and after the collapse of Napoleon (19). There are, as Lukács points out, numerous seventeenth- and eighteenth-century examples of historical fiction, but,

the so-called historical novels of the seventeenth century (Scudéry, Calpranède, etc.) are historical only as regards their purely external choice of theme and costume. [. . .] And in the most famous ‘historical novel’ of the eighteenth century, Walpole’s Castle of Otranto, history is likewise treated as mere costumery. (19)

Lukács therefore characterizes the historical novel by examining the works of the British author Sir Walter Scott, the first, for Lukács, writer of truly historical novels: “What is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the
specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the
historical peculiarity of their age” (19). Scott, the author of, among other novels,
Waverley, Old Mortality, Rob Roy, and Ivanhoe, is for Lukács emblematic of the author
of historical novels, and through his analyses of Scott’s “manners of composition” (39),
Lukács gleans the constituent characteristics of that genre.

One element critical to the characterization of the historical novel is the scale
upon which historical events are depicted. For Lukács, the processes of history are not
reflected in the great personages of history, nor in its epic events; rather, history is the
process of the interaction among all strata of society, its daily passions and pitfalls, and
this process is carried out on stages and by players as varied as society itself. It is Scott
who best recreates these interactions:

Scott portrays the great transformations of history as transformations of
popular life. He always starts by showing how important historical
changes affect everyday life. [. . .] Scott aims at portraying the totality of
national life in its complex interaction between ‘above’ and ‘below.’

(Lukács 48-9)

The scale of historical events, therefore, is shifted from the grandiose to the quotidian;
despite the inclusion of recognizable, monumental events, the narration of the past occurs
at the level of the individual.

By Lukács’ logic then, it follows that the veracity of specific historical events is
of little import in the development of the historical novel: “Measured against this
authentic reproduction of the real components of historical necessity, it matters little whether individual details, individual facts are historically correct or not” (59). Given that the basis for history, in Lukács’s terms, is the interaction of the individual with his world and those in it, the facts of the historical record are rendered irrelevant. Relationships at the level of the individual, argues Lukács, are what drive the telling of history; the “great monumental dramas of world history” (42), are less suited for the retelling of the past, and for the projecting of a vision of the totality of that past, than are the intimate relationships among individuals. Lukács states clearly, in this regard, that “What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events. [. . .] What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel, and act just as they did in historical reality” (42). This then is a first key element in Lukács’s estimation of the historical novel; the basis for history does not lie in its great events or conflicts, but rather in the relationships of its individuals.

Lukács outlines two other central elements in the form of the historical novel, one serving as a corollary to the other. Not surprisingly, given Lukács’s first tenet regarding the primacy of the individual in the process of history, these other aspects define the roles of character and characterization in the historical novel. The first of these characteristics attempts to form a definition of the protagonist of the historical novel. In Scott’s novels, the principle character cannot be a larger-than-life historical personage; as Lukács argues, history is most faithfully retold at the level of the individual, and the protagonist of the historical novel, therefore, must serve as the conduit through which that task is
accomplished. Lukács relies on Hegel’s definition of history as the spirit of an age in defining the ideal protagonist of the historical novel; since the ultimate goal of the historical novel is the faithful retelling of a given age, the author of historical novels must take pains to create a main character who incarnates the totality of the spirit of that age:

For the being of the age can only appear as a broad and many-sided picture of the everyday life of the people, the joys and sorrows, crises and confusions of average human beings are portrayed. The important leading figure, who embodies an historical movement, necessarily does so at a certain level of abstraction. (Lukács 39)

This leading figure must, in Lukács’s scheme, broadly represent an age, and the characters most apt for this task are a unique brand of archetypes. For a character to describe adequately the spirit of an age, she must be able to penetrate, as previously noted, the spheres of society both “above and below” (49); the character, through her unique position as protagonist, experiences the “crises and confusions” of daily life at the individual level, and also bears witness to the consequences of the unfolding of history. Lukács’s “monumental dramas” (42) do have a place in his scheme, but they are necessarily relegated to a secondary role, serving as the motor for the interaction of individuals. The role of the protagonist, given her privileged perspective, is to witness the development of events and experience the consequences of those events at all levels of society. National types, argues Lukács, best fill this role, precisely because their identity is not larger-than-life: “The principle figures in Scott’s novels are also typical
characters nationally, but in the sense of decent and average, rather than the eminent and all-embracing” (36). Heroes from the epic tradition inevitably place the entirety of society at a level of moral and personal inferiority, obscuring the central concern of historical fiction, the analysis of all social and historical forces which shape the age in question:

It is their [the central characters in the historical novel] task to bring the extremes whose struggle fills the novel, whose clash expresses artistically a great crisis in society, into contact with one another. Through the plot, at whose centre stands this hero, a neutral ground is sought and found upon which the extreme, opposing social forces can be brought into a human relationship with one another. (36)

The hero of the historical novel must be a humble one, what Lukács terms a “mediocre hero”; he serves as a gathering point for the conjunction of social forces, and as a lens through which to “generalize and concentrate” (Lukács 39) on the conflicts, outcomes, and consequences of the process of history.

Corollary to the humility of the hero of the historical novel is the relative insignificance of major historical figures as central characters in those novels. Lukács contends that the presence of these major figures—Luther, Cromwell, or Napoleon, for example—in the novel skews the perspective from which history is retold. Much like Achilles or Odysseus from the epic tradition, these personages draw toward themselves the attention of the narration: “Achilles is not only compositionally the central figure of
the epic, he is also a head taller than all his fellow actors, he really is the sun around which the planets revolve” (36). The centrality of such figures thereby prevents the telling of what is for Lukács at the center of historical narration, the encounters of individuals and systems of thought in everyday life. These figures may well be the protagonists of the events shaping history, but for Lukács, the ripples those events cause in society are the true object of narration in the historical novel. The grand heroes of legend passionately represent their side in whichever conflict is narrated, and therein, for Lukács, lies the peril:

Scott represents great crises of historical life in his novels. Accordingly, hostile social forces, bent on one another’s destruction, are everywhere colliding. Since those who lead these warring forces are always passionate partisans of their respective sides, there is the danger that their struggle will become a merely external picture of mutual destruction incapable of arousing the human sympathies and enthusiasms of the reader. It is here that the compositional importance of the mediocre hero comes in. (36)

In order to portray accurately the processes of history, the main character must be able to access both the opposing sides of a conflict and the varied social strata of the context in question. Again, Lukács insists that the protagonist of the historical novel be capable of penetrating both above and below: “[s]uch a mediocre hero, who sides passionately with
neither of the warring camps in the great crisis of his time can provide a link of this kind without forcing the composition” (36).

The three elements of Lukács theory of the historical novel here mentioned, the primacy of interpersonal relationships relative to historical accuracy, the secondary nature of historical personages as characters, and the reliance on the mediocre hero, all resonate deeply within the structure of Beatus Ille. As noted above, Muñoz Molina employs strategies common to the traditional historical novel; Minaya’s arrival signals the beginning of a litany of third-person accounts of the relationships between the most central characters: Manuel, Mariana, Solana, Inés, and Minaya. These accounts vary in length, depth of detail, and significance to Minaya’s project, but with regard to narrative style, they represent a connection between traditional historical narratives, like those which Lukács studies in the works of Sir Walter Scott, and the works of Antonio Muñoz Molina. Retrospective narration—veracity and reliability being its eternal enemies—is a fundamental characteristic of historical narrative, and more specifically of the historical novel, and has been since the inception of the genre.

Perhaps one of the best examples of this form of narration, in the context of Spanish letters, can be found in the Episodios nacionales and the Novelas españolas contémporaneas by Benito Pérez Galdós. These texts recount the great historical events of the Iberian Peninsula of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries relying on, in most cases, retrospective narration to accomplish this goal. In his article “¿Historia novelada o novel histórica?” (1988) Geoffrey Ribbans analyzes Galdosian historical narrative and
contends that, although the two entities—the Episodios and the Novelas—differ substantially in some specifically narrative ways, the central issue confronted links the two series inextricably. This link is the reliance on history for the base upon which each narration is constructed; this, for Ribbans, creates the unique bond that historical narratives share, regardless of the methods applied in the act of narration:

[C]reo importante reconocer que la presencia de importantes sucesos históricos dentro de una obra de ficción le da una configuración especial. Las referencias externas siguen conservando su realidad fuera de la obra, y esta realidad no puede dejar de influir en el lector. [...] Esta dimensión externa influye incluso en la distribución estructural de la obra—los hechos históricos condicionan al autor, aun cuando no los respete—pero pesa más el efecto que produce en el lector, consciente tanto de la realidad externa como de la ficción. (168)

Ribbans’ caveat is equally valid with respect to Muñoz Molina’s novel; regardless of the doubt engendered by the source of each narrative fragment and its particular bent on the events recounted, the very concrete external referent of the civil war remains, indifferent to the unfaithful individual memories that reorganize, and often reconfigure, its events. However, while Galdós’s tracts on the history of Spain focus directly and intentionally on its epic events and larger-than-life personages, Muñoz Molina’s novels approach much more closely what Lukács considers the historical novel. Examining the bases upon which Muñoz Molina builds his novels, the development of characters within the text and
their temporal and spatial confines, the author’s debt to traditional historical narrative becomes clear; however, the same examination also yields the point of departure from which to study the manner in which Muñoz Molina renovates that same traditional form, redefining its devices and altering readerly expectations.

IV

In his study of the works of Sir Walter Scott, the ideas which constitute the theory offered by Lukács center on the concept of the relating to the reader the essence of a given historical time as completely as possible. Lukács, as noted above, underscores the relative indifference with which the author of historical novels should treat both the minutia of actual historical events and its titular players. These events and personages, as the following analysis will show, are relegated in Beatus Ille to a secondary role, serving as the stage for the novel’s relationships. The essentialized expression of these historical moments takes shape through the characters that populate the text and their interactions with their contemporaries within the limited geographical space of the town of Mágina. The civil war, its battles and its aftermath, are not scrutinized for historical accuracy, nor for their magnitude in the political and military conflict or its outcome; rather, its significance is measured by the effect it has upon the lives of the central figures of the development of the plot. Minaya—the novel’s protagonist and avatar of Lukács’ mediocre hero, to be studied further on in this chapter—serves as a catalyst and focalizing point for the relating of these personal histories; he penetrates “above and below” (49) during his investigations, and begins to uncover the evolution of various
relationships within Mágina and within his uncle’s home. Moreover, Muñoz Molina presents not only the interpersonal relationships of the primary characters, but also the relationship of each character to Mágina, the one commonality that inevitably links all the characters in *Beatus Ille*.

Upon Minaya’s arrival, his first impression of Mágina communicates the isolation and decadence that define the town: “Náufragos, escribe Minaya, en una ciudad que ya es en sí misma y desde hace tres siglos un naufragio inmóvil, como un galeón de alta arboladura barroca arrojado a la cima de su colina por alguna catástrofe del mar” (75). Eugenio Utrera, the sculptor who lives and keeps a studio in the home of Minaya’s uncle and self-proclaimed expert on local history, informs Minaya of the illustrious history of Mágina. This melodramatic conflation of various fundamental moments of Spanish history includes its founding as a quiet mercantile village on the banks of the Guadalquivir, and underscores its crucial role in the dynamic process of Moorish conquest and Catholic reconquest during the Middle Ages. Utrera also scrupulously describes the architectural style and materials employed in the construction of Mágina, emphasizing the beauty of the Greek and Roman elements, and lionizing the men whose artistry built the town. As Minaya begins to enter the world of Mágina, however, he is presented with opinions which run counter to the grandiose schemes that Utrera creates. Even Utrera’s friend, Minaya’s uncle Manuel, warns him of the sculptor’s penchant for hyperbole:
Pues fue el orgullo y no la prosperidad, quien edificó las iglesias con bajorrelieves de dioses paganos y combates de centauros y los palacios con patios de columnas blancas traídas de Italia. [. . .] Así que no le hagas caso a Utrera—dijo Manuel, con esa ironía triste que usaba siempre para hablarle a Minaya de su familia—cuando te cuenta los méritos de nuestros antepasados” (75-6).

It is Manuel’s friend Orlando, a bohemian painter who lives in Madrid, who perhaps best captures the paradoxical essence of Mágina, its beauty and its futility: “Dictamen de Orlando en la plaza de Santa María [. . .]: ‘Lo que más me gusta de esta ciudad es que su belleza es absolutamente inexplicable e inútil, como la de un cuerpo que uno encuentra al doblar una calle’” (75).

With very few exceptions, this beautiful and useless Mágina serves as the setting for the novel, and soon becomes the singular focus of Minaya’s investigations. The narrative fragments presented jump between numerous temporal contexts: “[In Beatus Ille] ni la trama ni el tiempo son rectilíneos, ni los varios hablantes cuentan los hechos de la misma manera ni expresan las mismas ideas acerca de ellos; se va ahondando cada vez más en la historia de los diferentes personajes en círculos concéntricos” (Bertrand de Muñoz 1693). Despite these gaps, Minaya begins to construct a coherent chronology of the events in Mágina during the previous thirty-five years, a chronology that outlines the development and destruction of friendships, loves, careers, and lives. The distinct moments described by Muñoz Molina are not without their own historical import,
however; each is rife political and cultural significance, making it nearly impossible to consider Beatus Ille without contemplating the historical context in which it is based. Equally evident in these segments is the connection that Beatus Ille shares with Lukács’s definition of the historical novel; that is, while Muñoz Molina chooses key historical moments for the temporal settings of his novel, the focus of the narration is not the socio-political particularities of those specific time frames. Rather, the relationships between the central players are examined within each given context. This, for Lukács, is the essence of the historical novel: the interaction of individuals in history in order to express as completely as possible the Hegelian Geist.

The earliest moments recounted, from 1933, take place in Madrid; the atmosphere then portrayed is one of political and artistic fervor, the result of the birth of the Second Spanish Republic only two years earlier. This is also the moment when Jacinto Solana first meets Mariana, the woman who four years later would become Manuel’s wife. Four years later, gathering in Mágina for Manuel’s wedding, Solana would recall the Mariana he first met in 1933:

[L]a encontré esperándome en el comedor, recién bañada y liviana, con el pelo húmedo y la camisa blanca desabrochada hasta muy cerca del inicio de los pechos sueltos y pálidos que yo vislumbraba en su leve penumbra cada vez que ella se inclinaba hacia mí para decirme algo y que me devolvían con súbita claridad y dolor a la tarde de 1933 en que la vi desconocida y desnuda en el estudio de Orlando. (178)
Muñoz Molina uses the historical context of 1933 as a backdrop to the atmosphere of freedom and possibility incarnated in the meeting of Solana and Mariana, when she was still, for Solana, “la Mariana recién aparecida de mil novecientos treinta y tres, la Mariana posible, no deseada aún, la muchacha sin nombre con el mechón recto sobre las cejas y los ojos pintados como Louise Brooks” (180). The intervening moments in the rest of the novel repeatedly employ this interplay of socio-political background and interpersonal, relational foreground to delimit the ebb and flow of both Peninsular history at that juncture, and of each of the central characters’ relationships. As noted above, this interaction represents a characteristic aspect of the process of the historical novel.

The scenes from 1936 and 1937 confront the chaotic first stages of the civil war and the almost immediately apparent inability of the ill-equipped Republican forces to sustain and win a full-scale war against General Franco and the rebellious faction under his command. This initial chaos is mirrored in the relationships of the characters in Beatus Ille. During the 1936 election, when the Popular Front succeeded in consolidating its position in the young republic, Manuel and Solana meet in Madrid to celebrate the apparent victory. This political euphoria reaches into the personal relationship between Manuel and Solana when the latter introduces his friend to Mariana, the object of Solana’s unspoken desire during three years. According to Manuel’s friend and physician Medina, the change in Manuel was total, as he explains to Minaya in 1969: “‘Pero es que era otro,’ recuerda [Medina], con exageración teatral, pasándose la mano por su propia cara, ‘y yo no hubiera podido decir en qué había cambiado, pero tenía la misma expresión que debió tener San Pablo al día siguiente de caerse del caballo’” (158).
As Manuel succumbs to his infatuation, his desire is unbridled, unable to forget the woman who, a year later would become his wife:

‘No me explico cómo puede haber en el mundo otras mujeres que se llamen Mariana,’ dijo una vez a Medina: pues entendía que Mariana no era un nombre que alguien le puso arbitrariamente cuando nació, sino una palabra tan definitiva y exactamente vinculada a ella como la luna a la palabra luna. (159)

Manuel’s delirium, for Solana, is a betrayal that plunges their friendship into chaos, much in the same way that Franco, in July of 1936, would precipitate three years of national turmoil by revolting against the Republic.

The following year, 1937, would see the steady advance of Franco’s troops and the marriage of Manuel and Mariana. Solana grudgingly accepts the invitation to attend, but not to celebrate the couple, but rather to steal a fleeting moment with Mariana, the woman for whom he could not, or perhaps would not, express his true desire. His ardor is evident as he and Mariana await the arrival of Orlando, just days before the wedding:

[A]l levantarse [Mariana] había descubierto durante un instante delicioso sus rodillas, pero la sonrisa que ahora había en sus labios ya no me pertenecía, y su impaciencia por la llegada del tren donde venía Orlando era un agravio muy semejante al desasosiego de los celos. Odié el tren y odié a Orlando, porque venían para decapitar mi soledad con ella,
emisarios del tiempo que me la arrebataba y de las horas futuras me arrasaría su ausencia. (177)

Mariana’s mysterious death on the following night seals this solitude definitively for both Manuel and Solana, and Solana’s subsequent disappearance and ten-year absence from Mágina mirror the silence imposed by the Franco regime at the end of the civil war.

In 1947, when Jacinto Solana is pardoned and released from prison in Beatus Ille, the Franco regime is facing one of its first political obstacles on an international scale. In the wake of World War II, Franco’s Spain is rebuffed by the international community; this affront takes the form of the denial of admission into the newly-formed United Nations. In an attempt to soften the image of his regime and to dissociate himself from Hitler’s failed Nazi project, Franco ceases the use of the fascist salute and extends a number of pardons to Republican prisoners, a shift contrary to the harsh political reality of the decade of the 1940s. Solana returns to Mágina amidst this first limited amnesty, to the house he left ten years earlier, to find much unchanged, as he and Manuel construct a tenuous peace. This momentary cessation of hostility is shattered, however, by the realization that, despite the limited political reconciliation touted by the regime, those classified as subversive are still under close watch, and that any slight misstep would arouse deep suspicion. Soon after his arrival, Solana sees the fragile balance broken, and his death in a gunfight with the Guardia Civil seems to bring his tumultuous existence to an end. Manuel, for his part, has by that time already resigned himself to a solitary life, inhabiting “un espacio irremediable de soledad” (246):
La casa es tan grande que sus habitantes, también Minaya, se pierden o son borrados por ella; [. . .] no es porque deseen o hayan elegido la soledad, sino porque se han rendido a su presencia poderosa y vacía, que va ocupando una por una todas las habitaciones y la longitud de todos los pasillos. (74)

Muñoz Molina, Lukács’ logic suggests, conveys the development of Spanish history in the 1930s and 1940s by distilling the totality of that process into the relationships of the protagonists. Within the world of Mágina created in Beatus Ille, the characters through which Muñoz Molina “generalizes and concentrates” (Lukács 39) this history are Manuel, Jacinto Solana, and Mariana, but its coherent recollection and retelling are only made possible by the arrival of Manuel’s nephew, Minaya, in 1969.

The year 1969 is the narrative present-time of Beatus Ille, and also the point at which Franco slowly begins to cede a number of his responsibilities to hand-selected ministers, an unmistakable sign of his physical deterioration due to age. A number of student and labor-based organizations, as well as groups like ETA had by 1969 firmly planted the seeds of discontent, and their general strikes and marches continued to advance the cause of democracy until the death of Franco in 1975. Nonetheless, the repressive apparatus put in place by Franco following the civil war remained largely intact into the 1970s, and an encounter with “los duros jinetes grises” (Beatus Ille 19) of the Guardia Civil leads Minaya to consider retreating for a time to Mágina. Imprisoned for five days in the dank prison at the Puerta del Sol in Madrid on charges of illicit
political activity, Minaya is left with “una ingrata sensación de impotencia y desarmada soledad” (20), having survived numerous interrogations, beatings, and the “espera atroz” (20) between the two. Amid this turmoil, Minaya recalls his early youth in Mágina, and his uncle’s home there; ultimately, the plot for his journey is hatched upon his release, when a colleague from the university presents him with a poem originally published in the literary review *Hora de España* dated May of 1937 in Mágina. The poem, written by the apocryphal member of the Generation of 1927 Jacinto Solana, is to serve as the basis of the thesis of Minaya’s colleague, but the serendipity of their encounter is not lost on Minaya: he usurps his colleague’s project as his pretense and escapes further political embroilment in Madrid by fleeing south to Mágina.

The final principal characteristic of the historical novel for Lukács is the use of the mediocre hero, a protagonist whose attributes are not those of history’s great heroes, but rather those of a “decent and average” (Lukács 36) character whose being perfectly ordinary allows him to penetrate and experience all the varied levels of society he encounters. Muñoz Molina incarnates this hero in the student Minaya, whose mediocrity is so characteristic, so internalized, that it appears not only as a quality of his personality, but also as his birthright, a nearly hereditary condition: “[s]us padres, […] le dejaron al morir algunos retratos de familia y un raro instinto para percibir la cercanía del fracaso” (15, *emphasis* mine). His intrinsic trepidation manifests itself even after his uncle has invited him to stay in Mágina, in his apprehension that his uncle will not receive him upon his arrival:
Though his presence in Mágina is perceived differently by its other inhabitants, Minaya’s uncle does welcome him warmly, opening his home and offering Minaya any resource necessary in his investigation of Jacinto Solana. During his stay, Minaya will infiltrate every plane of society in Mágina, penetrating above and below, in an attempt to uncover the truth regarding the final turbulent days of the poet Jacinto Solana. With the exceptions of the protagonist Minaya and Manuel’s murdered wife Mariana, all of the primary characters’ lives span the years between 1933 and 1969, and each character therefore experiences the development of history in postwar Spain. Each character represents a unique perspective which, when combined with the others, helps weave the complex tapestry that Muñoz Molina sets forth in his novel. This tapestry is ever-changing, however, and each character he encounters presents a distinct version of events, rendering more difficult at every turn the task set before him.

The first obstacle Minaya faces is the isolation that Mágina often imposes. While the majority of the characters inhabit a world that moves forward, others voluntarily eschew inclusion in the progression of time, exploiting their seclusion in rural Andalucía to become relics of a frozen past, immobilized in their antiquated ways. One of the best
examples of this historical stagnation is presented in the character of Minaya’s great aunt, Doña Elvira. When Minaya first meets his great aunt, it is more than evident that hers is an attitude born of an age long past: “No es el olor de una mujer’, pensó [Minaya], sino de un siglo: así olían las cosas y el aire hace cincuenta años” (80). She sits in her room as years pass, rendering the passage of time meaningless in her attempt to retain the fleeting vestiges of her once-proud family. Doña Elvira exemplifies what Ana María Spitzmesser calls, borrowing from Lyotard, “la nostalgia de lo sublime irrepresentable” (48); for Spitzmesser, this nostalgia is typical in the narrative of Muñoz Molina, both in Beatus Ille and in his other works. The characters who suffer this infirmity, she argues, follow a pattern of yearning and self-deception throughout the works: “El sujeto desea transcribir su añoranza por lo sublime como aquello que podría haber sido (o debiera ser) la realidad social y personal; lo cual se convierte en inevitable decepción cuando la vida, perversamente, rehúsa ajustarse al guión previsto” (48).

The other characters of Beatus Ille bear witness, Lukács might contend, to the development of history, at the same time serving as a barometer of that change. Doña Elvira’s archaic tenacity, however, is not the only hindrance Minaya confronts as he attempts to enter the world of Mágina. Even characters that appear to dwell in the present often attempt to reverse the passage of time, seeking to recapture, if only briefly, the happiness they once experienced. Manuel Santos Crivelli, Minaya’s uncle and host during his stay in Mágina, is a frail, aging man who has for thirty-two years borne two indelible burdens: a chronic cardiac malady caused by a wound suffered during the civil war, and the emotional trauma of his wife’s tragic and suspicious death in 1937. Upon
Minaya’s arrival in Mágina in 1969, his memory is betrayed by the effects of time on his uncle, whom he has not seen in a number of years:

The passage of time has unmistakably overwhelmed Minaya’s uncle, but his daily routine is that of a man who ignores the unnecessary imposition of hours and days to measure his existence. He agonizes over each day, remembering that which he has lost, and not daring to forget those lost to him. He sleeps sparingly, and roams the halls of his house, spending an inordinate amount of time in the master bedroom (which he keeps under lock and key) in which he shared the one night of his married life with his wife. He takes his meals irregularly when at all, preferring to sit and smoke—against the orders of Medina, his physician—in the attic where his wife’s body was found, pierced with a single bullet, on the night following their wedding in 1937. Memory, guilt, and sorrow are his constant companions, as he awaits “con serena familiaridad” (28), his final cardiac episode: “El hábito de la soledad y la codicia de la muerte eran en él formas residuales o secretas de recordar a su mujer y a Jacinto Solana, y haberlos sobrevivido durante tantos años le parecía una deslealtad no mitigada ni por la devoción de su memoria” (29).
This is the figure that initially greets Minaya upon his arrival, ravaged by three decades of grief and unable to overcome the regret that has come to define his existence. Very quickly, however, Minaya will serve a dual role in his uncle’s house; he will not only begin, through his conversations with Manuel, to uncover long-buried tales about Jacinto Solana and Mágina, but also serve as a conduit through which Manuel will come to terms with his emotional trauma. The change in attitude that Manuel experiences is immediately apparent among the others in his house:

Dijo Inés que era como si Manuel hubiera vuelto a su propia casa. [. . .]

Impuso de nuevo horarios fijos para las comidas, se encargaba cada mañana de consultar las compras del día con Amalia y Teresa e incluso renovó las reservas de vino de la bodega, encontrando en esas ocupaciones olvidadas durante tantos años un placer que a él mismo le sorprendía. (54)

The presence of his nephew rejuvenates Manuel, to a point at which those closest to him hardly recognize him, as Medina notes when attempting to convince Minaya to remain in Mágina: “En mi condición de médico me permito rogarle que no se vaya todavía. Miro a Manuel y no lo conozco. En cualquier tarde que pasa con usted habla más de lo que ha hablado conmigo en los últimos veinte años” (54). Despite the pleas of Medina and others, Minaya’s anxiety over what he considers his intrusion of Mágina and his uncle’s house surfaces again, and he plans his departure after only a few weeks. Manuel, sensing his nephew’s unease, devises a plan which will allow him to remain, while at the same
providing a nominal responsibility to assuage Minaya’s apprehension over his imposition: “‘Serás mi bibliotecario’ le explicó [. . .] y le dijo que podía dedicarse luego, tal vez por las tardes, a redactar un catálogo de los libros y acaso también de los muebles y los cuadros valiosos que ahora estaban repartidos sin orden por habitaciones y desvanes” (54).

The hospitality that Manuel extends to his nephew allows Minaya to deepen his investigation into the life and death of Jacinto Solana. After beginning his task of cataloguing Manuel’s library, Minaya encounters numerous characters, all of whom relate some aspect of the relationship of Manuel and Solana. In this capacity, Minaya serves as the epitome of the protagonist of a historical novel in Lukács’s terms; his search runs the gamut of the world of Mágina, from the antediluvian Doña Elvira, to the rustic Frasco, caretaker of the Isla de Cuba, as he attempts to retrace the events of the preceding thirty-six years. Doña Elvira recounts the illustrious family history which Manuel has allowed to lapse since his youth, a fact which she is loath to forget:

[Manuel] Se fue voluntario a ese ejército de hambrientos [the Republican army] que nos habían quitado la mitad de nuestra tierra [. . .] y por si fuera poco se casó con aquella mujer que ya era plato de segunda o tercera mesa, tú me entiendes” (81).

During the conversation with Doña Elvira, one of the novel’s only allusions to Lukács’s “eminent protagonists of history” is made, reinforcing the connection that Beatus Ille shares with the historical novel. In relating the grandeur of her family history to Minaya,
Doña Elvira is certain to boast several anecdotes which include “su Majestad” and “don Miguel” (82-4), referring to her late husband’s relationship with King Alfonso XIII and Miguel Primo de Rivera, both of whom are central figures in Spanish history during the twenty years preceding the civil war.11 The allusions, however, are merely that, an effort by Doña Elvira to convince Minaya that his family once belonged to the elite of Spanish society.

Minaya’s conversations with Utrera and Medina, as mentioned above, also provide him with valuable information regarding the events and relationships in Manuel’s house, but the most intriguing information for Minaya comes from his visit to the Isla de Cuba, and his conversation with Frasco, its caretaker. As his investigation stalls and he attempts to make sense of the often contradictory information he receives from various sources, Minaya, having learned form his uncle that Solana spent his final days there, travels to the outskirts of town to meet Frasco, who according to Manuel, “fue el último de nosotros que vio vivo a Solana” (114). Solana had indeed spent his final days there, in a failed attempt to write his novel, Beatus Ille, and the information Frasco offers is of little use to Minaya. Minaya’s interest is piqued, however, upon the discovery of a trunk in the hayloft that Solana inhabited. As he sifts through the shoes and clothes, he makes the discovery that had inspired his trip: a diary of Solana’s last days, and a shell casing from a pistol, wrapped in a page from the newspaper ABC dated May 22, 1937, the day following Mariana’s murder.
In addition to meeting and speaking with this menagerie, he also comes to know several characters indirectly whose presence in Mágina plays a key role in the development of events during the three and a half decades examined in the novel. Each of these characters shares a bond with Solana and with Manuel, making them crucial components in the completion of Minaya’s appointed task. First among these is Justo Solana, the father of the poet Solana, who allows his son to begin his quest toward a career in literature. Rather than force his son to remain at home to work their land, the elder Solana sends his son to complete his studies and watches him abandon Mágina entirely for Madrid in search of literary fame.

The fate of Justo Solana also serves to elucidate the cruel reality engendered by the civil war. On July 19, 1936, one day after Franco’s uprising, Justo Solana, a solitary man by nature, closes his home in the city and retires to his farm, not in fear of the burgeoning war, “sino porque la guerra le ofreció el pretexto que siempre había deseado para abandonar la ciudad y huir el trato tedioso con los otros hombres” (147). Nearing the end of the conflict, in 1939, he returns to the city now under fascist control, only to be very quickly apprehended and carried off to a convent crudely fashioned to serve as a prison. As Minaya reads Solana’s diary in 1969, he finds the reason for which his father was condemned: “Me dicen, dice Manuel, que nadie sabe por qué lo mataron, pero eso es un modo piadoso o cobarde de no decir que lo mataron porque era mi padre” (165). Solana was a well-known and vocal supporter of the Republican cause—one of his first jobs is as a pamphleteer in the Second Republic’s Ministry of Propaganda—and his father’s death underscores the brutality of the means employed by the Franco regime in
the consolidation of its power. Unable to account for Solana the son, the local officers of the Guardia Civil execute his father, presenting a stern warning to anyone in Mágina who might consider disloyalty to newly established regime.

Another character tied closely to Jacinto Solana is Beatriz, his wife and comrade-in-arms in the struggle to defeat Franco’s army and preserve the integrity and sovereignty of the Second Republic. Beatriz, with whom Solana shared the successes of the Republic in Madrid, is the first to greet Solana upon his release from prison in 1947, but her reaction is not unbridled joy for his safe return, but rather a curious mixture of relief for his having survived, shame for her not having worked harder in seeking him out, and betrayal for his apparent disinterest in continuing the fight for their cause. Her commitment to her political ideals is evident not only in her activities, but also in the language she uses to inform Solana of what has transpired since the end of the war. She speaks almost exclusively in the first-person plural, emphasizing the collective spirit which drives the Communist Party to which she belongs. For Solana, however, that collective dream is merely that, as he comments in his diary regarding Beatriz’s continued devotion to a dead ideal. She speaks, according to Solana, “[e]n ese plural antiguo, fracasado e intacto tras el que se escondían, en estancias sucesivas, la impotencia y el miedo, el fervor de los antiguos nombres, de las banderas perdidas” (136).

Like many others at the close of the civil war, Beatriz was forced into outward acquiescence with the ruling regime, becoming a designer of women’s fashions, however, her commitment remains steadfast, and her hope upon their reunion in 1947 is to garner
in Solana another soldier for the fight against Franco. But Solana, like his father, seeks only solitude: “Yo únicamente quería estar solo, emboscado en mi abrigo, bebiendo hasta que muy despacio se me anegara la conciencia” (139). Beatriz disappears, disappointed with Solana’s decision to abandon his political resistance, only to reappear a short time later at the Isla de Cuba. Her faith in Solana is restored soon thereafter, but only by his personal loyalty, rather than his political conviction. As the Guardia Civil pursues her and another comrade on suspicion of illicit political activity, she takes refuge with Solana; their brief respite only delays the inevitable for Beatriz, and Solana’s loyalty ultimately leads to his seemingly fatal encounter in 1947. For both Solana and Beatriz, this first amnesty of the late 1940s is a tenuous one, and obligations, both personal and political, lead to its end.

Orlando, the eccentric painter from Madrid whose watercolors, for Solana, are the only medium which is capable of capturing the essence of Mágina, is another character that connects Jacinto Solana and Manuel. Upon his arrival in Mágina for Manuel’s wedding in May of 1937, Orlando, “[g]rande, cansado, con la ropa en desorden de borrachera nocturna y un escaso mechón húmedo sobre las sienes, oliendo a alcohol y a medicinas,” (182), personifies the bohemian artist of the 1930s, and his irreverence and urbane demeanor draw a stark contrast between the cosmopolitan Madrid and rural Andalucía. Typical of his panache is this statement, made as he watches Mariana drive a car returning from the train station: “Estás guapisima conduciendo, Mariana [. . .] me recuerdas a aquella heroína del Orlando Furioso que cabalgaba sobre un caballo alado con una armadura reluciente” (184). After the war, however, Orlando and his unique
persona become another casualty of the conflict, buried in the rubble left behind by incessant bombing of Madrid by the German Luftwaffe. His mark on the lives of the central characters in Beatus Ille is indelible nonetheless, as it is Orlando who first introduces Solana to Mariana Ríos in his studio in 1933. No other character in Beatus Ille has as significant an impact on Minaya’s investigation as Mariana, and her presence in the house in Mágina lingers long after her death in 1937.

Known as the “miliciana” or the “roja” by many—especially by Doña Elvira, who employs both terms with the utmost vitriol—in the novel, Mariana Ríos is the wife of Minaya’s uncle Manuel. Despite his initial pretense of researching the works of Jacinto Solana, Minaya’s investigative path quickly turns toward the death of Mariana, who is assumed to have died victim to a stray bullet in 1937. Hers remains a marked presence in Manuel’s house, even thirty-two years after her death. Manuel’s library, in which Minaya carries out his charge as librarian and archivist, serves as a shrine to Mariana, populated with pictures and portraits which allow Manuel, through endless reminiscence and undying guilt, to negate the passage of time. Her frozen visage maintains a constant watch over the house, and upon his arrival, Minaya is struck initially by the image that would become the central focus of his work in Mágina. Her eyes, “muy abiertos, fijos en algo que no estaba fuera de ella, sino en su conciencia absorta” (27), first capture the attention of Minaya in the portrait drawn by Orlando in 1937. Next to the portrait sits a photo, taken in Madrid shortly after Solana had introduced his friend Manuel to Mariana, in which her eyes again dominate the composition. Despite wearing a veil which partially covers her eyes, Mariana, “atenta sólo a la pupila de la cámara, como a un
espejo en el que la complaciera mirarse mientras caminaba” (27), fixes her gaze on the viewer while walking between the two men whose lives she would forever change, Manuel and Solana.

The third piece in the library is a wedding portrait, and the best evidence for Minaya that Mariana still occupies the house in Mágina. This is perhaps the eeriest reminder of her presence; her eyes appear to follow whomever enters the library, as Manuel informs his nephew shortly after his arrival:

Mariana, en cambio, y eso no era una casualidad, supongo, sino el signo de sus caracteres diversos, miraba al espectador desde cualquier punto que se contemplara la fotografía. Uno entraba en el gabinete y allí estaban sus grandes ojos rasgados, mirándolo sin expresión ni duda” (34).

In the thirty-two years following her death, Mariana becomes one of the ghosts to which Fernández Martínez in her article “La proximidad de los fantasmas: Beaux Ille y El jinete polaco de Antonio Muñoz Molina” refers, and for Minaya, she becomes an all-consuming mystery:

[Minaya] Vio entonces, mientras esperaba y temía, las dos primeras imágenes de Mariana, que después, día tras día, iban a repetirse y prolongarse en otras, cuando su rostro, no siempre reconocido, apareciera ante él en las habitaciones de la casa, en los escritos de Jacinto Solana, en una plaza y en algunas iglesias de la ciudad. (26-7)
The images Minaya will encounter are both real and imagined, and the presence of each is a constant, powerful reminder of the Mariana’s impact not only on Manuel and Solana, but also on the other inhabitants and visitors of the house in Mágina.

The first contact Minaya has with Mariana comes in the library with the aforementioned portrait and photos, but his exploration will extend far beyond those images, by both his personal volition—that is, his desire to uncover the truth of Mariana’s death—and the help of others in the house. Perhaps the most important foreign influence on Minaya in Mágina is Inés, a young woman who works as a domestic in the house. Her intimate knowledge of both the physical space of the house and the activities of its inhabitants is an invaluable tool for Minaya as he attempts to reconstruct the events which lead up to the moment in which Mariana’s body is discovered. Unlike Mariana, Inés has a physical presence in 1969, but she occupies a nebulous space, hiding in shadows and concealing herself in endless hallways, always observing: “[A Inés] Le gustaba mirarlo todo desde lejos, las cosas inmóviles, el tránsito de la luz en los vidrios de la cúpula, y sin que nadie notara su presencia—era tan sigilosa y delgada que sólo un oído muy atento, y avisado, podía descubrirla—reclinaba en el cristal” (26). Minaya is the target of her surveillance upon his arrival, and the development of their relationship leads Minaya into the labyrinth of Mágina’s recent history.

Inés reveals to Minaya, both directly and indirectly, a number of keys to the history of both the house and Mágina. On one of their first meetings in Manuel’s library, Inés accidentally knocks one of the photos from its place, breaking the glass frame. The
result is the first in the line of fortuitous mishaps which pique the interest of the protagonist. Written on the reverse of the photo is a poem titled “Invitación” in which “[u]n hombre solo escribia frente a un espejo y cerraba los labios antes de decir el nombre único que lo habitaba para mirarse en una tranquila invitación al suicidio” (22). Minaya knows that the author is Jacinto Solana, but what he does not know is that the poem reveals the intensity of the personal crisis that the poet suffers upon witnessing the marriage of his best, and only, friend and the woman he loves. The poem is dated in Mágina, in May of 1937, and only after onerous research—and other serendipitous accidents in the company of Inés—will Minaya discover the connection between the poet and his murdered love.

As the young lovers stroll through the Plaza de los Caídos on a Sunday afternoon, Inés reveals another piece of the Mágina puzzle to Minaya. The monument in the center of the plaza, designed and sculpted by Eugenio Utrera, depicts a fallen hero of the Civil War. The face of the soldier, however, hidden in the sculpture’s composition and only visible from a very specific perspective, which Inés reveals to Minaya, is the face of a woman, and a slight depression marks the spot where a bullet has pierced her forehead. Again, Inés intrigues Minaya with a revelation that is intimately connected to the case of his uncle and his wife: the face on the monument is Mariana’s, after her murder in 1937. Her attempts to immerse Minaya in the mystery of Mariana’s death continue throughout the novel, including their trip to the Isla de Cuba during which Minaya discovers Solana’s trunk in the hayloft and Inés “discovers” Solana’s diary and the bullet casing, but her most effective stratagem is also the most disastrous.
One of the forbidden areas of Manuel’s house is the master bedroom, where he and Mariana spent the one night of their married life. He keeps the key safely at his side at all times, but Inés, in her desire to draw Minaya deeper, arranges a midnight tryst there in which she plays the role that will inspire Minaya to solve the thirty-two year-old mystery. She lures Minaya to the bedroom, and her intention is clear, as is Minaya’s acquiescence, despite knowing the sanctity the room holds for his uncle: “Hubiera bastado decir que no por segunda vez, obligarla a que se retirara de la puerta, salir solo tal vez y aceptar el insomnio y la rabia, pero [Minaya] no hizo nada, sólo mirarla enfermo de deseo y de miedo” (126). Having entered the room, their passion is unleashed, as they mimic the wedding night shared by Manuel and Mariana in 1937. The bliss of their encounter is shattered, however, when Manuel, wandering the halls victim of his own insomnia, enters the room to find his nephew in the throes of passion. He collapses and dies instantly, and Minaya and Inés are left to concoct an alibi that will assure that they are not discovered. Manuel’s death is the logical continuation of a series of events that began more than thirty years earlier, and taking on the cold, analytical posture of the detective he has become, Minaya retreats to his room and sifts through the various manuscripts Solana left behind. Vowing to leave Mágina and the house behind, Minaya sets out to end that tragic series of events “pregúntandose quién de ellos, quién de los vivos o de los muertos había sido un asesino treinta y dos años atrás” (129). Only the definitive facts of the matter will enable him to leave Mágina freed of the guilt caused by his uncle’s death.
Focusing the narration through the mediocre hero, Muñoz Molina presents the recent history of Mágina through the eyes of its individuals. As Minaya navigates the distinct layers of society in Mágina, he assimilates divergent perspectives in his attempt to chronicle the years preceding his arrival, and inches closer to unearthing the truth about the events which took place in his uncle’s house in May of 1937. Each character Minaya encounters presents a personalized version of those events, and the conjunction of these points of view allows the protagonist to construct a tenuous timeline, at the same time encouraging him to delve deeper into the labyrinth of Mágina’s history. Though the reader can decipher the chronological confines of each narrative moment, Minaya confronts these moments not for their importance on a broad socio-political scale, but rather for the manner in which these monumental events affect the individuals—for Minaya, primary sources—who inhabit Mágina during those years.

The centrality of the mediocre hero and the personalized portrayal of the process of history are typical of the historical novel as defined by Lukács, and, as the preceding analysis shows, serve as narratological cornerstones of Muñoz Molina’s *Beatus Ille*. This more traditional historical narration, however, is merely a first narrative mode employed in the novel. As noted above, one characteristic element throughout Muñoz Molina’s body of work is the incorporation of multiple modes of narration, and *Beatus Ille* is no exception. Perhaps the most drastic counterpoint to historical narration springs, in modern Peninsular narrative, from novelists like Luis Martín Santos, Juan Goytisolo, Juan Benet, Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, and Carmen Martín Gaite during the 1960s and 1970s. Their predilection for narrative innovation, through devices such as narrative
ambiguity, distorted chronology, and systemic subjectivity, allowed the first generations of novelists after the death of Franco to examine and define their attitudes toward the weighty history of their national novelistic heritage. Muñoz Molina, along with many other contemporary narrators, take full advantage of this expanded technical and thematic palette; the remaining analysis in this chapter attempts to uncover exactly in what ways narrative innovation serves as a formative element in Beatus Ille.

V

In her 1988 book A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction, Linda Hutcheon defines the key elements that for her constitute postmodern cultural production.

At the center of her theories is the idea that,

[p]ostmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon, one that uses and abuses, installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges—be it in architecture, literature, painting, sculpture, film, video, dance, TV, music, philosophy, aesthetic theory, psychoanalysis, linguistics, or historiography. [. . .] what I want to call postmodernism is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political. (3)

In her study, Hutcheon favors a specific sort of fiction as paradigmatic of postmodernism, fiction she terms historiographic metafiction. This body of fiction is comprised of “[w]ell-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (5). Within these novels, the process of installation and subversion of which Hutcheon speaks is laid bare;
theoretical self-awareness and the acknowledgment of both history and fiction as constructs allow for “rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past” (5). Historiographic metafiction adopts the traditionally accepted modes of recounting the past—this being the installation—only to expose the textuality which fundamentally informs those modes, and thereby subvert the notion of any true objectivity in narrative. As Hutcheon asserts, historiographic metafiction incorporates all the concepts its name implies: “It [historiographical metafiction] is not just metafictional; nor is it just another version of the historical or non-fictional novel” (5). This reconsideration of history is precisely the intersection of two disciplines, history and fiction, traditionally understood as having distinct rules, processes, and ends; the conjunction and conflation of those disciplines is what Hutcheon views as characteristic of postmodern fiction.

The distinction between history and fiction, argues Hutcheon, can be traced as far back as Aristotle, who divided these labors into two specific categories. The historian in the Aristotelian scheme was limited to the recounting of what happened, to the facts, while the poet was free of such strictures, able not only to imagine and exaggerate what happened in days of old, but also to postulate what might come to pass given the truths of the factual past, verified of course by the historian. The present moment, however, has seen a change in this classical perspective. Hutcheon holds that a new focus, the postmodern focus in the form of historiographical metafiction, tends to explore the similarities between the disciplines, rather than mark their differences:
[History and fiction] have both been seen to derive their force more from verisimilitude than from any objective truth; they are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure; and they appear to be equally intertextual, deploying the texts of the past within their own complex textuality. [. . .] this kind of novel asks us to recall that history and fiction are themselves historical terms and that their definitions and interrelations are historically determined and vary with time. (105)

History and fiction are similar enterprises, then, which are generated by the need to tell, the need to recount events, whether real or imagined. This again underscores the basic contradiction of postmodern cultural production; in combining in a single text both historical context and fictional representation, historiographical metafiction “problematises the very possibility of historical knowledge, because there is no reconciliation, no dialectic here—just unresolved contradiction” (106).

These unresolved contradictions which undermine historical knowledge are another central element to this particular type of fiction. One result of these contradictions is the possibility of nearly unbridled subjectivity; whereas historiography is traditionally understood as a factual genre, trading in truth, postmodern fiction questions truth, emphasizing the simultaneous existence of various truths, and accentuates a multiplicity of perspectives:
Historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity may indeed not be the right terms in which to discuss fiction. [. . .] Postmodern novels like Flaubert’s Parrot, Famous Last Words, and A Maggot openly assert that there are only truths in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness per se, just other’s truths. (109)

Freed from the lofty goal of scientific objectivity and accuracy traditionally attributed to the historian, producers of this type of fiction introduce devices and elements from both history and fiction into single texts. Both intellectual traditions, the literary and the historical, are used and abused with heavy doses of irony, frequent reliance on parody, and a manner of self-awareness which alerts the reader to the author’s complicity in the delicate, if less restrictive, process of creating a fictional world.

Equally important in Hutcheon’s scheme and connected to the confrontation between history and fiction are the metafictional elements which find outlet in this brand of fiction. In a first instance, this means that producers of this fiction are acutely aware of the work they undertake, and this recognition is explicitly revealed in the texts; for Hutcheon, this attitude is inevitably linked, on the scale of socio-historical context, to an investigation into “the inadequacies of totalizing systems and of fixed institutionalized boundaries” (224). These macrocosmic asseverations serve as the central ligature between history and fiction, but Hutcheon does cite a number of narrative processes particular to the literary which can be considered tendencies of historiographic metafiction. Among these are a move toward ill-defined and shifting narrators whose
role is often overtly self-reflexive, and—as a result—problematic subjective narration, unresolved—and perhaps unresolvable—narrative contradiction, the frequent avoidance or ironic abuse of structures which “we had come to consider ‘natural’: continuous narrative, inevitable development, universal (in other words, recognizable) patterns of action” (225). While particular formal and thematic strategies like those just mentioned tend toward transparency and critical self-awareness, Hutcheon also sees postmodern discourse as irrevocably tied to all the textual remnants which constitute both literature and history. This interconnectedness, reinforced by self-conscious and problematized narrative techniques, is most openly portrayed, for Hutcheon, in the most characteristic process of historiographic metafiction: intertextuality.

“A literary work can actually no longer be considered original; if it were, it could have no meaning for its reader. It is only as a part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance” (126). It is this assertion that serves as the backbone for Hutcheon’s concept of intertextuality; every text produced necessarily reaffirms its place within historical and literary discourse. What separates historiographic metafiction is its penchant for the ironic and parodic play produced as a result of the recognition of this reality. Self-conscious incorporation of past works—be they novel, film, music, or visual arts—seeks to underscore the creator’s acknowledgement of her discursive debt, at the same time performing “a real skewering of any humanist notions of subjectivity and creativity” (127). Hutcheon carefully manages the scope of her conception of postmodernism, eschewing the infinite expansion of ever-shifting contexts—proposed in this case by Derrida—but does grant that her definition allows for
a broad reconsideration of the understanding and analysis of cultural production:

“[a]mong the many things postmodern intertextuality challenges are both closure and single, centralized meaning. Its willed and wilful provisionality rests largely upon its acceptance of the inevitable textual infiltration of prior discursive practices” (127). The texts of which Hutcheon speaks, in typically contradictory postmodern fashion, install recognizably literary and historical orders only to undercut them by questioning their value as modes of knowing those traditions.

Hutcheon also recognizes the dual roles that this concept of intertextuality undertakes, roles she terms “hermeneutic and formalist” (127). The formalist elements evoked here are the concrete, if ironically reworked, literary and historical allusions which appear in the text. These elements may include, but are not limited to, the naming or appearance of literary and historical figures within the text, the direct citation or close imitation of preceding literary or historical works, the mimicry, parodic or not, of specific, recognizable prose or poetic styles, and the recapitulation of established thematic traditions. These are the “textualized traces of the literary and historical past” (127) which allow the reader to recognize the author’s indebtedness to the antecedent cultural production. Beyond this primary recognition of formal elements are the complementary and contradictory hermeneutic elements which elucidate precisely how the formal elements function within the text. In addition, these explanatory components facilitate the study of how the conjunction of literary, historical, and intertextual factors functions in order to communicate cultural meaning. Ultimately, for Hutcheon, the onus of constructing the significance of any given text falls upon the reader, who “is forced to
acknowledge not only the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past, but also both the value and the limitation of the inescapably discursive form of that knowledge” (127).

Historiographic metafiction, for Hutcheon, is the form of cultural production in literature that most fully encompasses the contradictory nature of the postmodern moment. Fiction of this type asserts and denies textual authority at every turn, and defines its existence through the foregrounding of “its paradoxical doubleness of both continuity and change, both authority and transgression” (35). The contradictory elements, both historical and metafictional, presented by Hutcheon are apparent throughout Muñoz Molina’s novel. The specific problematics of Beatus Ille are neatly summarized in the sixth chapter of Hutcheon’s work, and serve as a point of departure for the present analysis:

Historiographic metafiction self-consciously reminds us that, while events did occur in the real empirical past, we name and constitute those events as historical facts by selection and narrative positioning. And, even more basically, we only know of those past events through their discursive inscription” (97).

VI

Beatus Ille is particularly illustrative of Hutcheon’s theory with regard to the phenomenon of selection and narrative positioning. As noted in the introductory section of this chapter, the first sign that the perspective of the novel is not an—for Hutcheon, impossibly—objective third-party observer occurs in the very first lines of the novel,
when the then-unidentified first-person narrator underscores the roles of imagination and unfaithful memory in narrative. At the close of the novel, Minaya meets Jacinto Solana in person, and rather than revealing the facts of the case—thereby providing the tidy resolution antithetical to the majority of historiographic metafiction—Solana casts further doubt on the possibility of such antiseptic closure:

Es cierto: yo no he podido inventarlo todo, y otras voces que no eran siempre la mía lo han guiado a usted. Yo no inventé la muerte de Mariana en el palomar, ni la culpa de Utrera, [. . .] pero es posible que no hubiera sido yo quien encontró el casquillo de bala en el palomar, o que éste no perteneciera a la pistola de Utrera, o que el modo en que descubrí el asesino no fuera tan incitante y literario como el que le he sugerido a usted. (310)

Minaya might take solace in the results of his investigation, whether or not the facts were neatly in order, but Solana continues: “Y acaso la historia que usted ha encontrado sólo es una entre varias posibles” (310). It is in this way that Solana greets Minaya, leaving no doubt that equal parts of memory, imagination, desire, and guilt on the part of each contributing “voice” comprise the labor at hand. In examining each of the narrative moments of the novel (the same studied above in relation to the theory of Lukács), the multiplicity of perspectives from which the stories are told becomes clear, recalling again Salinas’s verse from the epigraph of this chapter. Minaya can only find the Mágina he seeks through the eyes of its inhabitants, and he actively searches out those who will aid
his investigation. Minaya, already wandering among the diverse tellers and tales, meets his creator Solana, and, after seeing his entire masterpiece undone in only a few hours’ time, stumbles despondent and alone toward the station where he will meet the train which will carry him from Mágina, a conflation of Captain Nemo and Ulysses adrift in rural Andalucía.

The earliest narrative moment chronologically is 1933, and it also the most limited in scope. The entirety of these narrative fragments surrounds the initial contact between Jacinto Solana and Mariana Ríos, who later would become Manuel’s wife. In his search to fill in the holes of Jacinto Solana’s biography, Minaya speaks with a number of the residents of Mágina familiar with Solana’s life and death, and it is through this collective memory that Minaya constructs his version of the life of the unjustly forgotten poet. Formally, Beatus Ille is divided into three sections; the first recounts, through both the unidentified first-person narrator and multiple third-person testimonials, Minaya’s arrival and initial investigations in Mágina, the second is a mixture of first- and third-person testimonials much of which is later revealed to be the Solana’s “blue notebook” which served as his diary upon his return to Mágina in 1947, and the third is told exclusively in the first-person, revealing the complicity of the surviving Solana and Inés in drawing Minaya into Mágina’s mysteries. The events recounted from 1933 appear in only the second section of the novel, and their source is Mariana, Manuel’s wife. These moments are multiply removed from narrative immediacy, leading inevitably to the questioning of their viability; in the first instance, they appear in the diary which Solana was purported to have written in 1947. It is revealed, however, that the diary is written
by Solana in 1969 and dutifully provided to Minaya by Inés, in the “discovery” in the hayloft at the Isla de Cuba. The fragments presented, therefore, are a memory of a memory recorded in a falsified memoir. The first segments are Solana’s thoughts upon meeting “Mariana recién aparecida de mil novecientos treinta y tres” (180), in Orlando’s studio in Madrid. The narrative remove is deepened further however, as the other fragments are Mariana’s narration of the events of 1933. These moments do not occur in 1933, but rather represent recollections of 1933 retold from the year 1937, when she and Solana meet again days before her wedding. As the two sit awaiting the arrival of Orlando for the celebration, Mariana recalls the formative role Solana played for her in the forgotten days of the Second Republic:

Yo no era nadie, menos que nadie, yo no era nada cuando te conocí. [. . .]

Cuando apareciste tú y me miraste fue como si al fin yo me encarnara a mí misma. [. . .] Aquel día fue como si me vieran por primera vez en los espejos. (181)

While the number of narrative voices for these moments is limited relative to the other chronological segments, the narrative scheming is more complex than with any other timeframe presented in the novel. Memory is the primary tool for the relation of this history, and this for Hutcheon signifies one of the fundamental problematizations incarnated in historiographic metafiction.

The fragments which describe the events of 1936 are the earliest which plague Minaya with truly disparate perspectives. As noted above, 1936 is the moment in which
Manuel first meets Mariana, as well as the point at which Justo Solana abandons the city to avoid the gathering civil war. The majority of these events are related in the first section of the novel, but it is not the first person narrator who relates them. As Minaya searches Mágina for information, many of the players, some vital players and others very peripheral, oblige his request and instruct him on the events of the year of Franco’s insurrection. Minaya’s presence in the Mágina house proves to be a revitalizing one for his uncle Manuel, and one of the keys to Manuel’s healing, as argued above, is the act of remembering and retelling his personal history, undertaken with his nephew.

Immediately upon Minaya’s arrival, Manuel begins this process, finding his nephew waiting in the library. As Minaya observes the photos and the sketch of Mariana in the library, Manuel enters and introduces him to the woman who would become one of the central focuses of his investigation. Manuel, sparingly at first but later in more detail, informs Minaya of the way he was first introduced to Mariana—through Solana—his military service for the Republic and subsequent wounding in battle, and the schism both of these events created between himself, his mother Doña Elvira, and his best friend Jacinto Solana. The first part of the novel also introduces Manuel Biralbo, a neighbor of the house in Mágina who first introduces Minaya to both the story of the disappearance of Justo Solana in 1936 and his reappearance and execution in 1939. Biralbo’s presence is limited to a short narration—he is quickly scolded by his wife for being too nosy with strangers—but Minaya’s knowledge of this added dimension of Jacinto Solana’s life provokes his desire to learn more, at the same providing a direct link between Mágina and the atrocity of the civil war.
Another valuable source of information for Minaya appears in the second part of the novel, as Solana’s apocryphal diary is interrupted briefly to return the narrative time to 1969. Through the presence of Inés in the house, Solana maintains his surveillance of Minaya, and his conversations with Medina, Manuel’s physician and friend, are presented as another avenue for Minaya’s gathering of information. In addition to supplying Minaya with information, it is at Medina’s behest that Minaya remains in Mágina longer than the originally intended few weeks, given the improvement in his uncle’s general health; Medina, much to the delight of Solana, becomes an unknowing accomplice to the narrator’s scheme. Through his conversations with Medina, Minaya learns in greater detail the extent of the damage caused by Manuel’s relationship with Mariana. Medina describes the initial change in Manuel when he first meets Mariana in 1936 in Madrid, and the manner in which Manuel ends his relationship with his intended, a young woman from the well-heeled López Cabaña family in Mágina, “a quien yo [Medina] llamaba de López Carabaña porque era tan excitante como una botella de agua mineral” (157). Following this social insult, Medina continues, the stories about Manuel’s new bride-to-be Mariana circulate rapidly, and it is quickly assumed that she is not only a communist, but also a dancer at an all-nude cabaret in Madrid. According to Medina, however, the most difficult problem for Manuel and Mariana had no connection with social decorum or family loyalty: “Y ya el único problema que les quedaba no era cómo decírselo a Doña Elvira, sino a Jacinto Solana, [. . .] porque ambos sabían, y y hubieran preferido morir antes de confesárselo el uno al otro, que Solana llevaba tres años enamorado de ella” (161). Medina is one of Minaya’s most important sources of information on the case, and
through the memory of the good doctor, Minaya begins to construct his history of Mágina.

The final narrator of events from 1936 is Jacinto Solana himself, who in his diary interrupts the recounting of his father’s execution—by Manuel in 1947, and by pieces of intermittent information from Solana himself—to tell the story of the decision of Justo Solana to abandon Mágina for the rural home he preferred. The brutality of the civil war is again underscored, not only in the execution of Justo Solana, but also in the ostensible motive for his leaving the city at the outbreak of the conflict:

En la tarde de aquel 19 de julio, [Justo Solana] salió a la calle y vio a un hombre que cruzaba corriendo la plaza de San Lorenzo y [. . .] en seguida sonó un disparo en la plaza vacía y el desconocido [. . .] cayó muerto sobre el empedrado. (148)

It is this scene that sends Justo Solana out of the city that same day, and its telling is one of Jacinto Solana’s diary entries which comprise the majority of the second part of the novel. These entries also focus extensively on the next narrative moment in question, 1937, when Solana returns to Mágina for Manuel’s wedding.

Solana’s false diary occupies the majority of the second part of the novel, and much of that memoir focuses on the days in May of 1937 which Solana spends in Mágina before disappearing. He recounts the visit to his father’s rural retreat, and the last contact he shares with him before arriving at Manuel’s house for the celebration. Also retold are the fleeting moments he shares alone with Mariana, and their brief passionate encounter
just before her wedding. As Mariana, Solana, Orlando, and Santiago, the object of Orlando’s affections at the time, return from the train station, their progress is halted in the center of town where a large crowd of townspeople has gathered. The citizens of Mágina, still loyal to the Republic in 1937, uncover a would-be fascist spy in one of their hotels; the public lynching and the mob scene which ensues result in Solana and Mariana finding themselves pushed to the ground in each other’s arms, a brief foreshadowing of the encounter to come. After escaping the chaotic events in the center of town, the celebration is in full swing at Manuel’s house. After a picnic on the outskirts of Mágina, the group returns to the house to spend the evening sharing stories from Madrid and news of the Republic. Solana then describes his encounter with Mariana in the garden of Manuel’s house, late that evening when the others in the party had retired to their rooms:

todos los actos de mi vida, también el miedo y la culpa y la postergación,
se habían ido confabulando minuciosamente para preludiar aquella isla en el tiempo en la que yo la besaba y lamía sus lágrimas y me dejaba derribar atrapado en su cuerpo repitiéndo su nombre‖ (223).

Only after their passionate embrace do they realize that they have been watched from an illuminated window, and that the voyeur will play a key role in the murder only two nights later.

The sculptor Utrera is another narrative voice that allows Minaya to conclude his investigation in Mágina. After Manuel’s death in 1969, Doña Elvira suffers an episode in which she ransacks her immaculate room; sifting through the remains, Minaya stumbles
upon a letter which is the final piece of the puzzle he seeks to solve. The letter is dated May 12, 1937, and addressed to Utrera, communicating the arrival of an “associate” in Mágina on the 17th of that month. With the help of Solana’s manuscripts, Minaya recognizes the associate’s name, Víctor Vega, as the name of the Francoist spy lynched in Mágina days earlier; Minaya learns that Utrera was to serve as Vega’s contact in Mágina. Doña Elvira, politically savvy and always first to read the mail, was also aware of Utrera’s plan, and used that information as leverage for her own ends. She is the voyeur who witnessed Solana and Mariana in the garden, and she forces Utrera, under threat of revealing his plans to the local Republican army installation, to murder Mariana to restore the honor of her son and her family. As Manuel’s coffin is removed from the house in 1969, Utrera confirms all of Minaya’s suspicions about the events of 1937. The sculptor’s confession validates Minaya’s task and reveals the truth of the death of Mariana, but the young investigator’s response is not the personal satisfaction of one who has toiled in search of the truth. Instead, his realization that Solana guided his steps through his manuscripts and the self-effacing contrition\(^\text{18}\) of the culprit produce only the knowledge that he too will soon disappear from Mágina, as had all the others who formed part of his investigation: “De un golpe percibió Minaya, en el comedor, esta tarde, el peso inmenso de la realidad y el descrédito de las adivinaciones que hasta unos minutos antes lo habían exaltado, y renegó en seguida de su lucidez” (287). This is the first event in the third section of the novel which disillusions Minaya, but the masterstroke is still to come; Minaya will soon learn of the sequence of events in 1947 that lead him by the hand into the world of Mágina and its intrigue.
The first narrative voice that introduces Minaya to the events of 1947 is his uncle Manuel, who describes Solana’s arrival in Mágina after an absence of nearly ten years. Even before his arrival, Minaya learns of his quarry in the invitation letter from his uncle:

Con mucho gusto te ayudaré si me es posible en tus investigaciones sobre Jacinto Solana, que, como ya sabrás, vivió algún tiempo en esta casa, en 1947, [. . .] pero temo que no hallarás aquí ni un solo rastro de su obra, porque todo lo que escribió antes de morir fue destruido en circunstancias que tú sin duda sabrás imaginar. (18)

In their conversations, Manuel informs Minaya of the days that Solana spent in Mágina, and the difficulty Solana found in writing his book. His initial attitude upon arriving is enthusiastic, telling Manuel how he finally planned to make his mark on the literary world. As Manuel tells Minaya in 1969 what Solana had told him in 1947, recorded in 1969 in the apocryphal diary, Solana’s purpose was clear:

‘He empezado a escribir un libro,” dijo Solana, [. . .] ‘En la cárcel, como Cervantes,’ entreabrió los labios para sonreír y Manuel advirtió que le faltaban varios dientes. ‘Se llamará Beatus Ille. ¿Te gusta el título?’” (143).

The evident metafictional elements involved in the naming of the text notwithstanding, Solana reveals that he has conceived of writing the story of Manuel, Mariana, Orlando, himself, and the house in Mágina since 1947, and that that book, Beatus Ille, “iba a ser no sólo la justificación de su vida, sino también el arma de una incierta venganza” (30).
However, as he reveals to Minaya in the third section of the novel, he could not realize his project without an accomplice; Minaya conducts a tireless investigation, and his findings, relayed to Solana by Inés, offer Solana the information necessary to create his masterpiece.

One of the crucial moments in Minaya’s investigation is his journey to the Isla de Cuba, during which he discovers the notebook which contains the fictional diary of Jacinto Solana’s last days. As important as this discovery, however, is the information provided by Frasco, the caretaker, in their conversations. Although he did not witness first-hand the murder of Solana, Frasco corroborates the story Minaya had come to accept as true, that Solana, fleeing from the Guardia Civil, had been shot and killed in 1947. Frasco confirms having seen the cadaver, and having witnessed the burning of all of Solana’s papers; Minaya’s curiosity trumps his intellect however, and the results of a brief search affirm his suspicions. In a forgotten trunk, Minaya finds the notebook and the shell casing which spur him to examine more thoroughly the events surrounding not only Solana’s death, but also Mariana’s. Frasco’s voice validates Minaya’s quest, but at the same time it creates more questions that will ultimately lead the protagonist to his meeting with Solana, a meeting which will reveal the role he has played in the development of Beatus Ille.

The final voice that narrates the events of 1947 is Solana’s, and he does so from two very distinct moments. The first is situated in the second section of the novel, a third-person narration of the night on which Manuel is escorted to the local barracks in
order to identify the body of Jacinto Solana, recovered only hours before from the riverbank near the Isla de Cuba. In his diary, Solana recounts his own death, as seen through the eyes of Manuel in the basement of the Mágina barracks. According to Solana, when his friend identifies the body, it is not a despondent act, but rather one of relief: “Manuel dijo el nombre de Jacinto Solana como una vindicación y un homenaje, y al pronunciarlo por un instante sintió que el hombre a quien aludía estaba a salvo del envilecimiento de la muerte, inmune a la soledad” (210). The reality of the situation imposes itself quickly however, and once again the suffocating and menacing atmosphere of the first post-civil war decade is brought to the fore. As Manuel completes the perfunctory paperwork in an office, the police captain reminds him of the risks he runs by keeping friends like Solana: “Debiera usted buscar otra clase de amigos, señor Santos Crivelli. Puede que su apellido no vaya a servirle siempre para que olvidemos quién es” (210). There is nothing veiled about this threat, but the captain’s words are moot; Manuel, witnessing the end of a tumultuous chapter of his life, has already abandoned the world of the living. His is a world of memory and guilt, both of which culminate in the image of Solana’s bullet-riddled body on the medical examiner’s table.

Solana’s identifying of his own corpse lends a modicum of verisimilitude to the story told in the apocryphal diary supplied to Minaya, despite the narrative contradiction, revealed only later, evident in the act of retelling his own death. The second instance of Solana’s narration of the events of 1947 underscores again the provisionality of each differing account of the history of Mágina. After Manuel’s funeral, immediately before which Utrera admits his guilt in Mariana’s murder, Minaya confronts Solana for the first
time, and the narrator recounts for his accomplice Minaya the events surrounding his reported demise in 1947. Despite the identification by Manuel, the body in the police barracks was that of another, a comrade of Solana’s wife Beatriz, both of whom had arrived at the Isla de Cuba seeking refuge from the Guardia Civil. Solana relates the story of Beatriz’s arrival, and the resulting assault by the national police, but Solana’s death was not, as originally reported to Minaya, that of a valiant defender of the Republic, nor was it a vicious fight to the death. As Beatriz and her comrades depart the Isla de Cuba, Solana burns his manuscript himself, which, Solana admits to Minaya, was merely a stack of blank sheets which were to become Solana’s Beatus Ille. Solana flees, knowing too well that the attention to the Isla de Cuba would eventually lead the Guardia Civil to him, and takes refuge in a rural mill for a number of years before returning to Mágina, dead to the world, but also to himself:

No me absolvió la literatura, como usted suponía, como yo le ayudé ligeramente a pensar. Me absolvió la pérdida de mi vida y de mi nombre, porque despertar en esa casa donde me escondieron fue como volver de la muerte, y cuando uno vuelve de ella adquiere el privilegio de ser otro hombre o de ser nadie para siempre, como yo elegí. (308)

Solana recounts these events to Minaya, seemingly drawing the story to a confusing close; Solana, however, renders a neat closure impossible by informing Minaya that perhaps his version of events is not the only one possible: “Y acaso la historia que usted
ha encontrado sólo es una entre varias posibles. Tal vez había otros manuscritos en la casa o en la Isla de Cuba, y el azar ha hecho que usted no diera con ellos” (310).

When Minaya arrives in Mágina in 1969 to begin his investigation, chance is the last element he expects to encounter. With access to a number of primary sources—Manuel, Utrera, Medina, Doña Elvira—Minaya envisions his task as that of an archivist, collecting and ordering the pieces of an untold story; very quickly, however, serendipitous encounters, including the notebook and shell casing at the Isla de Cuba and the manuscripts in Manuel’s locked bedroom, become the foundation of his biography of Solana. The narrative strategies employed in the sections of the text describing the events of 1969 are emblematic of the narrative challenges throughout Beatus Ille, and demonstrative of the problematics presented by Hutcheon. In narratological terms, Solana constitutes a problematic being, one who exists on both intra- and extradiegetic levels, but who also shares both a homo- and heterodiegetic relationship to the narration. In simplest terms, Solana is both narrator and protagonist of both his own story and those of many others, but he also exists both inside and outside the narrated story. This duplicitous role, when combined with the numerous other intra-homodiegetic narrators—secondary narrators recounting their own stories—places Beatus Ille squarely within the parameters of what Hutcheon considers historiographic metafiction; the varying tellers and differing information create an atmosphere in which truth ceases to matter, and the act of narration itself becomes the central focus of the text. Having examined the intricate problems with regard to the historiographic elements of Beatus Ille, there remain only the manner in which Muñoz Molina’s novel approaches the act of
writing, and how the author incorporates literary tradition, both Spanish and otherwise, into his novel.

VII

Metaphorical elements abound in Beatus Ille, the first and most obvious of which is the novel’s organization around the narrative framework of the *mise en abyme*. Muñoz Molina’s novel is not, however, an example of the simple mirror text, wherein the principals of the novel engage in or contemplate the act of writing; rather, the initial single layering to which the term refers is deepened in Beatus Ille by incorporating several reflective tiers and by the manipulation of narrative positioning. Furthermore, in Beatus Ille, Muñoz Molina inverts the traditional récit/histoire model of the modernist novel, in which narrative positioning and instability, though transparent as devices, are still subordinate to the story told. In his *Post-Totalitarian Spanish Fiction*, Robert Spires argues that Juan Goytisolo achieved this inversion much earlier, in his novel *Juan sin Tierra*: “Particularly with his *Juan sin Tierra*, he [Goytisolo] served as standard-bearer for a new poetics that privileged the act of narrating (récit) over what is narrated (histoire)” (54). In the wake of authors like Goytisolo, Juan Marsé, and Carmen Martín Gaite, the preeminence of the act of narration becomes a typical characteristic in Spanish fiction after the death of Franco in 1975. The initial conceit of the novel, Minaya’s writing of a doctoral dissertation on the life and works of Jacinto Solana, is predicated on “Un pretexto, al principio, una secundaria mentira, [. . .] una coartada casual para que el acto de huir y no seguir resistiendo la cruda intemperie de la desgracia se pareciera a una
elección positiva de la voluntad” (19). This fabrication, born of political expediency—that is, Minaya’s need to escape Madrid—serves as the first impetus for the action of the novel; his supposed task, the volume on Solana, alerts the reader to both the impending metanarrative and to the fact that it is calculated not as a literary endeavor, but rather as an escape for its author.

The second layer presented stands, on its surface, as a testament to the purely literary. Immediately upon his arrival, Minaya encounters the history of Solana’s presence in Mágina, and that his last days in the town were spent in the preparation of a manuscript. Minaya begins his investigation in earnest under the impression that there may indeed be a text in Mágina which will place Solana among Juan Ramón Jiménez, Pedro Salinas, and Miguel Hernández—pertinent intertextualities all, to be examined below—and the other paragons of Spanish letters from the first decades of the twentieth century. The ultimate revelations of the novel, however, highlight the narrative manipulation that complicates Beatus Ille at every turn; Minaya is confronted physically by Solana, and intellectually by the realization that his labor was the result of yet another fabrication. The final narrative maneuver which further obscures the simplicity of the protagonist-as-author scheme comes in the last pages of the novel. Solana, admitting to the unwitting Minaya his machinations, entrusts his labor to Minaya, granting the astonished young man ownership of the text they have compiled. After explaining the details of his participation, Solana attempts to help Minaya reconcile the conflicting accounts by recusing himself entirely from the chain of events which leads them together:
Piense, si lo prefiere, que este momento no exsite, que usted no me vio esta tarde en el cementerio o que no fui más que un viejo tullido que miraba una tumba y al que usted vio y olvidó como un rostro que se le cruzara en la calle. Ahora usted es el dueño del libro y yo soy su personaje, Minaya” (310).

The structural elements of Beatus Ille alone place the novel within a renewed trend of metanarrative—what Spires terms “the fusion of the act of narrating with the narrated product” (55)—in Spanish fiction in the last decades of the twentieth century. However, the discursive problematization that occurs within the text is another subject which deserves attention in the present analysis. The self-conscious aspects of Beatus Ille are not subtle, as the narrator openly comments on the task he performs, and a number of other secondary narrators often connect the characters in their stories in one manner or another to literature and the act of writing. Upon Minaya’s arrival in Mágina, his uncle conjures his memory of how Solana had approached his vocation as a writer: “Obra, Manuel, todo el mundo busca y tiene Obra, con mayúscula, igual que Juan Ramón” (30). A second brief example comes from Solana himself, in one of the numerous first-person intrusions in the text. As Solana considers Minaya’s reaction upon their meeting, he wonders how the young man will respond. Solana muses, “No volveré nunca, piensa [Minaya], ensañado en su dolor, en la huida, en el recuerdo de Inés, porque ama la literatura y las despedidas para siempre que sólo ocurren en ella” (18). These are but two of virtually innumerable references to the world of literature that underscore the
self-consciousness of the novel, a number of which will be analyzed below with regard to their roles as intertextualities.

A second aspect of the metanarrativity of Beatus Ille highlights again the contradictory nature of Hutcheon’s definition of postmodern cultural production. Solana and his contemporaries drink deep the literary world of the 1930s, and as he recounts the events of his life in 1969, he rarely escapes that environment, measuring his life against those of Miguel Hernández, Juan Ramón Jiménez, and other literary luminaries. His narrations, however, belie the possibility of veracity in any narrative form. A life reliant on and indebted to literature only exists in its textual form, Hutcheon might argue, but the lapses of memory and imposition of will become clear, formative elements of the narrations that comprise Beatus Ille. The first and third sections of the novel demonstrate clearly this imposition, in segments that relate Minaya’s departure from Mágina after meeting Solana. In the initial pages of the novel, the then-unidentified first person narrator alludes to the dual role that he will play as the text develops; Solana brings to life in his narrations the process of installation and subversion proposed by Hutcheon in her study.

The first comments of the narrator point to the task he will undertake, that of presenting Minaya’s actions, in an unassailably direct manner, establishing a base of faithful, if somewhat personalized, narration: “Ha cerrado muy despacio la puerta y ha salido con el sigilo de quien a medianoche deja a un enfermo que acaba de dormirse” (9). He continues by describing the atmosphere that defines his personal situation in 1969 but
soon reveals the provisionality of the narrative act. In the same paragraph, Solana introduces expressions like “tal vez” and “posiblemente” (9-10) to refer to actions, feelings, and thoughts that may describe Minaya and his demeanor at that moment, and culminates this augury with a sentence that subverts any notion of narrative objectivity in *Beatus Ille*: “Ahora, cuando se ha cerrado la puerta, puedo, si quiero, imaginarlo todo para mi solo, es decir, para nadie” (9). After returning briefly to the action before him, his last interaction with Inés, Solana again highlights what his role will be in the novel, and also redoubles the narrative conjecture that will permeate the novel: “Ya no es preciso escribir para adivinar o inventar las cosas. Él, Minaya, lo ignora, y supongo que alguna vez se rendirá inevitablemente a la superstición de la escritura, porque no conoce el valor del silencio ni de la páginas en blanco” (10, emphasis mine). Each conjecture builds on the one before—including the use of the future tense for conjecture—until the level speculation undercuts any possibility of solid narrative footing from which to consider the events recorded in the novel.

The final section of the novel is the other clearly marked intrusion by the narrator Solana into the text. His identity revealed to Minaya, Solana imparts his wisdom upon the young man, revealing ultimately his estimation of the act of narration, an act that has been mimicked by Muñoz Molina in his writing of *Beatus Ille*. Awaiting the effect of the tranquilizers he has taken in a slow and peaceful suicide, Solana informs Minaya of the consequences of the writing of this novel, which has yet to take shape:
usted me ha devuelto por unos días a la vida y a la literatura, pero es posible que no sepa medir mi gratitud y mi afecto, que son más altos que mi ironía. Porque usted es el personaje principal y el misterio más hondo de la novela que no ha necesitado ser escrita para existir. (312)

For Solana, Minaya’s greatest accomplishment relates to the characters—himself, Mariana, and Manuel—and the manner in which he discovers them, in an ideal state, freed from the minutiae of historical fact: “[h]a sido en su imaginación donde hemos vuelto a nacer, mucho mejores de lo que fuimos, más leales y hermosos, limpios de la cobardía y de la verdad” (312). Solana’s monologue draws distinct attention for its metanarrative assertion that all characters, those derived from history and the purely fictional, are subject to the reconstruction at the hands of the writer. To the last, Solana exemplifies this idea by imposing his narrative will on Minaya; the last sentence of the novel begins this way: “Veo a Minaya, lo inmovilizo, lo imagino, le impongo minuciosos gestos de espera y de soledad, quiero que piense que también ahora, al huir, me obedece” (315). Minaya, who arrived in Máginga after fleeing Madrid, now flees Máginga, but is unable to escape the grasp of his creator and teacher Solana. Muñoz Molina ends the final sentence with a flurry of dependent clauses in the subjunctive, a list of nine more commands from narrator to protagonist, emphasizing with utmost clarity the transparency and self-awareness that characterize Beatus Ille.

As noted above, the most characteristic process undertaken in the discourse of the postmodern is, for Hutcheon, intertextuality. The incorporation of the literary tradition in
a self-conscious manner and the complicity of the reader in decoding that incorporation work together to create meaning from these “textualized traces of the literary and historical past” (Hutcheon 127). Intertextuality in the age of the postmodern is not merely the use of names and texts, but rather their use and abuse as both extratextual markers and as cultural and chronological indicators within the text. The allusions incorporated in Beatus Ille surge from both the European (most notably, Spanish) and American cultural contexts, and the works, institutions, and individuals incorporated run a broad gamut in both genre and audience, from music and film to poetry and the visual arts, and from the popular to the elite. The end result of this inclusionary exercise is a garden of intertextual delights that demonstrates clearly the coexistence of the popular and the literary, not as opposing forces but rather as complementary elements in the construction of cultural meaning.

Among the extratextually presented allusions, the first and most necessary examination is that of the title of the novel. The poetic theme of beatus ille has enjoyed a long history in Spanish letters, from the Coplas of Jorge Manrique through the Renaissance and Baroque, and forward into the modern era. The origins of the theme, well-known and equally well documented, can be found in the second Eclogue of the Roman poet Horace, whose poems praised the simplicity of country life in contrast to the hectic existence of urban spaces. This is the initial conceit of Muñoz Molina’s novel; Minaya escapes the turmoil of Madrid to take refuge in Mágina, hoping to find a respite from his political troubles. Upon his arrival in Mágina, Minaya is anxious, but his first days are restful, and he soon seeks a new pretense to remain even longer. He spends his
days reading in the comfort of his uncle’s library, and even discovers a potential love interest in Inés; his leisure is soon undone, however, as Inés and others increasingly entrap him in the recent history of Mágina. This inversion is indicative of the ironic reworking of the textual tradition that Hutcheon cites as typical of postmodern fiction. For Horace, and the various intervening interpreters of the beatus ille theme in Spanish literature, the man who can abandon the madness of city life for that of the country is fortunate, and his life, serene and uncomplicated, a blessing. For Muñoz Molina’s protagonist, in an ironic inversion, the country proves more unsettling than the city, and as the novel draws to a close, the traveler abandons the countryside in hopes that the city will bring him peace.

The other formal intertextual elements are the three epigraphs which precede each of the novel’s three sections. The first points to the central narrative theme of Beatus Ille; the two forces which most successfully impose their will on the narration of the novel are memory and desire, both of which Solana employs freely when recounting Minaya’s investigation. The epigraph, from T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land, describes the duplicitous month of April, which, according to Eliot, at once reaffirms both life and death, sprouting the first signs of life from the dormant land: “April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain” (Eliot 1, emphasis mine). Eliot evokes the annual rebirth of the English countryside as an optimistic time, which immediately reminds the poet of the death and decay which are necessary and constitutive characteristics of life on Earth. Muñoz Molina employs this same play in his novel, placing Minaya as the foil to Jacinto Solana, and Inés as that
of Mariana; Manuel serves as the link between the generations, but the life and youth of Minaya and Inés also stand in contrast to both Manuel’s death and Solana’s recognition of his own mortality, which ultimately leads him to medicate his body and his mind into submission through suicide. Again, however, the role of the intertext is more than a simple homage to literary tradition; Muñoz Molina extends the meaning of Eliot’s verses from a human experiential level to a narrative one. As Solana admits to Minaya, he enjoys seeing the young man’s vision of his life in Mágina, and the literary purity which he ascribed to the characters involved in Mágina’s story. Solana’s manipulation of Minaya allows the elderly hermit to mix freely, on a narrative level, the memories and desires held silent for more than thirty years; more than a sentimental observation of the natural world and the passing of time, Eliot’s verses, in Beatus Ille, become a tool necessary to the act of writing.

The epigraphs from the second and third parts of the novel are lifted from the centerpiece of Spanish fiction, Don Quijote. The first comes from Cervantes’s prologue to the first part of the novel, and its inclusion in Beatus Ille highlights the narrative problematics that have persisted in the four hundred years since the appearance of the Quijote. In the prologue to Part I of the novel, Cervantes—the narrator and fictive character introduced in the prologue, not the Cervantes of empirical reality23—muses over how his text will be received after so many years of literary obscurity: “al cabo de tantos años como ha que duermo en el silencio del olvido” (5). The epigraph is apt for the second section of Muñoz Molina’s novel, since it is comprised mainly of the memoirs of Jacinto Solana, who had languished in quiet anonymity for more than twenty years.
before the arrival of Minaya in 1969. Solana, however, plays a narrative game with his protagonist similar to the one played by Cervantes with Don Quijote; the miraculously found blue notebook and other writings of Solana give life to an otherwise forgotten character presumed to have existed in another time. Despite the difficulties in ascertaining within the text the original authorship of the story of Don Quijote and intervening apocryphal versions of the text, Cervantes’s ownership of the finished product is not disputed, and his role as primary interlocutor relatively secure. Muñoz Molina again inverts this assumption in order to make clear the provisionality of the narrative act when Solana forfeits his ownership of the text in favor of Minaya at the close of the novel. Solana will only emerge from “el silencio del olvido” should Minaya decide to write his story, and this narrative uncertainty is one of the cornerstones of both versions of Beatus Ille, of both Jacinto Solana and Muñoz Molina.

The second epigraph, “fuego soy apartado y espada puesta lejos,” is taken from the fourteenth chapter of the first part of the Quijote. In her passionate defense of her physical beauty, Marcela attempts to convince her listeners of her innocence in the death of Grisóstomo: “la hermosura en la mujer honesta es como el fuego apartado o como la espada aguda: que ni él quema ni ella corta a quien a ellos no se acerca. [. . .] Fuego soy apartado y espada puesta lejos” (98-9). The heedless love of Grisóstomo for Marcela, does not, she argues, impose upon her the responsibility of reciprocating that sentiment; furthermore, if that love indeed be the cause of his demise, she cannot be blamed, since she has taken the vow of solitude in the forest to avoid such tragedy. This idea introduces the third section of the novel, in which the final narrative revelations are made to Minaya,
who takes on the role of Grisóstomo to Solana’s Marcela. His curiosity about the life of Solana leads him deeper into Mágina’s history, moving ever closer to the proverbial flame. The final discovery, however, reveals that Solana has not played the role of the innocent seeker of solitude, but rather has orchestrated the entire charade in order to draw Minaya to the blade of his sword, to have his story told. None of these epigraphs, in the development of *Beatus Ille*, allows for a singular reading; Muñoz Molina transposes their original contexts to elucidate the mimetic and diegetic intricacies presented in his novel. These recollections of literary tradition combine with a number of others throughout the body of the novel to compose a distinctive vision of the 1930s in Spain and to problematize the traditionally received notion of the validity and stability of memory in the process of creating that vision.

VIII

The notion that the authors and texts incorporated in the novel do not represent merely a literary tour de force is borne out in a number of critical essays on the work of Muñoz Molina. The author himself has commented on the role of intertext in a number of interviews, and offers perhaps the most succinct estimation of the role of literary tradition on his work. In a 2000 interview with Carlos Alfieri, when asked about his literary influences, Muñoz Molina reveals openly the need for imitation and inclusion, quoting Borges: “El joven escritor ha de ser sobre todo un simio diligente” (94). Even this idea in the interview, however, is infused with intertext; Muñoz Molina notes that although the quote is from Borges, its origins are in the writings of the British author Robert Louis
Throughout the corpus of interviews, Muñoz Molina regularly cites without provocation Faulkner, James, Proust, Kafka, Flaubert, Borges, Galdós, and Cervantes among others, as primary resources in his work. Not surprising, then, are the endless intertextual references throughout Beatus Ille, nor is the fact that the references cover the gamut of European and American cultural contexts.

At the most general level, the intertextualities presented within Beatus Ille can be divided into two groups. The first group of referents is character-driven, that is, their introduction into the text serves to provide depth and texture to the experiences of the different characters that inhabit the world created by Muñoz Molina. The second group is environmental, and undertakes most closely the hermeneutic labor proposed by Hutcheon. The primary function of these allusions is the creation and description—quite literally, the explanation—of the world set forth in the novel; by incorporating these authors and texts, the Second Spanish Republic and the civil war are placed in sharp relief to the world of 1969, and the cultural and political identity of that moment reasserted through its textual remnants. The groups, of course, are not mutually exclusive, since many of the examples presented serve the purposes of both character definition and chronological orientation. Nonetheless, the division demonstrates the careful nuances applied in the composition of the novel.

Two characters, Jacinto Solana and Minaya, merit special attention as figures created around a body of intertextualities; ultimately, the identities of both men are intimately connected, and this link is presented in part by textual similarity. Early in the
process of Minaya’s investigations into the life of Solana, he learns that Solana, though of humble origins, showed a predilection for the literary from an early age. As a child, he would read by candlelight the adventures of the legendary explorers of the nineteenth century, leading Minaya to speculate about the wanderlust that these texts would spark in his uncle’s boyhood friend: “[É]l [Solana] se quedaba solo en la cocina alumbrado por las ascuas del fuego y la vela que encendía para seguir leyendo las aventuras del capitán Grant o de Henry Morton Stanley o los viajes de Burton y Speke a las fuentes del Nilo hasta que sus ojos se cerraban” (67). For Minaya, these tales are a definitive omen of the path Solana’s life would take; he had no choice but to abandon Mágina for the adventures of Madrid, was compelled by historical circumstance to participate in the great battle of his time, against the surging strength of fascism in the Europe of the 1930s, only to disappear in heroic fashion and emerge years later to tell his tale. The incorporation of Jules Verne’s Extraordinary Journeys—specifically, his The Mysterious Island—in the library of Manuel serves much the same purpose. Captain Nemo, after years in silent anonymity, literally resurfaces in the Nautilus to recount his life to the settlers of the island, much in the same way Solana had planned, upon his return to Mágina in 1947, to record the events of his life in a book called Beatus Ille.

Neither of these texts corresponds directly and univocally to Solana. Minaya, escaping the political pressures of Madrid, begins his own journey into the unknown by fleeing to Mágina, and, as in any narrative adventure—like those of Dr. Livingston, Captain Grant, or any of their contemporaries—his path is plagued with unexpected impediments and miraculous revelations that advance the cause of discovery. Mágina is
also Verne’s mysterious island for Minaya, in that he must explore every corner of the unfamiliar town in order to complete his appointed task. The dangers he faces are neither savages nor erupting volcanoes, rather he confronts uncovering a sordid past that has lingered, accepted, for so long that its contradiction could have disastrous consequences for his loved ones. As he continues his investigation, the revelations of the facts of Utrera’s guilt, Doña Elvira’s complicity, Solana and Mariana’s encounter, Manuel’s melancholy, and a litany of other events during the recent history of Mágina become for Minaya a renewed version of H. M. Stanley’s search for the source of the Nile; each discovery unearths new information, and regardless of the number of dead-ends and obstacles he encounters, Minaya will see his exploration to the end. His final discovery, that Solana has directed his steps, represents a deep disillusionment, but at the same time grants Minaya, the would-be author of Beatus Ille upon Solana’s death, ownership of his discoveries. Ultimately, Minaya, like Captain Nemo, controls the destiny of his tale.

Another text presented indirectly communicates the depth of the disillusionment suffered by Minaya at the end of the novel. In another conversation with his uncle regarding Solana’s life, Minaya imagines the reaction of the child Solana upon the realization of the economic disparity between the two families, revealed through the wealth of titles in the library of Manuel’s house. Part of Solana’s reaction is shame, while the greater part is the possibility for vengeance, based in the world of literature:

No era el amor a los libros lo que le hizo apretar los puños y emboscarse en el silencio, […] sino la conciencia de la sucia escasez en que había
nacido y de la fatiga animal del trabajo al que se sabía condenado. Los libros, como el brillo opaco de los muebles y las lámparas doradas, [. . .] eran sólo la medida o el signo de su deseo de huir para calcular muy lejos su futura venganza, apetecida y tramada cuando leía en los libros el regreso del conde de Montecristo. (57)

The reference to Dumas’s The Count of Montecristo in this instance relates to Solana, but a similar sentiment is expressed by Minaya upon learning of the changes in his uncle’s will that make him the sole benefactor of his estate, just before encountering Solana for the first time. The vengeance sought by Solana in his youth is won by his unwitting protégé:

De modo que ahora, al final, cuando consumaba el preludio de la expulsión, las palabras de Medina le otorgaban bruscamente el derecho, no a la posesión de la casa, [. . .] sino a la pertenencia a una historia en la que hasta entonces había sido testigo, impostor, espía. (274)

Unfortunately, the revenge carries with it the knowledge of that which has been lost in its pursuit, and the remorse for that loss, “la misma sensación de inconsolado vacío de quien despierta y comprende que ningún don de la realidad podrá mitigar la pérdida de la dicha que acaba de conocer en su último sueño” (274). The path taken by Minaya in many ways mirrors that of Dantès, the protagonist of Dumas’s novel; both characters begin in a state of relative innocence, only to suffer betrayal and ultimately seek and carry out revenge. The vengeance, while initially satisfying to both, leads to a deeper
questioning of both motive and result. While Dantès suffers the remorse of having to reconcile his actions with the death of an innocent child, Minaya realizes that, in addition to the death of his uncle, his actions will drive him away from the place he has come to consider his own. For his part, Solana, after more than twenty years of anonymity, has accepted his self-imposed exile, and more than actively seeking revenge, he relishes his absence as “un cuévano de sombra que embosca la presencia asediada del Hombre Invisible” (70).²⁴

Much as the young Solana sought revenge for his poverty through the story of Dumas’s Dantès, Minaya spent much of his childhood wishing for a revision of his own personal history. This revision included the replacement of his father, a failed entrepreneur whose ventures bankrupted the family, by “[e]l Coyote o el Capitán Trueno o el Guerrero del Antifaz, alguien vestido de oscuro y casi siempre enmascarado” (12); in seeking this surrogate father, Minaya hoped to be returned to his rightful place in life, and to “la dignidad de su nombre” (12). The characters about which Minaya fantasizes are the leading protagonists of the comicbook trade in Spain during the decades following the civil war, the heroes of serials that recounted endless adventures in the face of danger. Despite the traditional distinction drawn between the literary, Dumas, and the popular, the comicbook, both Solana and Minaya use the familiar textual paradigms to give shape to their boyhood dreams; as components of Beatus Ille, these intertextualities begin to define the complex textual world that informs novelistic production in the last decades of the twentieth century
The references to *The Invisible Man* and the comicbook heroes of the post-war era serve the double purpose noted above, that of character definition and of environmental orientation. Both reveal salient characteristics of the personalities of Solana and Minaya, but they also place the novel without doubt in the decade of the 1930s. Among the other cinematic references, made by Medina, Utrera, and others are actors like Errol Flynn, Louise Brooks, Hedi Lamarr and Jean Harlow, whose brightest professional moments occurred during the decade of the 1930s. The other frequent cinematic referent is the standard bearer of twentieth-century Spanish filmmaking, Luis Buñuel. References are made to the director throughout the text, in relation to Solana’s time in Madrid during the years of the Second Republic. Along with Orlando, the painter, and Mariana, Solana attends a screening of Buñuel’s first feature, *L’Âge d’or*, in 1930, along with various other happenings characteristic of the feverish artistic climate in the Spanish capital in the years leading up to the civil war. Like these allusions to Buñuel, the vast majority of this second group of intertexts surges from the Spanish cultural context, and the works, institutions, and individuals incorporated run a broad gamut in both genre and audience, from music and film to poetry and the visual arts, and from the popular to the elite.

Another popular artistic genre that has a marked presence in the novel is music, and the intertexts chosen by Muñoz Molina underscore that the particular chronological setting of the novel will be the decade of the triumph of the Second Spanish Republic and its violent end. After one of their first romantic encounters, Minaya and Inés, “escuchando su doble y única respiración” (98), hear the music on the phonograph, a
1930 recording of Louis Armstrong’s *If We Never Meet Again*, come to an end; that record, a standard of the jazz age, serves as a soundtrack to the romantic segments of the novel, both for Minaya and Inés in 1969 and for Solana and Mariana during their one and only encounter on the occasion of the wedding celebration in Manuel’s house in 1937.

The record, though not Spanish in origin, serves as a chronological marker for the setting of the novel, and as a constant reminder of the temporal anomaly presented by Manuel’s house, which has been frozen in state since the night of Mariana’s murder in 1937.

Minaya overhears another musical interlude that corroborates the establishment of the atmosphere of the 1930s; as Medina and Manuel sit after their nightly game of cards, they turn on the radio in search of Radio Pirenaica, the name commonly associated with Radio Independiente Española, the Spanish branch of Radio Free Europe, which was the only broadcast after the civil war uncensored by the Franco regime. The scene poignantly recounts the memories of the two old friends, faithful still to the Second Republic, if only for the regenerative qualities of its memory:

‘Desengáñate, Manuel, [. . .] ni tú ni yo veremos la Tercera República.

Estamos condenados a Franco del mismo modo que a envejecer y a morir.’ ‘Entonces, ¿por qué vienes todas las noches a oír la Pirenaica?’

‘Porque me gusta el himno de Riego. Lo rejuvenece a uno. La marcha esa de Franco es para entierros de tercera.’ (92)
El himno de Riego was the popular, energetic anthem of the Second Republic, and the two friends, even thirty years after the fall of the Republic, still fill the library with its melody, in hopes that one day they might hear it again publicly.

The most telling environmental intertextualities incorporated in Beatus Ille are based in the literary world of the 1930s in Spain, when the literary and the political and both high and popular cultures were often fused. The artistic and intellectual community, amidst the ideological fervor of the decade, backed socialist, communist, and anarchist movements throughout the 1930s, and the organizations formed in support of these movements figure prominently in the lives of Muñoz Molina’s characters. Jacinto Solana, once a propagandist for the Second Republic, was at the same time a member of the Communist Party in Spain, and his wife, Beatriz, seeks his help in continuing the fight for the cause upon his release from prison in 1947. Orlando, along with a number of his colleagues in the Madrid of the Second Republic, proudly proclaims his membership in the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) to his friends at the celebration for Mariana and Manuel’s wedding: “No me miréis así. Pertenezco a la Federación Anarquista Ibérica porque me falta el pudor o la vergüenza que obligan a mi amigo Jacinto Solana a ser miembro del Partido Comunista” (217). During this same diatribe, Orlando exposes the enmities within the varied factions of Spanish Left, one of the contributing causes of the Republic’s inability to make a united stand against the Francoist troops:
sabéis que esta República no es vuestra, y que esta guerra que todos vamos a perder no hubiera sido nunca vuestra victoria, [ . . . ] no vamos a ganar nosotros o vosotros o quienquiera que sea esa República de las banderas y la Gaceta Oficial” (217).

The incorporation of another political entity, the Alliance of Antifascist Intellectuals for the Defense of Culture, is paramount to the establishment of the novel’s initial conceit, and also introduces another significant set of pertinent intertextualities. Minaya first encounters Solana’s poetry, the ostensible impetus for his journey to Mágina, in El Mono Azul and in Hora de España, two literary magazines dedicated to promoting the interests of the Republic and literary culture in Spain. Political intertexts aside the group to which El Mono Azul and Hora de España belong, literary magazines and journals popular during the 1930s, helps to confirm and enhance in an overt manner the chronological and intellectual setting of Beatus Ille. In “La literatura en pureza y revolución,” Agustín Sánchez Vidal cites the simultaneous existence of more than 500 literary magazines and journals which openly supported the Republican cause, and more than 1,300 which dealt in one manner or another with the civil war (755). According to Sánchez Vidal, these two publications deserve special recognition:

De todas ellas destacan por su importancia en el bando republicano El Mono Azul y Hora de España, ambas bien conocidas hoy. Se trata de dos revistas harto diferentes, más popular, directa e inmediata la primera y
más elitista y con mayores filtros y ambición de alcance la segunda” (755).

Other magazines and reviews which figure prominently in Beatus Ille—Octubre, La Gaceta Literaria, El debate, and Revista de Occidente—all permeate the conversations in Mágina during the 1930s, and delimit the intellectual environment that Minaya, thirty years later, begins to investigate.

The literary personalities connected with these publications demonstrate perhaps most clearly the central concepts underpinning Hutcheon’s reading of postmodern fiction. These intertexts, which serve to orient the reader chronologically and intellectually, are the building blocks of historiographic metafiction, since access to them for Minaya in 1969 is only possible in their textualized form. Minaya does not encounter the authors who populate the text personally, but in an issue of El Mono Azul, he finds a photo showing “Rafael Alberti, José Bergamín y Jacinto Solana en las dependencias del Quinto Regimiento” (22). Alberti was a key figure in the formation of the poetic group of 1927 at the Atheneum of Sevilla, but also led an active political life, working in the Spanish Communist Party before ultimately accepting exile at the close of the civil war. José Bergamín, though contemporary of the group of 1927, shared limited connection with its members. He was both author and critic in the 1920s and 1930s, who used aphorisms and word play to remove the reader from “logical reading” in favor of empassioned experiences in engaging texts (Dennis 582-83).
Both men assisted the initial purpose of the so-called Fifth Regiment, originally a
discrete unit of Republican fighters, later folded into the regular ranks of the Republic.
The regiment not only provided soldiers and material support, however; it served a
propagandistic role, as well as providing encouragement and entertainment to the
Republican army. Similarly, upon hearing Solana’s story for himself—though primarily
oral in nature, its existence is textualized nonetheless—Minaya learns of not only of the
1936 end\(^{26}\) to the publication of Ortega y Gasset’s *Revista de Occidente*, but also of the
collaboration of Alberti and María Teresa León in the founding of *Octubre*, for which
Solana purportedly wrote film reviews. León is perhaps today best known for her body
of short stories and children’s books, but as Janet Pérez notes in her 1995 article
“Cuentistas españolas de la segunda mitad del siglo XX,” her political and intellectual
preparation stems directly from her connection to both the group of 1927 and the wider
avant-garde movements in Spain during the 1930s (131).

Other figures that complete the vision of this world include two poets central to
the era, Juan Ramón Jiménez and Miguel Hernández. Jacinto Solana as a fictional poet is
built around the legacies left by both of these poets; Solana is as poetically arduous and
exacting in expression as Juan Ramón—admitting to his friend Manuel that his goal is to
establish “Obra con mayúscula, igual que Juan Ramón” (30), and spending insomniac
nights staring at the blank page before him—but lives, if only for a time, a politically and
intellectually committed life—the same life that led to the premature death of Miguel
Hernández in 1942. Solana survives his stint in prison, unlike Hernández, but his
emergence from incarceration is as a gaunt shell of the artist and activist he once was.
Muñoz Molina evokes both poets frequently throughout the novel, most notably in the narrative fragments that supposedly comprise Solana’s journal from 1947 but are actually his 1969 memoir of his disappearance (30-36, 164-69, 191-97, 232-38). For the protagonist Minaya, each of these sources, from the tangential to the central, avails itself secondarily in its textualized form and at the same time serves a vital function in chronological, intellectual, and political orientation, as well as in the development of the novel’s principal characters. The combination of intertextuality and acutely self-conscious discourse is the bedrock of Hutcheon’s thesis on the constitutive elements of historiographic metafiction. In the composition of *Beatus Ille*, Muñoz Molina catalogues the elements and devices proposed by Hutcheon, at every turn acknowledging his discursive debt to the literary tradition, both Spanish and otherwise, that serves as the palette from which the author creates his work.

IX

The manner in which Muñoz Molina draws from both traditional and innovative modes of narration in the composition of his novels becomes evident upon close analysis of *Beatus Ille*. The one intertextual reference ignored thus far, the epigraph to this chapter, is that of Pedro Salinas, in which the poet discovers his ability to view the world through the eyes of another. In the two conceptions of historical fiction examined in this chapter, the protagonist Minaya learns that the only manner in which he can succeed in his task is to do precisely that: rely on the eyes of others to uncover the history of Mágina. The reliance on character-driven explication of the historical moment in
question, and the eschewal of “monumental dramas of world history” (Lukács 42) echo the form of traditional historical narration espoused by Lukács, and delineate the importance of secondary narrators in developing a history based on the individual. At the same time, the direct and acknowledged incorporation of that textual tradition—Minaya’s “eyes” in his investigation—along with the overt and continual reference to the act of writing, place Beatus Ille squarely within the purview of Hutcheon’s architecture of historiographic metafiction. These two views of history coexist in Beatus Ille, and this coincidence of factors has become emblematic of narrative fiction since the restoration and consolidation of democracy in Spain. Two novels by another novelist, Las estaciones provinciales (1982) and La fuente de la edad (1986) by Luis Mateo Díez, represent the hybrid critical character of contemporary fiction staked out in this chapter, and the next chapter provides close textual analysis to reiterate that position. In both novels, Díez reduces the scale of the plot to focus on the “broad and many-sided picture of the everyday life of the people,” (Lukács 39), largely ignores the “monumental dramas” (42) with which the traditional discipline of history concerns itself, and relies on the movements of the “mediocre hero” (36) to drive the action of the novel; each of these elements is constitutive of the historical novel as defined by Lukács. At the same time, the novels underscore the flexibility of narrative selection and positioning that define the historiographic act and thereby echo Hutcheon’s postulations with regard to postmodern fiction; moreover, Díez laces traditional generic forms—the detective novel and the quest, respectively—with the humor and irony that Hutcheon identifies as characteristic of her brand of postmodern fiction. Eschewing a recapitulation of this theoretical
backing, then, the second chapter turns to the analysis of Diez’s novels that treat the lingering presence of the civil war by recreating the life of a Leonese town even decades removed from the conflict.
Endnotes

1 Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), is a member of the Generation of 1898. His writings include narrative, poetry, and essay; among his best known works are Niebla (1914), San Manuel Bueno, mártir (1924), and Vida de don Quijote y Sancho: ensayos en simpatía (1905). Thematically, his works cover a broad gamut, although he is perhaps best known for his representations of the crisis between doubt and faith in narrative, while his essays often return to the attempt to define the Spanish character and to diagnose the ills which plague turn-of-the-century Spanish society. The similarity between Unamuno and Antonio Muñoz Molina noted here is between Unamuno’s 1914 novel Niebla, in which the protagonist, Augusto Pérez, meets his author, Unamuno. Their conversation concerns the existence of fictional characters, and the literally formative role the author plays in that existence. For a detailed analysis of this scene and of Niebla’s role in modern Spanish fiction, please refer to the prologue to the 1996 edition of Niebla by Mario J. Valdés.

2 The term contemporary here refers to the authors who are most commonly grouped as the producers of what has been labeled the “nueva narrativa española.” With few exceptions, these authors published their first works of narrative fiction after the death of Franco, and gained national (and in some cases international) critical and commercial renown throughout the 1980s. Among the authors commonly included in this group are Luis Mateo Díez, Julio Llamazares, Marina Mayoral, Eduardo Mendoza, José María Merino, Juan José Millás, Soledad Puértolas, and Ester Tusquets. Perhaps the most complete catalogue of these authors is found in the ninth volume of Francisco Rico’s Historia y crítica de la literatura española (1992), in Santos Sanz Villanueva’s introduction to the narrative portion of that volume. As noted, however, the breadth of thematic and stylistic interests of the authors in question hinders any effort to create a viable generational scheme.

3 Both David Herzberger and Robert Spires have studied the post-civil war episteme, analyzing the authors and tendencies that most broadly define Peninsular fiction of the decades following the conflict. Herzberger’s Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Postwar Spain (1995) and Spires’ Beyond the Metaficitonal Mode (1984) examine the works which signal the shift toward a new understanding of formerly ironclad disciplines like history. Additionally, Gonzalo Navajas’s Teoría y práctica de la novela española posmoderna (1987) and Más allá de la posmodernidad (1996) approach the same literary-historical moment, at the same time highlighting the difficulties and paradoxes often associated with postmodern cultural production. One such paradox, the simultaneous incorporation of concrete historical context and problematization of that context, is a frequent object of study for all three critics noted above, and will be revisited below.
Ihab Hassan and Linda Hutcheon, among numerous others, have commented on the centrality of “genre-bending” in postmodern discourse. In the case of Antonio Muñoz Molina, beyond the examples examined above, the effort to blend genres is plainly evident. To name only the most exemplary cases: In Invierno en Lisboa (1987), Muñoz Molina employs jazz music as a constant background and counterpoint to the narration, to a point where background becomes foreground and music becomes protagonist; and in Los misterios de Madrid (1992), journalism becomes literature through the investigations of Lorencito Quezada. El jinete polaco (1991) merits special regard among the works of Muñoz Molina for its encyclopedic employment of numerous subliterary and paraliterary genres, as Elizabeth Amman has shown in her 1998 article “Genres in Dialogue: Antonio Muñoz Molina’s El jinete polaco.”

For a general analysis of the paradoxes of postmodern incorporation of history, please refer to note three. With regard to the novels of Muñoz Molina, both Maryse Betrand de Munoz (“Antonio Muñoz Molina and the Myth of the Spanish Civil War”) and Julio Prieto (“Playing the Sedulous Ape”) have studied the contradictory manner in which the elements like historical context are both introduced and undercut, underscoring further the parallels present throughout the works of Muñoz Molina.

The story line of El jinete polaco (1991) can be considered the foundational fiction for Muñoz Molina’s town of Mágin. Much more broad in chronological scope than is Beatus Ille, the novel explores more than a century of Mágin’s history through the eyes of Manuel, the native son whose professional adventures lead him away from Mágin and around the world, only to bring him back to confront in adulthood the stories and myths from his childhood. The novels share not only the establishment of Mágin’s history, but also an omnipresent emphasis on the questioning of the artifice of narration, and the manner in which its rules can be manipulated for virtually any stated interest. To that end, the similarities between Beatus Ille and El jinete placo have led some critics to ask, with a certain intentional extravagance:

¿Podría considerarse que El jinete polaco es el Beatus Ille frustrado de Jacinto Solana, alter ego del propio Muñoz Molina? [...] Como decíamos en un principio, el autor expande en ambas un imaginario personal que se convierte en el reflejo de una experiencia colectiva. (Fernández Martínez 106)

Whether or not a biographical link exists between the author and his protagonists and their histories, the parallels delineate one of the central veins of investigation in the works of Muñoz Molina.

In Galdós y la historia (1988), Ribbans holds that the Novelas españolas contemporáneas often demonstrate long chronological gaps between the time of the actions narrated and the time of narration. The reader, therefore, “acompaña, por decirlo así, al narrador en sus actitudes—sin compartirlas necesariamente, por cierto—frente a unas situaciones ya no inmediatas” (169). In the Episodios nacionales however, these gaps disappear, as “simultáneamente se desarrollan la acción y la narración [...].
Estamos, por tanto, frente a una reconstrucción histórica del pasado que se desarrolla ante nuestros ojos” (169). These narratological distinctions do not, Ribbans emphasizes, obscure the general defining characteristics of both series: the reliance on history and historical personages for the basis of each narration. In addition, Ribbans notes that the understanding of perspective with regard to each narration is also a key distinction between the Episodios and the Novelas. While the Episodios often rely on History—the great, epic moments of Peninsular history—the Novelas apply an approach more closely related to the personalized history which Lukács, as noted above, considers characteristic of the historical novel.

8 During Minaya’s investigation, he does leave Mágina, but only to visit the Isla de Cuba, a (now defunct) gentleman’s retreat on the outskirts of Mágina. What Minaya discovers—that Jacinto Solana spent his last days at the Isla de Cuba—he and Inés travel there to investigate. Other than this excursion, the only moments in the novel which take place outside of Mágina are memories of Madrid, or Granada, briefly retold from Manuel’s house in Mágina.

9 ETA, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (Euskadi and Freedom) was formed in 1959 as an organization which advocated the autonomy of the Basque Country. Their methods, which are based in revolutionary tactics and the overt use of violence, include individual assassinations, car bombings, and kidnappings. Perhaps their most famous strike during the Franco regime was the so-called “Operation Ogre” in 1973, which killed, among others, Luis Carrero Blanco, a member of Franco’s inner circle from the end of the civil war until his death in that attack. ETA continues its siege of Spain’s social democracy throughout the last three decades, having assassinated numerous politicians, judges, and journalists in attempts to further the cause of Basque independence.

10 This is a first instance of the intertextuality common in Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction, which will later be analyzed. The dank dungeon at the Puerta del Sol in Madrid was figures prominently in other works of twentieth-century Spanish fiction. To cite only the two most canonical instances, both Máximo Estrella and Pedro, protagonists of Valle Inclán’s Luces de Bohemia (1924) and Luis Martín Santos’s Tiempo de silencio (1962) respectively, spend melancholy moments in that same prison contemplating the degraded world which the inhabit.

11 The Bourbon king Alfonso XIII ruled during the volatile 1910s and 1920s, and beat a hasty retreat to Marseilles, France in April 1931, when elections demonstrated the public outcry for an end to the provisional dictatorship initiated in 1923 by Miguel Primo de Rivera. The initial intent of the dictatorship was to restore order and civility to the government, which had been beset by strikes in many industries, and increasingly vocal cries by the Catalonian and Basque independence movements. While mildly successful in quelling some activism, the dictatorship ultimately became an easy target for both labor and political entities, leading to Primo de Rivera’s resignation in January of 1930. A year the later, the Second Spanish Republic was declared, with both Alfonso XIII and
Primo de Rivera in France, the latter having retired there and passed away shortly after his removal from power. For a thorough analysis of the tensions in the government and the country during this period, please refer to Raymond Carr’s *Spain 1808-1975*, which chronicles in great detail the years preceding the civil war.

Jacinto Solana returns to Madrid in 1939, and finds Orlando among the destruction of an apartment in Argüelles. His health has deteriorated irreparably, but among the debris Solana discovers the watercolor paintings of Mágina bathed in “esa luz que ni Van Gogh pudo imaginar” (219). Solana describes the paintings to Manuel in 1947, and his estimations demonstrate again the temporal anomaly of Mágina, its position outside the boundaries of the mundane world:

Eran sólo acuarelas, y en todas se repetía el mismo paisaje. La colina de Mágina sobre los olivares, el perfil de la ciudad tal como aquel día lo vimos desde el cortijo. Las acuarelas tenían una belleza que no era de este mundo, que no era la perfección, sino algo que está más lejos y que ni siquiera pertenecía al arte” (144).

Inés serves a dual purpose throughout the novel. She is the object of Minaya’s desire, and their growing relationship is at first the singular reason for his remaining in Mágina beyond his originally intended stay. Unbeknownst to Minaya, she is also the constant link between between Jacinto Solana and the young investigator. She traces his steps through the house in Mágina, dutifully reporting to Solana his investigative activities, and providing clues to reinvigorate the investigation when its progress slows. In this second role, Inés also becomes the motor for the narrative development of *Beatus Ille*. During their first romantic encounter, their passionate embrace knocks a photo to the floor, breaking the frame and revealing an original version of Solana’s poem “Invitación,” the initial impetus for his voyage to Mágina. Later, Inés’s curiosity and passion lead the couple to the bedroom of Manuel and Mariana, where Minaya discovers a number of Solana’s manuscripts stored in a wardrobe. When the couple travels to the Isla de Cuba, Inés plants the blue notebook in the trunk, providing Minaya with more of Solana’s writings. Without the complicity of Inés, Solana’s decision to reveal himself would not have come to fruition, and her participation in the narration of the novel is therefore paramount to the development of the novel.

In “De Unamuno a Antonio Muñoz Molina: el proyecto moderno y el siglo XXI” (1997), Gonzalo Navajas draws the logical parallel—made as well at the outset of this chapter—between *Niebla* and *Beatus Ille* on the grounds of their exploration of self-reflexive narration. Navajas extrapolates from this idea the similarities between nineteenth- and early twentieth-century narratives and contemporary Spanish fiction, demonstrating clearly the discursive indebtedness of contemporary fiction. In her conception of historiographical metafiction, Hutcheon touches on the same theme, expanding the field of inquiry to include history as well, but the thrust of the argument is the same, that contemporary narrative and its innovations have not eliminated the past
wholesale, but rather incorporated it in new ways. The second half this chapter is
dedicated to examining how Muñoz Molina plies these innovations in Beatus Ille.

As Hutcheon notes, many literary theorists and critics depend on an antiquated
definition of parody as ridiculing imitation. The increased volume of parodic works,
Hutcheon suggests, signifies the need for a new critical definition of the term: “The
collective weight of parodic practice suggests a redefinition of parody as repetition with
critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity”
(26). This expanded definition, then, is that which will be observed in the analysis of
Muñoz Molina’s novel throughout this chapter.

This segment of Hutcheon’s definition resonates clearly with the final point of
emphasis—made by Brownlow and Kronik—that intertextuality is a crucial tool for the
understanding of narrative fiction. While, as Hutcheon contends, intertextuality takes
many forms, the informing principle of the present study is reaffirmed: that novels of the
civil war inevitably engage and employ a long tradition of narrative fiction to carry out
the task of remembering.

This is merely a brief reference to two of the central intertextual presences from
outside the Hispanic literary tradition in Beatus Ille. Verne’s The Mysterious Island and
Homer’s Odyssey are two key texts in the consideration of Minaya’s task and Solana’s
hidden existence in Mágina. As Solana had noted in the margin of the copy of The
Mysterious Island that Minaya would later find: “11-3-47. Quién hubiera tenido el
coraje de ser el capitán Nemo. Mi nombre es nadie, dice Ulises, y eso lo salva del
Cíclope. J.S.” (59). Solana here refers to the stoic death of Nemo aboard the scuttled
Nautilus, and to the stratagem—and, Hutcheon might argue, identity play—which allows
Ulysses and some of his men to escape certain death in the cave of Polyphemus. The two
key players, Nemo and Ulysses, correlate symbolically to Solana and Minaya: Solana,
after a number of years silent and all but forgotten, resurfaces to tell his life story with the
help of Minaya, much in the same way that Nemo returns to greet the fleeing settlers of
the titular Mysterious Island, while Minaya, lost in the foreign waters of Mágina, can
only carry out his stratagem by becoming the mythical No Man, that is, allowing the
stories of Solana to be told through him.

Utrera’s remorse spoils, to a certain degree, the satisfaction Minaya might have taken
from his success: “¿No se da cuenta? Llevo treinta y dos años pagando lo que hice aquel
día, y seguiré pagando hasta que me muera, y también después, supongo” (282).

Though the present study does not endeavor to study the novel in this manner, a strictly
narratological study would reveal a very complex structure. In addition to incorporating
a large number of narrators, some of the narrators (like Jacinto Solana) play multiple
narrative roles. In Genette’s analysis, he proposes four paradigms from which to begin
narratological investigation:
We can represent the four basic types of narrator’s status as follows: (1) **extradiegetic-heterodiegetic**–paradigm: Homer, a narrator who tells a story he is absent from; (2) **extradiegetic-homodiegetic**–paradigm: Gil Blas [of *Gil Blas*, by Alain René Lesage], a narrator in the first degree who tells his own story; (3) **intradiegetic-heterodiegetic**–paradigm: Scheherazade, a narrator in the second degree who tells stories she is on the whole absent from; (4) **intradiegetic-homodiegetic**–paradigm: Ulysses in Books IX-XII, a narrator in the second degree who tells his own story. (248 emphasis original)

Extra- and intradiegetic refer to the level at which the narrator is present, while hetero- and homodiegetic define the narrator’s relationship to the story. Solana is perhaps the slipperiest of the characters given his ambiguous state of being, existing both inside and outside the story, but the novel is rife with intradiegetic-homodiegetic narrators, i.e. secondary tellers who appear in the novel to narrate their own stories. Maryse Bertrand de Muñoz, in her 1992 article “Historia y ficción, historia y discurso: doble dualismo. Análisis narratológico de tres novelas de la guerra civil española,” studies three novels thematically linked to *Beatus Ille*: *La llama* (1951) by Arturo Barea, *Un millón de muertos* (1961) by José María Gironella, and *San Camilo, 1936* (1969) by Camilo José Cela. Each of these novels, evidently, explores the problematics presented in reconciling memory and narration, a theme central in *Beatus Ille*.

**20** A term originally applied to medieval coats-of-arms, the concept of *mise en abyme* was “[g]iven a new currency by the French novelist André Gide (1869-1951), who defined it as the representation within a work of art of that work’s structure” (Macey 256). While numerous examples of this phenomenon exist long before Gide’s definition—chief among them, in the Spanish context, Velázquez’s “Las meninas”—Muñoz Molina foregrounds its presence in *Beatus Ille* by presenting multiple layers of self-reflexivity. Solana writes in 1937 in Manuel’s house, and Minaya arrives to do the same in 1969; however it is revealed that Solana, not deceased, accompanies Minaya in 1969 to produce his falsified memoir, and the product they create together becomes Minaya’s, given to him by Solana: *Beatus Ille*. No mere coincidence, it seems, is that Muñoz Molina titles his novel *Beatus Ille*, again probing the boundaries between the novelistic reality and that of our empirical world.

**21** This estimation is particularly apt for *Beatus Ille* for the decisive participation of the narrator throughout the novel. In the first instance, Solana first conspires to create his *Beatus Ille* by guiding the young investigator, and then entrusts the narration of his creation to Minaya. Solana creates the narrated product (in his blue notebook), intrudes openly in virtually every section of the text, and ensures its delivery to the would-be interlocutor Minaya. At every turn in the novel, the act of narration is underscored, whether in Solana’s soliloquies or in Minaya’s investigational interviews, while the *histoire*, the narrated product, is a secondary consideration—so much so that Solana informs Minaya that the story reported to him may be only one among many possibilities.
22 Wardropper defines the essence of the beatus ille tradition in this way: “[I]n the Beatus ille poems he [the city dweller] flees from the corruption of urban life in search of a peaceful existence where he may live with self-respect” (121). For Wardropper, the most representative poet of this tradition in the Spanish Golden Age is Fray Luis de León, and for a more complete history of this thematic tradition, please see Wardropper’s Spanish Poetry of the Golden Age (1971).

23 The character Cervantes, pen behind his ear and hand on his cheek, here resembles Cervantes the author in that the time between major publications for Cervantes was nearly twenty years. In 1585, Cervantes published La Galatea, but prior to the publication of the Quijote in 1605, his literary successes were limited. For a complete study of Cervantes’s literary career, please see the introductory and closing essays by Salvador Fajardo and James A. Parr in their joint edition of Don Quijote (1998), and for a complete narratological consideration of Don Quijote, please refer to Parr’s Don Quijote: An Anatomy of Subversive Discourse (1988).

24 The allusion here made, “la cara oculta bajo el ala del sombrero, entre las solapas del abrigo, el rostro sin ojos ni nariz ni boca” (70), is to the 1933 Hollywood film The Invisible Man in which Claud Rains portrays the title character, and provides a first clue to the chronological setting Muñoz Molina attempts to recreate. The reference also sheds considerable light on the condition of Jacinto Solana, who in the years since his presumed death, has lived in Mágina, invisible to the world he abandoned in 1947.

25 The FAI, or Federación Anarquista Ibérica, was a group committed to social revolution in the truest anarchic sense: the elimination of the unnecessary state apparatus for governance. This radical stance highlighted one of the rifts within the Spanish Left; the Socialists and Communists claimed a pragmatic course of action—after the Republic is conserved and stabilized, the revolution can continue—while the FAI saw this stance as another institutionalized betrayal of the progress of the revolution. One of the canonized defenders of the F.A.I. was Buenaventura Durruti, a radical anarchist who not only participated in general strikes of miners and railroad workers during the 1910s and 1920s, but also died in November of 1936 fighting on the Madrid Front (Sánchez Vidal 762). Durruti is yet another political intertext present in Beatus Ille, as Jacinto Solana imagines the conditions under which his father was executed in 1939:

F.A.I., debió leer en la fachada cuando lo hicieron bajar de la furgoneta. ‘Loor a Durruti,’ pero sin duda ignoraba quién era Durruti y qué significaban las iniciales furiosamente escritas con brochazos rojos [. . .] tan indescifrables como la guerra misma y los rostros de los hombres que lo empujaron y el motivo que usaron para detenerlo. (167)

26 José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) is a prominent mid-century Liberal philosopher of the twentieth century. Numerous critics and philosophers have produced copious collections and evaluations of his essays, and for a more detailed bibliography, please refer to Germán Bleiberg and Julián Marias’s Diccionario de la literatura española (1972), which
is exhaustive to the date of its publication. From 1923 to 1936, Ortega is the principal force behind the publication of *Revista de Occidente*, which ceases publication upon his leaving Spain in 1936. Its publication begins anew in 1963, after his death.
CHAPTER 2

The Lion and the Looking Glass: Reflection and Deformation

in Luis Mateo Díez’s Las estaciones provinciales and La fuente de la edad

Para mí es un mundo que ha adquirido una dimensión simbólica, un mundo perdido, sin destino, que pertenece a una realidad intermedia entre el pasado y la modernidad, y que se ha quedado anclado en medio, como si estuviera destinado a desaparecer.

-Luis Mateo Díez

The world to which Luis Mateo Díez here refers is the realm in which his first two novels, Las estaciones provinciales (1982) and La fuente de la edad (1986), take shape: the decade of the 1950s in Spain, under the most intense scrutiny and fiercest censorship of the Franco regime. Díez, born in 1942, defines the problematized relationship of many contemporary authors in Spain to history; he recreates this symbolic, lost world—all too literal and persistent for many Spaniards, even into the 1980s—through a combination of real, personal memory and what Hirsch has called postmemory. Díez, albeit as a young child, witnessed in a minimal way the years of want and privation that followed the war, but the more impactful notions of the civil war were and could ever only be mediated and narrative in nature. It is neither necessary nor critically sound to rely solely on the
author’s biography, but it is instructive to reflect in part on the factors contributing to the genesis of narratives—in this case, the two novels noted above—that confront squarely the hypocrisies, inconsistencies, and injustices of the years of the dictatorship. The characters that emerge from Díez’s consideration of that time, as well as the spaces they inhabit, offer a strident indictment of social reality under Franco: the abject failure of communication, the triumph of systemic corruption and collusion, and the impossibility of even minimal change in the face of a static hierarchy bent on imposing and maintaining order. Díez’s characters stumble through this macabre world, encountering at every turn another obstacle to impede their progress or another pathetic being to compound their misery; this ominous vision finds constant outlet in the author’s oeuvre, permeating his later novels El expediente del náufrago (1992) and Camino de perdición (1995) as well.

The civil war itself does not appear in the texts, as is the case with other contemporary novels by Antonio Muñoz Molina or Marina Mayoral. Díez’s avoids direct mention of the conflict, but its importance in the development of the novels cannot be underestimated. The post-war period suffers indelible wounds, still open long after Franco’s ascent to power in 1939; there remains a profound schism between Francoist and Republican, conqueror and conquered, despite the superficial obedience paid by the vanquished in order to assure their own survival. The presence of these two combatants lingers long after the last Republicans had fled the peninsula, and in much the same way that Carmen Laforet’s Nada (1944) or Luis Martín Santos’ Tiempo de silencio (1962) are novels of the civil war, so are Luis Mateo Díez’s Las estaciones provinciales and La
Díez turns the looking glass upon the past, combining his personal memory with a collectively conjured one to rewrite—from the perspective of very particular protagonists deeply ensconced within this historical context—the story of a nation deeply divided.

Two key elements of Luis Mateo Díez’s fiction are the incorporation of history and the increasingly subjective nature of that history, as well as the preeminence of story development through richly textured narration. These elements have often been considered paradigmatic of the Spanish novel of the Democratic era and critics have begun attempting to label this literary moment with alarming speed. Samuel Amell (1993) has heralded the arrival of a “new realism,” while Gonzalo Navajas (1996) has championed the cause of the “neomodern” novel. Questions of—and concerns regarding—the periodization of contemporary literature aside, it is readily apparent that the freedoms afforded by Spain’s relatively young social democracy have changed not only editorial practices, but also the general direction of literary creation, with regard particularly to the novel. The aforementioned elements associated with the novel of the Democracy—the incorporation of history and the dependence on structured, cohesive narration—manifest the manner in which contemporary novelists, and in particular Luis Mateo Díez, both accept and reject elements of their national novelistic tradition.

Both critics, Amell and Navajas, see the present moment as one of both inclusion and exclusion; Amell’s term clearly demonstrates the connection he wishes to make, that the contemporary Spanish novel shares many characteristics of the realist novel in Spain
that dominated the second half of the nineteenth century. This is not to say, Amell assures, that the novel of the Democracy “se haya vuelto al realismo decimonónico o, peor aún, al realismo pedestre y chato de los llamados novelistas sociales de los años cincuenta” (246), but rather that traditional narrative technique—infused with the innovations of twentieth century narration—is prized above the necessary incorporation of experimental narrative techniques popularized in the Spanish novel of the 1960s and 1970s. Amell contends:

Lo que encontramos en los nuevos escritores es una conjunción de elementos narrativos tradicionales con técnicas actuales, algunas de ellas provenientes de la novela experimental. Ahora bien, hay que tener en cuenta que estas últimas se limitan a aquellas que enriquecen el relato, siendo desechadas todas las que tienden a la confusión del lector. (246)

On the same score, Navajas agrees that the novels of the Democratic era represent a conscious rejection of the innovative novel of the 1960s and 1970s, while at times incorporating some of its components. Despite the desire to declare absolute independence from previous literary moments, Navajas cautiously posits that a fully realized division and a clear demarcation between eras are all but impossible: “[…] la última fase [the neomodern] se delimita por reacción a la anterior [the postmodern] y participa todavía de modo explícito o inconsciente de varios de sus rasgos” (23).

One central characteristic of the contemporary novel is the renewed importance of the dynamic of storytelling. Many contemporary novelists, Luis Mateo Díez among them,
base their efforts around narration—plot, character development, and thematics—and only implement those innovative techniques that serve to further the cause of narrativity. This return to traditional narrative technique is, according to Amell and others, a response to the crisis that the novel suffers in Spain in the late 1970s and early 1980s, due to economic realities that provoked deep cutbacks in the number of titles published. By the early 1980s, however, a new generation of novelists, concerned more with narrativity than with experimentation and innovation, had begun to garner interest from both the critical and commercial publics. Amell’s “new novelists”—Luis Mateo Díez, Luis Landero, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Rosa Montero, Eduardo Mendoza, among others—do make use of narrative innovations when, as noted, they enrich the story at hand rather than cultivate confusion or misunderstanding. Coupled with another salient aspect of the new novel—the setting of the text in a real, recognizable world—this neo-traditional narration allows Amell to assert his theory of inclusion and exclusion. In nearly all of these authors, he claims, there is a tendency to “anclar sus narraciones en la realidad del mundo que los rodea y en desechar cualquier técnica innecesaria para el funcionamiento de la historia que quieren contar” (247). For Amell, story supersedes technique; nonetheless, traditional narrative technique—dialogue, anecdotal complexity—is fused with material alien to conventional realism—the incorporation of myth and other fantastic elements—and other contemporary narrative techniques such as counterpoint to create accessible texts set in accessible spaces, spaces with which the reader can connect (248).
Another of the aforementioned critics who has hailed the return to narrativity is Santos Sanz Villanueva. In his introductory essay to the portion dedicated to contemporary novel in Francisco Rico’s Historia y crítica de la literatura española (1992), he maintains that among the various trends and multiple approaches to the novel since the death of Franco, the most pervasive is what he terms the return to the “afición a contar”:

“Era una vuelta al viejo gusto por contar, al clásico relato cervantino que puede tener otros valores—desde humorísticos hasta morales—pero que se fundamenta en la narración de una historia” (254). Sanz Villanueva cites Eduardo Mendoza’s La verdad sobre el caso Savolta (1975) as an exemplary text of this tendency, and also notes that “En esa línea de un patente gusto por contar historias ocupa un lugar destacado Luis Mateo Díez” (255). Classifying his style as traditional realism imbued with a sharp sense of humor and a degraded perspective similar to that of Ramón del Valle Inclán, Sanz Villanueva later reconfirms in his article “En la provincia de Luis Mateo Díez,” echoing the suppositions of Amell, that the preeminence of narration is one of the central characteristics of the fiction of Luis Mateo Díez.

History, either as setting or as thematic concern, has played an important role in the formation of the modern Spanish novel, from Galdós to Baroja, Valle-Inclán to Juan Goytisolo; that said, history is also one of the predominant issues confronted in the contemporary novel, as well as another touchstone from which to consider the novelistic production of Luis Mateo Díez. What many contemporary novels share is the problematization of that history, a critical reevaluation of the past, a reconfiguration of “the facts” to offer a subjective (re)vision of history, both as specific temporal referent
and as concept in and of itself. This reconsideration of history is one of the hallmarks of Díez’s first two novels; the author turns his mirror on Spanish society—as any nineteenth-century realist might—but his novelistic vision is not the immediate reflection offered in the looking glass. Rather, the author’s own conception of that same moment et milieu, his subjective impressions of the time and place examined, are brought to bear on that reflection. The product of the marriage of these two conceptions is a damning portrait of social strife, political corruption, and spiritual despair in post-civil war Spain.

In his book Más allá de la posmodernidad (1996), Navajas proposes that the contemporary aesthetic—what he terms the “neomodern”—recuperates the past in a fundamentally subjective way, in opposition to the atemporal stance many postmodern novelists adopted, which eschewed in its totality the possibility of a metanarrative conception of history. The basis for the rejection of the positivistic conception of history as scientific process—verifiable, recordable, and immutable—according to Navajas, can be found in the post-structuralist revision of history as narrative. This philosophical reorientation and its subsequent dispersion throughout literary scholarship, in the writings of such thinkers as Hayden White, “han puesto de manifiesto los procedimientos figurativos y narrativos que perturban y cancelan la supuesta objetividad neutral del estudio objetivo de los acontecimientos en el tiempo” (Navajas 29). The concept of the historian as scientist, neutrally observing and collecting empirical data, no longer functions in a philosophical atmosphere where the text falls under increased scrutiny. Not only are texts read with renewed vigor, however; there is also a reevaluation, in the broadest possible terms, of what constitutes a text. One of the many concepts textualized
is history, as recognized by David Herzberger and noted in the introduction to this study; its writers no longer enjoy the privileged position of neutral observer, but rather are subjected to the rigors of the analysis of any other text. The author as narrator and his or her unique perspective—historical, social, political, and so on—are inevitably brought to bear on the text: “[...] su perspectiva y los principios que fundamentan esa perspectiva forman parte íntegra de lo que se historifica y determinan la naturaleza de lo historificado” (Navajas 29). The instability engendered by this revision, the demythification of history as concept—and its reinsertion, as history as construct—lead many postmodern authors, in Navajas’s view, to abandon historical referents almost entirely.

This is not the case, however, in the Navajas’s postulation of the neomodern novel. History remains an indispensable property of the novel, but its role, in the wake of the noted reevaluation, is modified, reconfigured to reflect the details of a reality beyond the rhetorical reach of official discourse. At the fore of this renewed understanding is the subjectification of history; the recognition of history as construct and the personalization of that construct are pivotal to the creation of the literary text, as Navajas avers:

La nueva estética recupera el pasado pero lo hace de modo subjetivo, filtrando la objetividad de la reflexión histórica a través de la mirada personal de un observador que altera su conexión con ese pasado por medio de la transfiguración de sus procesos mentales personales. (28)
The subjective filter allows for the recreation of the past, its physical and human geographies, and makes possible the reconsideration of that past. This subjectivity, however, also limits the scope in which that history is seen. Here the postmodern and the neomodern seem to coincide, given the proclivity of the postmodern novel to avoid any totalizing impulse whatsoever, favoring the litany of “anti-“, “de-“, and “in-“ characteristics that generally accompany texts which seek to theorize the postmodern condition. The neomodern Spanish novel, according to Navajas, reduces the scope of history to a manageable scale, preferring the “micronarración” of subjective, personalized history to the “macrorrelato” of positivist, empirical History (30).

This reduction in the scope is precisely the manner in which Luis Mateo Díez approaches history in his first two novels, Las estaciones provinciales and La fuente de la edad. He employs the micronarration suggested by Navajas in order to represent, in microcosm, the endemic ills of Spanish society under Franco; that is, both of the novels use limited points of view to focalize the narration, and it is within that limitation, by presenting types as representative of a broad swath of society, certain inferences can be drawn. Díez’s two novels offer only a glimpse of life in a provincial capital, but the cross-section made available, every character and the world he or she inhabits, serves as a symbolic signpost which constitutes another piece of the larger puzzle that the novel seeks reveal. In Luis Mateo Díez’s novels, these two elements—character and environment—form the axis on which the novelistic reality revolves. Through an examination of the physical spaces and human geography presented in both of these novels, the specific reality—filtered subjectively through the memory and postmemory of
the author and focused narrowly through the perspective of the narrator—of León in the 1950s, is laid bare, serving as the microcosm from which to glean Luis Mateo Díez’s vision of post-civil war Spanish society.

II

Las estaciones provinciales (1982) represents Luis Mateo Díez’s first foray into full-length novelistic fiction. His literary career began in the 1960s, with his collaboration in the literary magazine Claraboya, in which he published poetry. His poetry however, by his own admission, was written in a “tono virulentamente irónico,” revealing his preference for the narrative, which later would bring him success, both critically and commercially. In 1973, Memorial de hierbas, a collection of short stories was published in Madrid, to be followed in 1977 by Apócrifo del clavel y de la espina, two short novels in a single volume. Las estaciones provinciales, published in 1982, relates the story of a young journalist, Marcos Parra, who works as a staff writer for a local Catholic newspaper, the Vespertino. In a provincial city based on, again by the author’s own admission, the city of León, news is often scarce, and what stories there are—that is, can be released for public consumption—are controlled by the vigilant local government, eager to maintain its place in the established order. Daily columns construed in any way as questionable are immediately replaced by advertisements, before the author is given any opportunity to justify his work. It is in this suffocating atmosphere that Parra toils daily, a journalist unable to hone his craft.
When a fire at a local slaughterhouse greets Parra one summer morning, the *Vespertino* is already preparing a front-page exposé; a cadaver is recovered from the ashes, and witnesses decry the incompetence of the local firefighters. Aching for news to report, Parra quickly begins running down clues, only to have a call from local government officials quash his efforts and silence his inquiries. The magnitude of the story is obediently reduced, and the details of the cadaver removed, as are the references to the ineptitude of the fire company. Parra remains skeptical, however, and his personal investigation provides the remainder of the narration. He manages to discover the identity of the deceased, a local beggar who is known as Cribas. Another piece of the puzzle is uncovered when Parra discovers that the animals being slaughtered and fed to the city are not cows, but rather mules, and that Cribas had made this discovery, sleeping in one of the slaughterhouse’s doorways. The death, presumes Parra, is no longer an accidental one, but rather a homicide. Díez plies the standard devices and movements of the *novela negra*. Parra, through his investigation, becomes linked to the entire gamut of social strata in the city, from beggars to councilmen, from marginalized—both socially and geographically—gypsies to the highest ranks of the clergy. It is this panorama of pathetic beings, whether they suffer economic poverty or a more profound spiritual malaise, and the spaces they inhabit, equally pathetic on either end of the economic spectrum, that illuminates the degraded world that Díez seeks to recreate.

Marcos Parra, narrator and protagonist of *Las estaciones provinciales*, is the mediator through which the facts of the case at hand—the presumed murder of Cribas—are related, and in his movements, both as reporter and then as investigator, a vivid sketch
of the landscape of León comes to life. From the very beginning, the daily frustrations of Parra’s existence are made plain, leading him to ponder his role in the static hierarchy that dictates his reality. The novel opens after a night of drinking and debauchery, Parra’s only release available from the drudgery of the everyday, which the narrator describes, not without a transparent, melancholy irony, as “una noche medianamente gloriosa” (14). In arriving late to work at the Vespertino, Parra muses to himself that “No hay mayor desgracia que padecer la jerarquía de los pobres de espíritu” (14), having just been reprimanded for his lack of punctuality. From the very beginning, the second page of the novel, the reader is aware of the rigid system that defines Parra’s reality, and the hierarchy under which Parra suffers throughout the novel is foreshadowed, to be borne out as his investigation deepens.

In his professional life, Parra is a news reporter without news to report. In the office, he is surrounded by the rest of the paper’s staff, each of whom suffers a malady whose representational value can only be described as transparent. Among these agonizing souls are Argüello, the deaf-mute who serves at the paper’s information desk who also happens to be the father-in-law of one of the paper’s owners; Afrodisio, the interim director of the paper, whose mood outwardly demonstrates the effects of the ulcers which plague him; Cayetano, the paper’s one-eyed director; Alipio, the paper’s errand boy who suffers below even Parra in the established hierarchy; Arsenio, the printer, who toils in the basement of the paper, an insufferable inferno worthy of Dante; Baudillo, Chumilla, Rovira, and a host of others who populate the professional landscape which Parra describes as “este triste papel, feo, católico y sentimental” which suffers
under “un estricto cinturón de seguridad” (29) locked and guarded by the local government. The only member of the staff of the Vespertino with whom Parra spends time outside the office is Benito Calamidades, who, as his surname would suggest, is at this time in his life a dreary, world-weary soul whose pratfalls and mishaps play a double role in the novel. On one level, they provide a brief respite from the gravity of the everyday happenings at the Vespertino at the level of farce and physical comedy. Calamidades, however, is mired in an ever-deepening spiral of depression, exacerbated by his alcoholism, which serves, on a second level, to depict the abject misery that accompanies the emotional and spiritual malaise typical of the world Díez exposes.

An alcoholic and a widower, Calamidades accompanies Parra as he canvases many of the local bars and cafés in search of information about Cribas. This circuit is the second orbit of Parra’s professional world. El Curuqueño, el Nacional, el Capudre, el Isma, el bar Minero, el Mayoral and countless other establishments constitute Parra’s informal and informative network of connections, which he employs when other official channels are less forthcoming. The atmosphere of each of these various locales is almost identical; each floats in a haze of alcohol and tobacco, while a very distinct cast of characters inhabits their stools and tables. Among these legions are Restituto, owner of the Curuqueño; Domitila, his mother-in-law and waitress for the bar’s favored clientele; Celedonio, the sleepy barman at el Isma; Venceslao el cerrillas, the mutilated knighth-errant; and Manolo Pistolo, nearsighted seller of the Vespertino who regularly finds Parra in order to offer advice, both journalistic and otherwise. These are the characters who
decorate the background of Parra’s adventures, sketching an inert environment, static and frozen, unable to free itself of the bacchanalian melancholy which defines its existence.

Outside of his professional life, Parra finds little relief from the oppression under which he labors. Living in the pension house of Doña Chelo, Parra is a bachelor with few, if any, social outlets. He spends the majority of his free time in and out of the establishments previously mentioned, and beyond that, his only other consistent activity is his work at the *Vespertino*, which, apart from the journalistic (dis)satisfaction it provides, hardly constitutes a viable opportunity for meaningful social interaction. Díez’s narrowing of the narrative focus, again, heightens the intensity of the misery he hopes to communicate; the accumulation of injury, anguish, and emptiness immediately surrounds Parra and is only leavened by occasional pricks of black humor. This is no less true of Parra’s personal life, where the systemic corruption and complicity typical of his professional world extend even into his personal life, into his relationships with the opposite sex. The first episode in which the reader is presented with Parra’s strictly personal interactions is his encounter with Claudia Vergel, a dancer in a traveling carnival, with whom Parra enjoys the fleeting moments her itinerant schedule occasionally allows. Claudia represents an escape for Parra, an ephemeral moment of both longing and fulfillment. Parra anxiously awaits the return of the traveling show, toiling daily in inescapable solitude, but his suffering is assuaged each time Claudia returns; for Parra, Claudia’s performances have “la capacidad de remover esa memoria enterrada que a mí me hacía rememorar rostros y cuerpos soñados en tantas aventuras imposibles” (71). The encounters with Claudia are a momentary reprieve from the world
in which each forcibly dwells, the nearest approximation to happiness that either of their existences provides. Moreover, as Parra’s musings above reveal, meaningful contact and connection to the other people in his orbits represent the ability to relocate the memory that can alleviate the misery of the present reality.

When Parra and Claudia meet, on the night following the fire at the slaughterhouse, Parra is preoccupied with the increasingly damning information he has received—and is unable to report—with regard to the death of Cribas. Nonetheless, Claudia’s presence removes him from that world, and the two escape quickly to fulfill their longings. After a brief encounter in a field, the two continue on to meet Belisario, the night watchman of the abandoned army installations on the edge of town. The shacks are austere at best, but for a few pesetas, the two suppose they can enjoy their few moments together in peace. Their peace is soon interrupted, however, when the local police arrive, asserting their role as guardians of the “moral pública.” As noted in the preceding chapter through Martín Gaite’s essays in *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*, this generality covered a multitude of sins, some actually committed and others only potential, and the application of the term as a known referent allows Díez to once again underscore the empirical aspects of the reality he targets in the novel. The interruption and detention, as Parra soon learns, have little to do with protecting the virginal rural town, and much to do with the information he seeks, and the answers he may uncover.
The rhythm of the narration here reflects the counterpoint technique that Amell sees as one central characteristic of the contemporary novel. From the absolute heights of carnal passion—Parra and Claudia suffer a forcible coitus interruptus when the police arrive—to the depths of shame and anxiety, the pair experience both extremes of an emotional spectrum borne out in the tempo of the text’s narration. While the pair make love, Díez only interrupts the flowing, almost lyrical, paragraphs for one line of dialogue; “Ya es desgracia que tengas que irte mañana” (81) Parra whispers to Claudia, and the narration returns to a smooth flow. Soon however, the story’s flow is cut into a staccato dialogue between Parra and the police officers, Parra and Claudia, the officers and Belisario, Belisario and Cuqui, his faithful mutt. This is but one of the numerous occasions that Díez employs rapid, curt dialogue to maximize the situational tension which his characters eternally confront.

Upon arriving at the local police station, disheveled and distraught, Parra muses “Mis ánimos habían sufrido un vertiginoso descenso al verla padecer aquella humillación” (84). Parra shifts from depression to indignation when he is lead to the office of the inspector in charge, Valero. Their conversation is a thinly veiled means to inform Parra that his personal investigation concerning the slaughterhouse fire is not appreciated by the local powers, and that his insistence can only imperil his wellbeing and that of those close to him. In closing the conversation, Valero states dryly, not caring very much to mask his intentions:
No me haga divagar demasiado que yo soy un hombre de pocas palabras. Usted intuye de sobra a lo que quiero referirme. [...] Aprenda a callarse la boca y dedique sus indudables cualidades a ese periodismo sano que tanto necesitamos. Deje de meter el morro donde no tiene nada que ganar y sí mucho que perder. (86)

On that strident note the interview between Parra and the inspector closes, and soon after his relationship with Claudia suffers the same fate. The rhetorical turn taken by the inspector echoes much of the official rhetoric of the regime; the inspector applies the forms of inclusion and praise—the laudatory “indudables cualidades,” for example, or the inclusionary first-person plural of “necesitamos”—that seem to encourage participation in a shared project for the betterment of society in the process of communicating the perfectly clear threat of physical harm. This distancing is characteristic of the relationships Díez presents in Las estaciones provinciales.

Parra’s other amorous relationship is damned from the beginning. Tina, the daughter of the murdered mendicant, Cribas, arrives in the city, and her first contact is with Parra; his responsibility is to inform her of the extenuating circumstances surrounding the death of her father. Parra at this point is under the instructions of don Paciano, a businessman who has fallen out of favor with the local government. His assignment in meeting Tina is to offer her the opportunity to help Paciano regain his standing in the community by holding incriminating evidence against the local government regarding the mule meat being fed to the local citizens. With this threat
pending, Sebastián Riello, one of the city’s most powerful councilmen, would be forced
to accept don Paciano’s son into the government, knowing that otherwise, Parra’s story
about the slaughtered mules and the murder of Cribas could provoke a public scandal and
potentially disastrous consequences.

It is under these chaotic circumstances that Parra’s romance, if it can be called
that, with Tina takes place. Their interactions contrast sharply with Parra’s previous
relationship; with Claudia, Parra is stirred emotionally, her presence exudes a sensuality
that creates a strong physical bond. With Tina, however, their sexual encounters are cold
and mechanical, and Díez heightens this sense by maintaining a constant dialogue
between the two. Tina, once a prostitute in Barcelona, simply assumes that their
relationship will be sexual: “Desde el momento en que te vi entrar en el Nacional esta
mañana—confesó Tina—tuve la idea de que tú y yo íbamos a acabar así” (151). Even as
they make love for the first time, Díez continues their dialogue, concentrating on the
specific, minute details of the mechanics of human sexual interaction and the fear of
being discovered in Tina’s rented room in the pension. After placing the mattress on the
floor to reduce the noise of their encounter, Tina asks a question that crystallizes the
brutal frankness, and perhaps the insignificance, that define their relationship: “¿Pero me
vas a hacer algo de una vez?” (153). Parra seeks futilely to keep Tina at his side, but both
he and she are fully aware of the political machinations afoot which make their bond
impossible. Tina’s prior arrest records for prostitution are revealed, and she is sent off,
escorted by an armed guard; she returns some time later, only to depart hurriedly once
again. Upon her first departure, she was taken prisoner, beaten, tortured, and instructed
to seek accommodation elsewhere, far from both Parra and the scandal in which her father so prominently figures. She leaves for Madrid, after a brief stop to bid Parra farewell; her departure leaves him, once again, alone and more deeply disillusioned, fully aware of, but unable to comprehend, the litany of restrictions that dictate the boundaries of his existence.

Interspersed within Parra’s personal encounters are his dealings with other local figures as he attempts to ascertain the facts of slaughterhouse fire. One of the primary sources of information for Parra is Bedoya, a gypsy livestock trader who lives on the outskirts of the city. With the help of his son Fernando, Bedoya buys and sells livestock throughout the region, for both consumption and use as beasts of burden; his connections within that enterprise lead Parra directly to him in search of information about the mules found in the ashes of the slaughterhouse. The gypsies represent, in Franco’s Spain, a doubly marginalized segment of the population, suffering as not only social outcasts, but as geographical ones as well. Díez underscores this marginality in the text by locating Bedoya and his family in a far-flung hamlet called La Nava, some nine kilometers from the center of town, described as “un caserío derruido y abandonado” (42). Díez’s description of the poverty, even squalor, of that backdrop emphasizes the societal alienation suffered by the gypsy population, and serves as yet another piece of material evidence in this damning indictment of Spain’s post-civil war reality.

One of the first indications of the ruinous state of the settlement is the road that Parra must travel in order to arrive. Riding a borrowed motorscooter, Parra describes the
journey this way: “Eran nueve kilómetros por el tórrido yermo, entre los suaves desmontes agostados en su declive hacia el cauce seco del río, las sebes arruinadas, los cardos en solitarios enjambres por las cunetas” (42). La Nava sits in a dry, solitary, and forgotten space which has only deteriorated since the end of the war. When Parra finally arrives, he evokes a collective memory—one of the few direct references to the civil war in the text—in order to ponder the ruination that La Nava represents:

La tierra desvalida hacía nacer de su propia enfermedad aquellos raros promontorios de ruina, que en la memoria de la ciudad pertenecían a uno de los frentes más castigados durante el asedio del comienzo de la guerra. En La Nava las trincheras se asentaron en las cocinas y en los corrales y muchos paisanos murieron disparando desde la propia cama. (42-3)

The insidious infirmity sown by the civil war and preserved in the collective memory of the community still permeates La Nava, serving as a reminder of the lingering presence of the war. Another of these reminders takes shape in the grandmother of Bedoya, who has lost all but three of her twelve children. She succinctly characterizes the fate of many Spanish mothers and grandmothers of her generation, who endured the loss of more than 500,000 husbands, sons, and grandsons, when she states, “Una lo ha hecho sola todo en la vida” (43).

Parra’s visit to La Nava yields precisely the information he seeks; Fernando informs him that he and his father had provided mules to some of the leading business concerns in the city. Inconclusive at best, the information is at least suggestive enough
for Parra to persist in his investigation, and his speculations are validated as the novel proceeds; Bedoya is soon arrested and jailed to ensure his silence, while the cadaver of his son, Fernando, appears in a ditch just outside the city, executed after attempting, in the official reporting, to escape the local police. Díez’s treatment of the Bedoya, Fernando, and La Nava articulates the generalized attitude of antipathy and hostility associated with the gypsy population during the post-war period, and provides a marked contrast to another space in which Parra seeks to realize his investigation.

As the protagonist extends his search for information, he manages to garner a certain local renown for his assiduous research; one of the most interested parties to the reporter’s findings is don Paciano Abascal, a local industrialist who finds himself on the outside of the local government looking in, having fallen out of favor with the current ruling elite. With elections approaching and his sphere of influence diminishing, don Paciano hatches a plot which, with the aid of Parra, will provoke a minor coup d’état in the city, placing his son Isauro in the seat of councilman. Paciano plans to blackmail his local competition with information about the slaughterhouse fire and the cadaver there recovered, hoping to prompt their acquiescence, that is, their acceptance of Isauro into the local government. Under these conditions, Parra accepts an invitation to dine with Paciano and his closest friends, and is introduced to a world unlike any he has ever seen.

The estate where the dinner is to be held sits just outside the city’s center, stretching from the road to Asturias back into the hills, and oak and pine groves line the lengthy drive from the main road to the house. Parra arrives accompanied by Gabriel
Llanos, his friend and now loyal adviser and right-hand man of don Paciano. Among the other guests are Mariano Olmedilla, local voice of the Radio Falange, and don Cosme Braña, the bishop of the diocese; upon entering Parra witnesses a dignified scene in which the guests sip sherry by a large fireplace as they await their remaining dinner companions. The setting is impeccable, as is the table at which the group will dine; Parra observes, attempting to ascertain what the night will entail, the opulence of the atmosphere he so rarely encounters: “Una mesa central, escrupulosamente revestida y dispuesta, presagiaba la magnitud de la cena: atestada de vasos y platos, bajo la enorme lámpara de brazos torneados y un exagerado dispendio de cadenillas de cristales” (103).

After the initial reception, Parra follows his host and the other guests down to the cellar, where his astonishment grows upon seeing Paciano’s storehouse of goods:

—Sí, sí, amigo Parra—me dijo don Paciano orgulloso al verme observar asombrado aquel paisaje—. Doscientos veinte jamones, setenta y tres piezas de cecina, y por encima del millar de chorizos y otros mondongos. Uno se siente seguro y feliz al pisar el suelo que tiene todo esto debajo.

(109)

In addition to this warehouse of culinary delights, Paciano also maintains a vast collection of wines, champagnes, and cognacs, many of which are measured in centuries, rather than years. The lavish surroundings and sumptuous banquet at don Paciano’s estate, which permit his security and happiness, stand in direct contrast to the other spaces presented in the novel like La Nava, where hunger, scarcity, and thrift define
existence. Parra himself lives from bar to bar, from stew to stew, and these new environs represent a temptation to abandon his chosen craft and enter into a segment of society in which serving the appropriate interests seems to provide untold extravagance and an enviable quality of life. In effect, when don Paciano urges Parra to assist him in his plans, Parra willingly furnishes all the information gathered in his investigations, and promises to continue investigating the case in the employ of the industrialist. The atmosphere the Díez here creates, however, does not escape the critical eye that permeates the entirety of the text. No individual or institution is beyond reproach for the author, and the banquet scene is indicative of this attitude. Despite the elegance of the evening’s setting, despite the social standing of the guests—Parra excluded—Díez paints an absurd, degraded portrait of the group and their customs which serves to illustrate the gluttony and decadence characteristic of their position in the local hierarchy.

After touring Paciano’s extravagant cellar, Parra is introduced to the first ritual of the evening. Each of the guests selects a knife bearing a colored ribbon, and is charged with hunting and slaughtering a pig—whose neck is adorned with a collar of the same color—which, when the ritual is completed, will be prepared in the kitchen as the dinner’s main course. The men revert to the basest of human instincts, uttering shouts of conquest and frustration, jubilation and consternation, while seeking to trap their helpless prey. When Paciano reveals that the winner will be awarded a cup of the oldest, finest wine in his cellar—an ancient vintage prized for its fame as an aphrodisiac—the group instantly intensifies its search:
Arrastrándose por el suelo, subidos a las andanas, saltando entre las cubas, la búsqueda se convirtió en un desaforado rastreo del que don Paciano y yo en seguida quedamos fuera. El polvo y el sudor moteaba los rostros de los esforzados perseguidores. […] El gruñido chillón del cochinillo fugitivo surgió de la esquina de las escaleras. Un ruido de voces y disputa acompañó en seguida los lastimeros chillidos. (115)

Ultimately, don Cosme, the priest and most dexterous of the hunters, claims victory and savors the coveted elixir, amid howls of protest from the others; their envy takes the form of allegations of cheating, as well as other snide remarks concerning the inability of the priest to fully enjoy the gamut of sensations this particular wine provides.

The group then proceeds, after a necessary cleaning, to the table, where they are inundated with several courses of appetizers, accompanied by the appropriate liquid refreshments. An endless array of sausages, fresh shellfish, and poached and baked fish all precede the roast suckling pig, adorned, naturally, with the ribbon of its conqueror. Parra, unaccustomed to sharing the table with such voracious company, tries his best to keep pace, but simply cannot. Don Paciano exemplifies the collective appetite of the group, but Parra still struggles to comprehend the gastronomic capacity of his new environs:

La pericia y habilidad de los comensales podía causar vértigo. Mi estómago respondía como exitado por aquellas máquinas voraces, cuyo más eximio ejemplo era el propio don Paciano: sudoroso y lentamente
The guests rapaciously devour the feast placed before them from beginning to end, and although Parra cannot match their Herculean feats of digestion, he leaves the table satisfied, while the others mop the sweat from their brows and retire from the table, exhausted by their efforts and saturated with alcohol.

Abandoning the table, the spectacle continues before the eyes of the newcomer. Ursicino Lesmes and Olmedilla place a bet, another example of the excess and debauchery common to the group: “Ursicino y Mariano, completamente descamisados, se disponían a comenzar la prueba mientras Gabriel alzaba una mano atento al reloj para darles la señal. […] El champán desbordaba sus bocas regando los pechos descubiertos” (123). When Lesmes later plays a joke on don Cosme, holding his head submerged in a vessel filled with champagne, the decadence of the scene reaches its culmination. Upon emerging from the unexpected shower, “Don Cosme se incorporó con un aullido. De sus ojos manaba un manatíal de ira. […] Cogió un jamón, lo alzó en el aire. Ursicino Lesmes apenas tuvo tiempo de volverse para salir huyendo. El golpe le dio en la espalda” (126). This enraged eruption committed by a priest—the supposed earthly shepherds of peace—punctuates the decadence demonstrated throughout the evening. Jealousy, envy, gluttony, greed, rage; these are merely a few of the traits that Díez attributes to the guests at the millionaire’s dinner party. This characterization of that segment of the population reveals the desire of the author to revisit and critically reevaluate that particular place and
time, a process facilitated by the creation and manipulation of hyperbolic characters who move in an absurd, degraded world.

Corruption and complicity are the watchwords of the novelistic reality created by Luis Mateo Díez in Las estaciones provinciales. Even the protagonist Parra, enters into a pact that confirms his complicity with the interests of don Paciano, despite his initial desire to unmask the sinuous and sinister web of interests controlling virtually every aspect of urban reality. Díez illuminates these nefarious political machinations through his characters and the spaces they inhabit. From shanty towns to lavish estates, pension houses to police barracks, each space is ideologically charged, seeking to disclose the unofficial history that constitutes daily reality in a given time and place, a reality in this case starkly divided on the basis of political and economic interests. The characters who live and work in these worlds vary widely, but all share a common trait. Each character is defined by the space they inhabit, and while the majority struggles in a static, austere world, there are some, like Parra, who are able to move between worlds, and even attempt to exchange one reality for the other. As Parra learns, however, even pacts made with the best of intentions, like his agreement with Paciano, cannot be trusted in a world where shifting alliances and closed-door deals are the norm. Parra ends his travails where he began them, on the outside, frozen in a world which constantly reinforces its order, and annuls any possibility of change: “Cuando llegué al bulevar tuve esa lastimosa sensación del perro callejero en la inhóspita intemperie, como el náufrago de un innoble viaje en un mar de miserias en el que no queda más remedio que intentar sobrevivir” (264). The tragicomic degradation of the accumulated settings and characters in Las
estaciones provinciales contrasts starkly with what Catherine Davies calls “the
triumphalistic rhetoric of the victorious Right—the boastful claims of a return to order
and contentment” (186), and Díez, despite the apparent narrative simplicity of the novel’s
structure, crafts a tale that belies the possibility of the metanarrative certitudes of history.

III

If, as noted above, Las estaciones provinciales focuses centrally on the detailed
depiction of an overly pious, patriarchal society while relying on mainly traditional
narrative techniques, La fuente de la edad represents yet another step in the narrative
development of its author. The atmosphere explored in Díez’s second novel remains the
same, the 1950s in an anonymous rural provincial capital, and the degraded portrayal of
both character and environment serves much the same purpose: the critical reevaluation
of this historical time and place. La fuente de la edad differs from its predecessor,
however, on the basis of narrative complexity. Whereas Las estaciones provinciales
relies on a linear narrative structure with few, if any, digressions from the progress of the
story at hand, La fuente de la edad employs a more textured narration, depending on
several intercalated tales to enrich the narration. Stylistically, La fuente de la edad
presents a more complex manipulation of narrative schemes by Díez, but in terms of
thematic content, both novels approach similar phenomena in much the same way. Both
novels employ exaggerated characters in a static, degraded world, but what separates La
fuente de la edad is the manner in which form and content coexist; to accentuate the
decadence of the novelistic reality, Díez places the most bizarre and exceptional cases, to
be examined below, within the framework of narrative digressions, intercalated stories. Díez underscores his reconsideration of the microcosmic history of the rural León under Franco’s mandate by setting off the most outlandish tales and placing them outside of the main storyline of the novel. Nonetheless, despite more expansive narrative complexity, Luis Mateo Díez is, in La fuente de la edad, equally strident in his critique of mid-century Spanish society.

Structured, in general terms, as an adventure novel, La fuente de la edad relates the story of a fellowship dedicated spiritually to the teachings of their guru Gerónides, while devoting their earthly pursuits to another, don José María Lumajo. The group learns, through the extensive investigative effort of one of its members, Jacinto Sariegos, that there exists a notebook of Lumajo, and that within it lies the information necessary to mount an expedition in search of the virtuous spring, the fountain of youth. Not only does Lumajo’s research exist, but its findings indicate that the cave which houses the font sits nearby, in a rural community known as La Omañana. The group reels at the possibility of retracing Lumajo’s route, and immediately begins planning the expedition. The first step, described in the first section of the novel, “El baúl de don José María Lumajo,” is to recover the trunk which holds notebook and other writings of the group’s mentor. The second section of the novel, “La ruta de la fuente,” recounts the expedition made by the fellowship along Lumajo’s established route. The third and final section of the novel, “La flor de invierno,” details the consequences of trip and its discoveries some months after the group’s return to the city.
In similar fashion to Las estaciones provinciales, Díez uses eccentric characters and the equally outlandish spaces in which they dwell in order to formulate the reality in which the narrative develops. In La fuente de la edad, the obvious starting point for analysis of character is the fellowship that serves as the collective protagonist of the novel. Among the group are Paco Bodes, an aspiring poet who never lacks a poignant verse for any given moment; Jacinto Sariegos, a melancholy worker at the local archive whose work initiates the group’s quest; Chon Orallo, teacher and the sole feminine presence in the group, whose brother Ovidio is a chef who refuses to taste his own creations; Ángel Benuza, philosopher and pícaro; Floro, or don Florín, the pharmacist more devoted to myth and magic than medicine; and Benjamín Otero, introverted orphan and nephew of don Florín who more often than not is reticent to participate in the activities of the group. The common thread that connects these individuals is the sense of intellectual superiority based on the extended tertulia in which the fellowship engages over the course of the novel. Both in private settings, like Orallo’s apartment, and as members of the community at large, in the city’s numerous bars and cafés, the group is well-known for its eccentricities, embodied most often in its bizarre intellectual endeavors like the quest for Lumajo’s fons vitae; as the novel advances, however, it becomes increasingly clear that the unity of the group is also partially based in their collective opposition to other segments of the city’s population, like the denizens of the local casino. This eclectic collection of souls makes up the group loyal to Gerónides, although their true devotion belongs to the food and drink that bring them together on a regular basis.
The first encounter with the fellowship takes place in the attic apartment of Chon and Ovidio, where Ovidio is preparing a stew for the group. The building that houses the apartment offers a preliminary perspective on the circumstances in which the cohorts—and, by intimation, the majority of the city’s citizens—live:

Era preciso coronar los tres pisos del fúnebre caserón, alzado en la línea de la muralla donde se truncaba el riel del bordillo, […] Y ascender luego al abuhardillado refugio por el tramo suelto de la escalera, que se agarraba como el sendero a la cumbre. Una bombilla colgaba la desnuda miseria en el limitado rellano final, y el mugriento lucernario colaba a duras penas las cenitales lumbres del oscurecer. (14)

The primary reason for the meeting is to eat and drink, however, the second order of business is an update on Jacinto Sariegos’s progress in locating the necessary documents in order to proceed with the expedition. After a short offering to their spiritual leader and a drawn-out discussion about the origins of their faith—in which Chon Orallo asserts, on the first of many occasions, her feminine perspective and explicateds the limitations of the patriarchal assertion that the beauty of the feminine form is its only true asset—the friends eat and drink, listening to the exceptional news Sariegos has to report. Soon, however, the wine is consumed, and the conversation forcibly adjourns to the Capudre, another definitive space in the creation of the novel.

The Capudre, as described by Díez, is a latter-day lyceum, where the local population gathers to wax poetic and ponder (im)pertinent philosophical questions. This
tertulia is the central focus of the social life of the fellowship. Accordingly, their triumphs and failures are not uniquely their own; often, the exploits of the group are measured by what they assume the others at the Capudre will think upon discovering the details of any given adventure. Like the bars Marcos Parra frequents during his investigation in Las estaciones provinciales, the Capudre is a dank, musty locale, whose clientele is nearly permanent fixture, and whose atmosphere is so corrupted that when its doors are opened, it not only refracts the image of the entering patrons, but also threatens the surrounding environment:

Cuando la puerta bate sus hojas, moviendo el juego duplicado de los espejos, que desorientan la imagen de los que van llegando, el humo del Capudre, una arcana emanación de cenicientos volcanes, contagia la atmósfera externa como un escape de enfermizas volutas, deparadoras de algún riesgo mortal al que sólo sobreviven los contumaces. (29)

Here the band of poets and sabios de café\textsuperscript{16} come to share their latest verses and expound their newest theories. Not surprising, then, are the other characters who find solace here; they are pathetic, incomplete beings whose daily reality revolves slowly around the activity at the café.

Of particular interest among these other patrons is the pitiful collection of souls that constitutes La Peña de los Lisiados.\textsuperscript{17} This group consists of Avelino el manco, Pelines el cojo, Feito el tuerto, Eloy Sesma who suffers without a nose, Toribio who lacks testicles, and Nazario, who is missing three fingers on one hand. Díez plies the same
device here as that which appears in Las estaciones provinciales, and to the same
purposeful and pointed representational end; Díez introduces malformed, maladjusted
characters to recapitulate not only the degradation of the environments of both novels, but
also to intimate, in a physical way, the damage wrought in Spain by the imposition of the
regime. When the fellowship of Gerónides enters the Capudre, they cross paths with this
crew of pedantic biological imperfections, and quickly, in only the third chapter, the
reader is presented with the first in a series of intercalated stories. This narrative
digression explains the formation of La Peña de los Lisiados, and offers an insight into
the miserable conditions in which these beings exist. Nazario best explains the purpose
of the group this way, and the importance of the Capudre in their daily lives:

Tenemos los Lisiados […] la condición de lo incompleto, la conciencia de
que aquello que nos falta es ya patrimonio de la muerte, preludio de ese
porvenir fatal. Aquí en la Peña nos cobijamos, los seis que fuimos al
fundarla, dispuestos a alejar el recuerdo de lo que estamos privados. ¿Y
cuál fue el mejor procedimiento? Al margen, claro está de lo que con
buen ánimo se come y se bebe en este templo. (31).

Their temple is one of several physical spaces in the novel that underscore the decadence
that Spanish society, from the perspective of the author, then suffers. Their story
continues however, and the inane behavior subsequently depicted underscores the abject
misery which defines their reality. In an attempt to assuage their collective solitude, the
group invents a new member, setting a place for him at the table at each of their
meetings, and serving his portion of food and drink to an empty chair. The name of this surrogate is Orestes Enebro, and the group goes as far as to conjure a physical description of their imagined companion, as Nazario explains:

Orestes Enebro fue el nombre que le dimos a aquel personaje que aquí se sentaba con nosotros todos los días, a quien guardábamos su sitio y le servimos su plato y su vaso. Tenía Orestes mis tres dedos, el brazo de Avelino, la pierna de Pelines, el ojo de Feito, la nariz de Eloy y, dentro del mayor secreto, los huevos de Toribio […] (32-33)

Nonetheless, the happy fantasy that Orestes represents nearly destroys the unity of the group. Feito, after a night of debauchery and excess, brings the group to his attic workshop to show them the artistic rendering of Orestes that he has painted, and the ensuing scuffle nearly breaks the tight bond which supports the group.

Later in the evening, Nazario and the others bemoan their fate, predicting the imminent separation of the group, cursing the present state of affairs in the city, and evoking the ever-vigilant theme of ubi sunt\textsuperscript{18} by recalling the group’s golden days of yore. The digression here ends, as Sariegos and Bodes recognize that their investigative efforts have stalled; seeking more information about recent discoveries in the city concerning Lumajo, they turn to another friend, Melendres, who reveals that, in overhearing a conversation between the leaders of the local Casino at the Capudre, a trunk containing the personal papers of the investigator has been located in an abandoned apartment in the city. The group loses no time in thanking Melendres for his help before
abandoning the bar in order to concoct a scheme that will allow them to gain possession of don José María Lumajo’s trunk and begin their own odyssey in search of the miraculous fountain.

Another space explored in La fuente de la edad is the local Casino, where members of the city’s elite gather for the majority of their social interaction. Molded in the image of the classic salon, the Casino—a stronghold of patriarchal ideals and values—provides a space where men drink, smoke, gamble, and discuss questions of local significance, while women, as the stereotype dictates, chat tranquilly concerning issues of lesser importance, particularly with regard to social commitments and other such superficial topics. The Casino represents, for the fellowship of Gerónides, an aberration, given the superiority it is perceived to hold over their modest intellectual pursuits. It is soon revealed, however, that the notebook and other papers belonging to José María Lumajo are apocryphal, and that the members of the Casino are responsible for their invention; the entire plot was designed as an elaborate hoax to ridicule the fellowship publicly, to mock their practices and the zeal with which they realize their efforts.

The followers of Gerónides first learn of the deception while still in La Omañana conducting their search; they receive a local newspaper only to find that they have been deceived, and publicly humiliated as well. Their response is immediate and unanimous: the proper revenge must be exacted. Paco Bodes proposes the necessary reparations in this way: “Hay que juramentarse. […] Si existe una venganza necesaria, una obligación
de devolver la afrenta multiplicada por cien, éste es el caso. Imaginaros con qué cara volveremos al Capudre” (216). Perhaps most interesting is the motivation behind the plot for revenge; while the companions do seek to respond specifically to the affront committed by the members of the Casino, they do so only in order to mitigate the inevitable embarrassment they will experience upon returning to their pseudo-intellectual sanctuary.

The stratagem contrived by the fellowship of Gerónides requires much planning, and it begins long before the ultimate revenge is achieved. The first step is a poem written by Francisco Bodes Pellejero, Paco Bodes, which is submitted to the annual poetry competition held by the Casino. Each year, the winning bard is honored at the venerable “Flor de invierno” celebration, and when Bodes learns of his triumph, the detailed machinations of the plan can be set in motion. Don Florín, employing his knowledge of pharmaceuticals, supplies a purgative with which the group will extract its pound of flesh. With Bodes seated at the head table with the leaders of the Casino—and the daughter of the president, the reigning queen of the celebration—the other members of the fellowship surreptitiously taint the preferred beverage of the celebrants and wait anxiously to witness the inevitable consequences. The resulting chaos is the climax of the novel. Once the officials of the Casino become aware of the situation, they fear the worst: that they have poisoned all of their esteemed members and guests. They attempt to keep the problem quiet, but soon the next phase of the fellowship’s plan begins; Paco Bodes feigns severe illness and is carried, agonizing, to the office of the president, don Pacho Robla, where he is attended by his fair queen the daughter of the president of the
club, Tina Robla. The other cohorts exacerbate the concern of the Casino’s officials by exaggerating their non-existent symptoms, and soon the general population of the celebration falls prey to the effects of don Florín’s elixir.

With the orchestra under strict orders to continue playing despite the epidemic, a cacophony of shouts, cries of distress, and conga music permeates the deteriorating scene: “Un caballero se había desplomado en el vestíbulo y una señora era socorrida por sus amigas, aquejada de una escandalosas arcadas que hacían difícil atenderla” (275). Jacinto Sariegos, afflicted not by the purgative but rather by an excess of alcohol, embodies the rapid degeneration of the once-dignified affair, reminiscient of the banquet at the estate of don Paciano in Las estaciones provinciales:

La oscuridad era completa, y Jacinto dio dos o tres pasos sintiéndose perdido en la noche. [...] Decidido, abrió la bragueta y se dispuso a aliviarse. Lo único cierto que podía constatar era una gruesa alfombra bajos los pies. (274-5)

When Sariegos returns to the original setting of the celebration, he observes the destruction wrought by the fellowship’s desire for vengeance:

volvieron a iluminarse los salones, que ya muchos habían abandonado, y se hicieron perceptibles las huellas del pillaje: búcaros rotos, cristalerías arrasadas, sillones volcados, telas de cuadros rasgadas, la sensación de una secreta tormenta que había descargado en la oscuridad. (285)
The plot for revenge is complete when the cohorts solemnly hoist the purportedly expired poet, Bodes, onto their shoulders and carry him out of the Casino. Don Florín culminates the evening by calling aside an aide of don Pacho and handing him the two prizes won by the poet that evening:

Con sumo cuidado dobló la delicada prenda interior de raso, que el poeta había guardado como trofeo, y sujetó en ella la Rosa [the pendant received for his poem]. –Tenga—le dijo al cancerbero—. Súbale esto a don Pacho ahora mismo, y dígale que ambas cosas son de su hija, que el Poeta Galardonado no quiere llevárselas a la tumba. (294)

It is this scene of debauchery and depravity that ends the quest for vengeance, and the fellowship can return to its refuge, the Capudre, satisfied with the damage inflicted in publicly restoring their good name. Díez uses the Casino as yet another debased setting through which to contemplate the corruption and degradation of this reality; both environments here examined, the Capudre and the Casino, serve as spaces within the development of the plot. The unique aspect of La fuente de la edad is the use of other spaces, outside the framework of the plot, to communicate the same message, to describe the same degraded world.

The first of these intercalated tales relates directly—from the story it is understood that the action of the novel takes place somewhere around 1951—to the lingering presence of the civil war. Upon leaving the Capudre, the followers of Gerónides are met with the news that Celenque, a prisoner since the first days of the
conflict in 1936, is agonizing in his cell. Incarcerated for fifteen years, the captive serves
as a symbol of the permanence of the legacy of the civil war in the city, as well as a mark
of pride for those who championed the Republican resistance. The group hurries to his
side to comfort his final moments, and to mark the solemn occasion with the appropriate
pseudo-literary eulogy. The dramatic tension produced by the situation and the collective
political memory it recalls, however, soon give way to the absurdity pervasive in Díez’s
treatment of post-war Spanish society.

Tino Bandera, the caretaker under whose vigilance the prisoner has served his life
sentence, narrates the story of the captivity of Celenque. The most indicative sign of the
absurdity of the scene is the revelation of Celenque’s true identity; the captive, chained
for fifteen years, is not a man but rather a mule. The dedicated group of friends and
admirers learn by word-of-mouth of the agony of Celenque—an implicit affirmation of
the importance of the oral tradition in the fiction of Díez—20—and hurry to accompany his
final moments; the tale of Celenque and his purported heroism are yet another indication
of the radical inanity of the moment that Díez depicts. At the beginning of the war, when
Francoist troops entered the city, the Republicans mounted a staunch defense. A certain
commander Pardiña, leader of the Francoist troops in the area of León, had progressed
strongly in his campaign to take control of the city. Upon inspection one day, while
Pardiña whipped the livestock for lack of discipline, Celenque delivered a blow that
changed the fate of the insurrectionists’ occupation. His kick killed Pardiña instantly,
and the remaining troops, devoid of leadership and organization, were forced to abandon
the city.
The story is ludicrrous, of course, and becomes even more so when the crowd gathered hears the balance of the tale. The Republicans, indebted to Celenque for his act of valor, decorate the mule with military honors, and he becomes the symbol of the city’s resistance. When the war ends, however, the improbability of the story deepens and Díez extends the senselessness of the scene. For his role in the Republican “uprising,” Celenque is sentenced to death by the newly established regime, only later will he have his sentence commuted to life in prison. On display here are the absurd pettiness of the Franco regime, and the lengths to which its command would reach in order to punish its opponents. The preposterous scene culminates with the last words offered by Paco Bodes, the poet, and Ángel Benuza, the philosopher. Celenque has, at the very least, three literary works dedicated to his name—Paco Bodes’s *Balada del Cautivo*, Atanasio Ribera’s *Lamento de Celenque*, and Marujina Costales’s *Pavana del Mulo Ciego*—and as the captive expires, Bodes recites his verses dedicated to Celenque: “No lo vierais en el prado / ni en el trillar de la era. / Fue su vida prisionera / en un calabozo helado. // Nunca pastó en el ejido / ni dio vueltas a la noria. / El cautiverio es la historia / de su corazón herido” (54).

The inane melodrama continues when Benuza offers his philosophical musings on the larger significance of the evening’s tragedy. He steps before the crowd, and with all appropriate movements and gestures, pronounces that the cruelty which Celenque suffered will not be forgotten:
Yo quiero proclamar ante este cadáver […] la victoria del Inocente sobre el Abyecto, […] Y quiero advertir, a la discola memoria de esta ingrata ciudad, que no hay llaga más honda que la que este cadáver procura en el corazón de las buenas gentes. Y que por encima de todas las pompas y las glorias, la anónima sepultura de un muladar, cobijará más encendido el recuerdo que el más ilustre de los panteones. (55)

With these final words, Benuza ends this absurd, pathetic drama, comparable to any excerpt from the theater of Arrabal. This absurdity clarifies the position that Díez stakes in the reconsideration of the civil war itself and of the years that followed it; not only was the war itself a senseless conflict built around personal and ideological prejudices, but the consequences of such a conflict, for Díez, reflect little more than revenge-taking and the irresponsible exercise of power by those in a position to do so at war’s end.

Another cornerstone of the Franco regime, the Catholic church, comes under the scrutinizing eye of the author later in the novel in another intercalated story. As the fellowship searches the mountainous terrain of La Omañona for the fabled fountain, their trek leads them to a local parish church; when the rector of the temple approaches, his appearance speaks volumes:

Vestía el fraile un hábito que, más que consumido por el deterioro del uso, parecía devorado por los ratones, y calzaba unas sandalias que no lograban amparar los deformes dedos, heridos en las sendas del monte. La barba le
bajaba por el pecho como una curtida telaraña, en contraste con la oronda calva. (184)

The rustic friar begins an immediate interrogation of the group, inquiring with regard to their religious habits, as he asks Jacinto Sariegos: “Tú […] ¿cuánto hace que no descargas la conciencia?” (184). He also launches several menacing comments at the group, berating their indecision and their reticence to attend mass. Typical of the friar’s threats are statements such as “El pecado o se lava o se paga” (184), and “Ahora demuestra que eres hombre y que sabes impetrar el perdón y cumplir la penitencia” (185). Díez also accentuates the misogyny of the patriarchal system which rules the church. Of all the members of the group, who have traveled several days over rough terrain without the luxuries of modern society, the vicar singles out only the flawed appearance of Chon Orallo: “—Y usted, señora—señaló a Chon—, cúbrase la cabeza al menos con el pañuelo, si velo no tiene. En casa de Dios se guarda respeto, aunque una no se respete a sí misma” (186).

The appearance of the physical space of the church also serves as a reminder of the decadence of the institution. As the group sits on the only functional pew in the building, awaiting the beginning of the service, the notable disrepair of the locale is one of its only salient characteristics:

Por el suelo de la ermita, sobre los bancos desvencijados y los destartalados reclinatorios, se acumulaban las tejas y los cascotes. En la techumbre se apreciaban las combadas heridas de un progresivo
hundimiento, como si todo el armazón aguardara para desprenderse, con las vigas ya astilladas, el soplo definitivo de la próxima tormenta. (185)

The priest closes and locks the doors of the church before officiating the service, an act that raises the suspicions of the faithful gathering. Theirs are well-founded suspicions, the reader learns, only when the two non-worshipers, Aquilino and don Florín, meet up with two local shepherds.

When Aquilino and don Florín inform the newcomers that their companions have stayed behind in order to attend mass, the two respond that there is no time to lose:

“Señores—aseguró—sus amigos están en manos del Fraile Tronado, y como no vayan a por ellos no van a venir” (188). It is here that the story of the rural priest is related; the two explorers listen while Eulogio, one of the shepherds, recounts the arrival of Priscilo Tronado. When he arrived, years before, to the rural community of Sayuego, he was certain that he had arrived on his native soil. Confused and unable to verify the priest’s claims, the townspeople simply accepted him as their own, until they began to see the outlandish activities to which he was accustomed. Having recently returned from missionary work in “unas tierras que llamaba amazónicas” (188), he often walked around the town accompanied by a large, stuffed caiman which he had mounted on four wheels. When he began insulting and threatening parishioners in the confessional, the local populace merely ignored him, offering only the occasional charitable donation. It was then that he abandoned the town for the solitude of the church of San Pelayo, where the other disciples of Gerónides are trapped.
Some years later, another stranger arrives in the town, revealing that there is another Sayuego, in the river valley rather than in the mountains, and thus, that the friar must have mistaken one for the other. Given the amount of time passed, and the state in which the holy man finds himself, none of the townspeople has the heart to break such news to him. Accordingly, they leave him to his sacred San Pelayo, and only come in contact with him in cases of need. This incident is not the first in which hapless travelers have wandered into his trap; the shepherds have seen this before, and the townspeople are fully aware of the requisite hoax to free the friar’s hostages. One of the shepherds approaches the church to inform the priest that an agonizing soul seeks confession, and the complicity of the townspeople is assured: “cuando llegase a Sayuego y preguntase por el moribundo, cualquier vecino estaría dispuesto para improvisar el trance y la confesión, treta ya establecida para solventar los problemas que acarreaba fray Priscilo” (193).

Not only, then, has the church, symbolized in this case by fray Priscilo, been misguided, lost, but it also utterly lacks the true faith it seeks so vehemently to instill in its members. Combined with the crumbling physical structure of the church of San Pelayo offered by Díez, the parallel with Franco’s use and abuse of the church during his regime becomes apparent, and the message regarding the Catholic church and its infirmities could not be more clearly communicated. Disoriented and corroded, the church does not address the needs of the public, rather it attempts to take hostage as many souls as possible, force-feeding the catechism should it become necessary. The response of the public, of course, is one of minimal requisite outward acquiescence, accompanied
by an inward rejection, and a profound resignation and resentment toward the institution of the church.

Again, the characters and spaces presented in La fuente de la edad form the foundation upon which the novelistic reality is built. From eccentric pseudo-intellectuals to their handicapped counterparts, from pompous urban elites to hyperzealous rural clergy, Luis Mateo Díez employs the entirety of a polarized society in order to underscore the decrepit, degraded environment in which these pathetic souls exist. The environment depicted by Díez stands on its own as a critique of post-civil war Spain; from the cell of Celenque the captive mule to the abandoned, crumbling house of worship, Díez recreates the stagnant atmosphere of the 1950s in León, and animates on that stage the players who complete that fictional portrayal of that specific reality. The characters themselves, hailing from both ends of the political and economic spectrum, often reveal as much as the spaces which they inhabit; the unspoken rivalry between the followers of Gerónides and the members of the Casino unmasks the ugly reality of a world in which meaningful communication is rare, and reconciliation between warring factions impossible. Developed in a narrative framework which adopts equal parts of the oral tradition and the Spanish novelistic tradition, La fuente de la edad offers another damning vision of the excess and decadence endemic within post-civil war Spanish society.
Santos Sanz Villanueva succinctly defines the elements studied here, which coexist in the narrative worlds forged in Luis Mateo Díez’s *Las estaciones provinciales* and *La fuente de la edad*: “Una visión crítica del mundo transmitida mediante jugosos relatos es el doble eje, indisoluble, del arte narrativo de Luis Mateo Díez” (340). In effect, the first two novels from this member of the *mafia leonesa* present, within dexterous narrative frames, an intense critique of a degraded world. Without obscuring the considerable narrative skill plied in creating these two novels, it is perhaps this, the grim reality of failure and misery that both novels communicate and condemn, that represents the most salient characteristic of the novelistic worlds of Luis Mateo Díez.

In both novels, this ominous vision is reflected in the author’s use of circular narratives. *Las estaciones provinciales* is a narrative framed by death; the novel opens with the death of Cribas in the slaughterhouse fire, and closes with the demise of don Paciano, who experiences the consequences of a life of gluttony and excess by suffering a heart attack at the celebration for the inauguration of his son into the city council. *La fuente de la edad* begins with a scene in which Dorina, a young retarded girl, escapes the care of her parents and climbs to the roof of their apartment building, only to be later rescued by her father. At the end of the novel, however, as the drunken fellowship celebrates its overwhelming success in exacting vengeance on the members of the Casino, Dorina falls to her death from the same roof. These scenes contribute to the creation of a world in which existence is a fleeting struggle, and in which those who are
born into the conflict are ill-equipped to fight and destined to fail. The presentation of such a worldview less than a decade after the end the Franco regime again admits reiteration here. Spaniards generally, during the four decades that comprised the war and the regime, were subjected to a world beyond their control in which the imposition of capricious mechanisms of control was a daily reality; the absurdity of these circumstances would doubtless linger as a fact of living memory, and its narrative rendering—the postmemorial expression of those traumas—finds repeated outlet in the fiction of Díez.

Díez’s characters also play a crucial role in the development of such a world. As Sanz Villanueva (1992) has noted, the supporting casts in both novels form an encyclopedic vision of human limitation and deformity (338-39). Las estaciones provinciales boasts a one-eyed newspaper director whose interim replacement is plagued with ulcers, a deaf-mute who attends an information kiosk, don Paciano’s lame servant, Toñín, as well as a host of other physically disabled street vendors, whose ailments range from near-blindness to the lack of limbs. In La fuente de la edad, meanwhile, Díez highlights la Peña de los Lisiados, whose futile struggle to overcome disability paints an excruciating portrait of the agony of human existence. With regard to the possibility of meaningful interpersonal relationships between these characters in this distorted space, Díez depicts a sterile world where such relations are not only impossible, but also, in some cases, punishable by law. Marcos Parra attempts on two occasions, in Las estaciones provinciales, to overcome the restrictions that doom his amorous adventures, only to be thwarted by the local police who, under the pretense of guarding the “moral
pública,” merely serve the corrupt interests which drive the local government. Although less visible in *La fuente de la edad*, personal relationships do play a role in defining the atmosphere in which the novel takes place. Two members of the fellowship of Gerónides, Ángel Benuza and Chon Orallo, after spending a furtive evening alone in a hidden cave during the their search for the fontain, repeat their rendezvous on other occasions, but ultimately, the pair recognize the awkward situation it produces among the other members of the group, and therefore abandon the affair. Paco Bodes, it is assumed, uses sex as a tool of vengeance, seeking out and seducing the daughter of the Casino’s president in order to repay the affront suffered by the fellowship at the hands of its enemies. Personal relationships, in both of Díez’s novels, are another aborted attempt to enrich the vacant lives that inhabit a distorted, sterile world.

As Sanz Villanueva notes, the novelistic recreation of this reality is not the only contributing factor to the fiction of Luis Mateo Díez. The desire to relate a story, and do it well, also plays an important role:

> Si un impulso ético, un deseo de convertirse en memoria lacerante de unos tiempos ominosos no escapa de los propósitos de la narrativa de nuestro escritor, no podría decirse que sea tan sólo—ni siquiera preferentemente—una intencionalidad crítica o de denuncia la que le ha llevado al cultivo de la escritura. […] El gozo por el relato gustoso, la recreación del arte de contar, la afición por las historias que entretienen a los demás, todo ello está asimismo en la raíces primitivas de sus ficciones. (339)
The presence of other notable Hispanic writers—Cervantes, Valle Inclán and others—in the writing of Luis Mateo Díez has been recognized by a number of critics; this presence manifests itself not only at the descriptive level—the influence of Valle Inclán and his esperpento in Díez’s novels has been well documented—but at the narrative level as well. Cervantes, most notably, informs the writing of Díez, and this colossus of the Spanish novelistic tradition is most apparent in _La fuente de la edad_. The leitmotiv of the quest—and beyond that, the futile quest—directs each of the three parts of the novel: first, the search for the don José María Lumajo’s trunk, next, the expedition to find the virtuous fountain, and finally, the quest for vengeance; all three are quixotic adventures, and each fails to meet its ultimate goal. Another Cervantine narrative device, the found manuscript, is mirrored in the novel as well, as the apocryphal Lumajo manuscript provokes the fellowship to commit to the expedition. The most prominent aspect of Cervantes’s narrative incorporated in the novel, however, is the use of intercalated stories, which not only enhance the critique of the period examined by including content from a variety of disparate sources, but also produce a tiered, textured narration typical, according to many critics, of the contemporary Spanish novel.

The Spanish civil war per se—names, places, battles, politics—as previously noted, does not appear in either of the texts here examined. Díez limits the physical presence of the conflict to a minimum, supplying few direct allusions. Its presence in the collective memories of the anonymous provincial towns, however, plays an significant role in the development of each text. In both texts, the critical eye of the author examines both the distorted spaces and deformed characters that the ultimate results of the war,
Franco’s ascent to power and his subsequent totalitarian regime, generates throughout Spanish society. These consequences, the lingering effects of the devastating conflict that still punctuate the memory of a deeply severed nation, are the conditions which Díez explores in *Las estaciones provinciales* and *La fuente de la edad*. The convergence of the two elements here studied, Díez’s unrelenting critique of post-civil war reality and the application of venerable narrative devices and techniques, produces two texts which, some forty years after the decisive victory of Franco’s coup, seek to reexamine the physical and human geography established during the post-civil war period. These same two texts, *Las estaciones provinciales* and *La fuente de la edad*, animate the symbolic dimension to which Díez refers in the epigraph to this study; both texts, and the worlds presented therein, assure the survival of this reality, retrieved from the brink of insignificance and obscurity by Luis Mateo Díez.

In reformulating the years of the dictatorship in this way, Díez’s novels serve as exemplary of the collections of cultural expression defined by Pierre Nora as *lieux de mémoire*, which, as Marianne Hirsch shows in outlining her concept of postmemory, primarily function, “to block the work of forgetting” (22). Díez’s novels participate actively in this project, but suffer the inevitable temporal distancing from the events and personages of the moment in question; *Las estaciones provinciales* and *La fuente de la edad* take shape at the intersection of history and memory, as do many contemporary narratives that confront the civil war and the subsequent dictatorship in Spain. Despite the deceptively simple narrative schemes of both novels—when compared, for example, to the byzantine structure of Muñoz Molina’s fiction, or the indeterminate chronological
shifts of Llamazares’s—Díez inscribes his strident indictment of the 1950s in León into the textualized, occasionally ambiguous, and always mutable history of Spain in the twentieth century. Apropos for the conclusion, then, is the presence of Marcos Parra, protagonist of Las estaciones provinciales; journalism, Parra’s profession, plays a fully complementary role to that of literature in creating and deciphering the manipulations of that history, and a number of authors—including three of the authors in this study—in contemporary Spain work in both sectors of media. One of these authors, whose fiction was presented in the introduction of this study, is Javier Cercas, and his journalistic work is an ideal collection from which to undertake a brief and provisional conclusion.
Endnotes

1 From “Las obsesiones de la imaginación,” interview with José María Marco, published in Quimera 88: April 1989, 40-45.

2 Among these authors’ works that recreate the reality of the Spanish civil war are the other three novels in this study: Muñoz Molina’s Beatus Ille (1986), Julio Llamazares’s Luna de lobos (1985), and Mayoral’s Recóndita harmonía (1994).

3 On more than one occasion, Díez has noted the formative influence of the filandón, the storytelling circle, on his own work. As Sanz Villanueva notes, the filandón is markedly present in Díez’s novels, evidenced in—among other elements—the incorporation of the local and regional, and the use of intercalated stories (339). These stories, when accessed as personal memory, represent a collective vision/version of history independent of the agent of that personal memory.


5 For greater detail on this crisis, please see Santos Sanz Villanueva’s introductory remarks to the analysis of the novel of the Democracy, in Volume IX of Francisco Rico’s Historia y crítica de la literatura española (1992): 249-84.

6 The term modern here is employed in its most ample sense; that is, as a referent the modern era as it is commonly conceived outside of literary criticism: the era beginning with the zenith of the Industrial Revolution—the turn between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—and encompassing the subsequent two centuries.

7 Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920), most visible exponent of the realist novel in Spain, whose titles include Doña Perfecta (1876), Fortunata y Jacinta (1887), and Misericordia (1897), as well as numerous “Episodios nacionales” which fictionalize Spain’s social and political history between the battle of Trafalgar (1805) and the bloodless 1868 revolution, known as “la Gloriosa.” Pío Baroja y Nessi (1872-1956), generally considered the premiere novelist of the Generation of 1898, perhaps best known for his novel El árbol de la ciencia (1911). Ramón María del Valle Inclán (1866-1936), poet, dramatist, and novelist best known for his esperpento, an absurd, degraded vision of contemporary reality derived from his 1924 play Luces de bohemia. Juan Goytisolo (1931- ), novelist and exiled cultural critic whose novels include Señas de identidad (1966), La reivindicación del conde don Julián (1970), and Juan sin tierra (1975).
In Linda Hutcheon’s *A Poetics of Postmoderism: History, Theory, and Fiction* (1988), the author holds that this critical reevaluation of the past is a fundamental characteristic of postmodern fiction. However, this is not to say that approaching history within the novel relegates it to the territory of the postmodern; rather, it serves as evidence that the contemporary Spanish novel, as both Amell and Navajas contend, is a cannibalistic genre, which applies at will both technique and content from previous literary trends.

A brief list of these novelists, for Navajas, would include Armando López Salinas, Antonio Ferres, and the social novels of Juan Goytisolo (Más allá 26).

Again, regardless of the terminology employed, the contemporary Spanish novel is, from a literary-historical perspective, both inclusive and exclusive, sharing, as the terms would dictate, some traits, while ignoring others, from prior literary movements.

An abridged list of these qualifiers would include antiform, indeterminancy, decentralization, decreation, and deconstruction. Among the critics who theorize the postmodern, both Ihab Hassan (1987) and Linda Hutcheon (1988) make frequent use of these terms in an attempt to organize the seemingly endless stream of similar semantic posturing often associated with postmodern criticism.

From “Las obsesiones de la imaginación” [op. cit.].

The novela negra, or novela policíaca is a phenomenon loosely based around the mid-twentieth century serialized detective novels of the Americans Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. These detective stories are a very common novelistic form in the post-Franco period. Sanz Villanueva comments that “El rescate para un público culto y con caracteres de prestigio literario de este subgénero constituye uno de los rasgos externos más notables de toda la literatura posfranquista” (“La novela” 256-57). The novelists who have written in this vein are, among others, Díez, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Eduardo Mendoza, Juan José Millás, and Soledad Puértolas. The most noteworthy novelist in the development of this “subgénero” is Manuel Vásquez Montalbán, whose novels follow the unique detective-protagonist, Pepe Carvalho.

This characterization of Parra’s professional atmosphere is one of several references within the text to the work of Valle Inclán. The protagonist of Valle’s *Sonatas* is the Marqués de Bradomín, a type of inverted don Juan figure, who Valle describes as “feo, católico y sentimental.” In addition to this direct reference, the absurd, degraded environment that is Parra’s reality shares many characteristics with Valle’s esperpento.

As don Florín invokes the name of Aphrodite as a formative symbol in the shared mythology which binds the disciples of Gerónides, Chon Orallo intercedes:

Afrodita, Afrodita—terció Chon Orallo […] la soez obsesión de ese guarnicionero carcamal que fue Gerónides. […] Hay un principio femenino que impone sobre tanta manipulación y basura. Isis es el
This is the first of several occasions in which Chon asserts her unique perspective and underscores the hypocrisy and intransigence of the patriarchal system. For a more detailed analysis of the systems of myth and how they function in the fiction of Díez, please see Arcadio López Casanova’s “Mito y simbolización en la novela” in *Insula* 572-573: August/September 1994, 15-19.

---

16 Alonso Zamora Vicente, in his prologue to Valle Inclán’s *Luces de Bohemia* enumerates several fundamental characteristics in the construction of the esperpento. One of these characteristics is described as “literización” which is “un proceso asequible y chocarrero de citas ajenas, de sabiduría de café, que se escribe frecuentemente, con fines muy diversos” (26). *La fuente de la edad* is a catalogue of this tendency; the members of the fellowship live in a world of feigned intellectuality, where the ability to recite another’s scholarship verbatim is not judged on the propriety of the recited wisdom at the given moment, but rather on the name attached to that quote, and the quality with which it is delivered.

17 Díez, by using the term lisiados, characterizes the group even before they are introduced individually. The first two definitions provided in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* are instructive of Díez’s pointed double entendre. Lisiado does indeed mean physically disabled, especially with regard to the loss of a limb or other extremity. The second definition, however, reveals more about the group than the first: “Excesivamente aficionado a una cosa o deseosa de conseguirla.” Díez, hints at their excessive fondness for the pseudo-intellectual atmosphere of the Capudre, and their desire to pertain to the circle of thinkers who meet there.

18 The theme of ubi sunt is yet another evocation of the tradition of Hispanic letters. From Manrique’s “Coplas por la muerte de su padre” in the fifteenth century, through the poetry of Garcilaso, Góngora, and Quevedo, the theme of the bygone golden age is, most notably in poetry, a constant, which Díez here employs with respect to *La Peña de los Lisiados*.

19 Another notable manifestation of the degraded dinner party can be found in Luis Buñuel’s film *Viridiana*.

20 For a detailed analysis of the influence of the oral tradition in the fiction of Luis Mateo Díez, please refer to Santos Sanz Villanueva’s “Luis Mateo Díez, entre la crítica y la invención” which can be found in *La página* 1: 1989, 1-11.

21 Zamora Vicente affirms in his prologue that “de una o de otra manera, se vive pendiente del gesto, desde la literatura, de una erudición a veces superficial, pero siempre evocadora” (27). In Celenque’s death scene, both distinguished speakers, Paco Bodes and Ángel Benuza, use every gesticulation possible, from raising a hand aloft to holding
their chin between their fingers, to punctuate the words they speak. Díez underscores this plasticity through the use of specific active verbs—avanzar, hincar, señalar (La fuente 54)—and thus creates another link between his work and that of the Galician creator of the esperpento. Both Anthony Zahareas (1980) and Wadda Ríos Font (1992) have conjectured that this plasticity is a remnant of the naturalist characteristics of Goya’s Caprichos; this establishes yet another connection between Díez and the Hispanic artistic tradition.

22 Fernando Arrabal (1932- ), Spanish dramatist of the post-civil war period, most visible Spanish exponent of the mid-century European dramatic phenomenon known as the theater of the absurd. His most notable works in this vein include Pic-Nic (1952), El triciclo (1953), and El laberinto (1967). Two key thematic elements that coincide in the theater of Arrabal and the fiction of Díez are the futile battle against the monolithic system that dictates the characters’ reality, and the impossibility of communication between characters within that same system.

23 Numerous critics have cited the various Hispanic influences that populate the fiction of Luis Mateo Díez. Samuel Amell (1993) notes not only Cervantine and Valleinclanquesque overtones in Díez’s first two novels, but also the influence of Juan Marsé’s Si te dicen que caí (1973). Ignacio Soldevila Durante (1995) also comments on the Cervantine aspects of Díez’s fiction, while Arcadio López Casanova (1994) concentrates on the formative influence of Gonzalo Torrente Ballester’s 1972 novel, La saga/fuga de J.B. Santos Sanz Villanueva (1992), as noted before, also affirms a strong Cervantine presence, as well as the irrefutable ubiquity of Valle Inclán in both of Díez’s first novels.

24 In a 1994 interview with Luis Mateo Díez, Irma Vélez refers to the mafia leonesa as the group of narrators from León who, in the last two decades or so, have gained notoriety as much for their work as for the friendships and professional relationships they maintain. Díez confirms that the consolidation of the group—which includes, among others, Díez, José María Merino, Juan Pedro Aparicio, Antonio Pereira and Aurelio Loureiro—took place initially during the publication of the poetry magazine Claraboya, from 1963 to 1968.

25 Please see note number 24.
CHAPTER 3

Paradox, the King: The Problematization of the Binary

in Julio Llamazares’s *Luna de lobos*

En cierta ocasión me contó un señor español

un dicho gracioso de ese monarca

al que llamaron el Deseado para poner

más de relieve su condición indeseable.

Porque en este país flota siempre en el aire

la paradoja.


Surrounded by the unfolding events of June and July of 1936, Carlos Evans, protagonist of Pío Baroja’s 2006 novel *Miserias de la guerra*, attempts to maintain his daily schedule of meetings, meals, walking tours of Madrid, and tertulias over coffee. He moves freely in the capital, among aristocrats and anarchists, from barracks to prisons, exemplifying the Barojan observer through whom the author might present the condition of Madrid in the days leading up to the civil war. Baroja places Evans carefully among distinct economic and political strata and in different geographical locations with the goal of an objective rendering of those frenetic weeks; when he returns repeatedly to the Club de papel,¹ he compares his findings, complete with exceedingly subjective judgments of
many of the players involved, to those of his contetulios. The hope of objective history, an unbiased recounting, devolves into overt Barojan disdain for the events taking place and the leaders carrying them out, and Evans presents anecdotal evidence—like the story cited above regarding Fernando VII, and others about historical figures like Felipe II and Ignacio de Loyola—to support his conclusions. This paradox—the combination of purportedly objective sources and overtly subjective narrative content—is a frequent dynamic in Baroja’s fiction, which counts among its protagonists the enlightened and aptly-named adventurer Silvestre Paradox, whose “aventuras, inventos y mixtificaciones” never lack moments of contradiction, both overt and subtle. The present chapter parts from these paradoxical elements evident in the fiction of Baroja, particularly in his latter-day attempt to approach the civil war; it then examines briefly the onerous task of establishing viable critical apparatuses through the years of the Franco regime, the period during which both authors and critics struggled with both living memories of the conflict and censorial pressures. Finally and most centrally, after examining some of the general tendencies of his fiction, it examines Julio Llamazares’s 1985 novel Luna de lobos as representative of civil war fiction of the Democratic era in the light of different critical approaches in hopes of demonstrating how authors generationally removed from the conflict carry both the weight of their forebears and the responsibility of creating a viable literary space for civil war fiction in contemporary Spain.

The observational aspects of the fiction of Baroja are well catalogued, as is his purported goal of distanced and objective spectatorship of the Spanish condition.
Miserias de la guerra is unspectacular in that it displays this central conceit in the works of Baroja: the placement of a self-proclaimed disinterested observer in the environment set forth as the target of investigation. Hardly typical of the novel, however, is its examination of the civil war, and it is this thematic element that makes the work germane here. To demonstrate the role of Baroja’s protagonists, Birutė Cipliauskaitė points to La caverna del humorismo, since this collection of essays, first published in 1919, “resume muy sucintamente una—si no la más—consistente peculiaridad estilística de Baroja: mirar—y presentar—el mundo a distancia” (356). Cipliauskaitė takes this process, “el mirar el mundo como espectador, interponiendo distancia,” (356), as seminal in the analysis of the stylistics of Baroja; this distanced narrative perspective is only maximized, however, through the use of critical and distanced protagonists like Andrés Hurtado, Quintín and Larrañaga.⁵

Carlos Evans fits the prototype of this figure, and the first two chapters of the novel are dedicated to the explication of Evans’s qualifications and fitness for the task appointed to him. He is not Spanish, but English, though family ties have granted him a knowledge of the country and its mores, not to mention the linguistic aptitude that allows him to move effortlessly among social strata. He has no political affiliation that would color his investigation of the Spanish stage. Baroja is careful to demonstrate the discretion with which Evans approaches his interactions; the Englishman allows others to speak, only asking the occasional—and perfectly pertinent—question to further other characters’ comments. The reader only understands Evans’s positions through frequent first-person exegesis, and even these paragraphs are often bereft of reference to the
speaker: “Estos políticos españoles que pasan por hábiles, son torpes y hasta cándidos. Si son revolucionarios, yo creo que son como niños, unas veces cándidos y otras veces brutos, pero nunca hábiles. Un francés o un italiano les da cien vueltas” (120).

Evans emphasizes his diplomatic status, as an agent of the British military, at every turn throughout the novel, distancing himself again from the unfolding events. His open self-identification as foreigner—ever subtly represented by his traveling in a car draped with the British flag—reinforces the distancing, though the critical and ironic stance he takes remains as important in this process, as Ciplijauskaitė notes: “tampoco ellos [Barojan protagonistas] se entusiasman de veras por nada, entran en contacto con otros a través de un distanciamiento crítico” (359). Though he seeks out contacts in the city throughout the novel to detail his knowledge of the impending conflict, he shows little emotional investment in his activities, with the striking exception of his declarations and demonstrations of loyalty to his chauffer and guide in Madrid, Will. His criticisms span the political spectrum from anarchists to fascists, and no shortcoming escapes the critical eye of this distanced protagonist. As Ciplijauskaitė holds, drawing from Baroja himself, the astute humorist and insightful social critic finds himself in a particular position relative to the environment he observes:

Marco Aurelio dijo que hay que vivir sobre una montaña.

Indudablemente, el humorista vive sobre una montaña. Es lógico que en el fondo del valle se luche a favor o en contra de una idea o de una
Though the gravity of subject matter of _Miserias de la guerra_ prevents Baroja from presenting Evans as too clever a satirist, his position on a watchtower above the maelstrom of ideas and political affiliations of Madrid in 1936 is evident. Baroja’s manipulation of the situation is paramount; while other characters note comical and even farcical events, Evans is always certain to contain his venom in company, reserving candor for the reader. The occasional humorous barb, however, finds its way into the Evans’s dialogue:

Hablaron varios de ellos como oradores brillantes, y cuando le tocó el turno a Marcos, comenzó así su perorata: “La República, señores, es como una frágil barquichuela que navega en las procelosas olas del mar embravecido…”

Me reí de la perorata y de la cólera que producían en Will estas pedanterías aparatosas.

—Usted se ríe, pero yo me indigno pensando en tantas estupideces que hay que oír.

—No vaya usted a querer que toda persona que intervenga en política sea un hombre de genio. (37)

Baroja, writing well into the Franco regime, maintains throughout his works the preëminence of his protagonists, despite the difficulties presented by the paradoxical
relationship between the purportedly objective narrator and the overtly subjective narration. As subsequent generations of authors with new approaches to the act of narration attempt to rewrite and to reconsider the same events, they encounter not only very real censorial roadblocks from the regime, but also new paradoxes presented by the passage of time and the ever-shifting pathways of memory. This is not to say, of course, that authors of the postwar period do not continue producing literary remembrances and analyses of the war and its consequences; rather, it means that alternative narrative approaches to that task become necessary during the decades between 1939 and 1975.

Despite this highly organized censorial apparatus and other governmental organs designed specifically for the creation of an alternative historiography reflecting the values and goals the regime, narrative production in Spain continues its development throughout the duration of the dictatorial mandate. These obstacles, in turn, create difficulties for the critics of the novel in those years, as limitations on publishing naturally lead to limitations on reading and critical study. Nonetheless, valuable, if problematized, critical work carries on, much as narrative production does, through the decades of Franco’s rule. Early postwar anthologies and critical studies of Spanish narrative do begin to appear in the early 1940s, though the first critical endeavors immediately following the conflict were almost strictly chronological. These chronological schemes are clearly demonstrative of the stark lines drawn by the shift from the Second Republic to the Franco regime and the consequent transformation of cultural life:
Los intentos de presentar como un conjunto la novela del siglo XX no hacen sino poner de manifiesto la ruptura que se ha producido entre 1936 y 1939. Quizá sea la existencia de una fecha tan marcada, de un cambio tan radical, unida a la evidencia de enfrentarse con otro sistema social y político, lo que lleve a mantener a ultranza la ordenación cronológica en los estudios dedicados a la novela española de estos años. (Ynduráin 319)

The set of generational organizations is extensive, represented by, at a very minimum, the Generations of 1936, medio siglo, and 1968. The simplicity of these chronological divisions, however, becomes untenable as the critical apparatus in Spain and elsewhere deals with not only the quantity of narrative published, but also the varying thematic tendencies evidenced in the postwar years. Tremendismo, historical realism, critical realism, objectivism, selectivism, subjectivism, neorealism, and nueva novela are a representative selection of the terms applied, beginning in the early 1960s, in a critical shift attempting to clarify literary progress during the postwar period in Spain:

La necesidad de superar la organización externa, cronológica, se hace sentir con fuerza en estos años: hay una clara tendencia a la abstracción encaminada a obtener los comunes denominadores que permitan agrupar las novelas en corrientes o series literarias. (Ynduráin 320)

All of these schemes, of course, fall short of their intended goal. The quest to categorize the entirety of narrative production in the postwar period is a quixotic one, given both the
formal and thematic hybridity inherent to the genre and the expansion of writing and publishing interests as the century progresses.

This same difficulty has plagued critics of the post-Franco period as well. The death of Franco represents, after all, a significant historical marker for both the regime and the nation, but it hardly constitutes a literal literary genesis for fiction in Spain. Santos Sanz Villanueva very succinctly establishes this idea:

Somos conscientes de la artificiosidad de casi todas las frontera que alza la historiografía literaria, pero la desaparición de Franco y el proceso de transición desde la dictadura hacia la democracia parecen propiciar una linde definitiva a la llamada literatura de posguerra. (249)

Many authors, as the bibliographical schemes noted above will attest, straddle the years of change from the beginning to the end of the regime—from the initially draconian censorial restrictions to the 1966 Ley de prensa e imprenta, the ever-shifting political and economic realities of the Spain domestically and on the world stage, the dissolution of the regime and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, the pacts of silence and forgetting reinforced by civil and criminal amnesties—and this coexistence of multiple generations of authors makes a clear, definitive periodization nearly impossible, as Sanz Villanueva notes:

Han convivido, pues, en el panorama de la narrativa viva desde 1975 varias generaciones. Por un lado, la mencionada de los novelistas de la época de la guerra, tanto los del interior (Cela, Delibes, Torrente) como
The enumeration of particular authors and texts\textsuperscript{9} could be endless. Camilo José Cela, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, Ignacio Agustí, Juan Antonio de Zunzunegui—along with the aforementioned Baroja and his surviving contemporaries, and the sizeable population of exiled authors—began their careers before the outbreak of the conflict and survived well into the postwar period, some even outliving the regime as working writers. Others—among them Carmen Martín Gaite, Miguel Delibes, Ana María Matute, Juan Goytisolo, and Luis Martín Santos—rose to varied levels prominence in the two decades after 1939, and some have even continued writing into the present decade. Much in the same way that decades of separation from the events of the civil war allowed critical perspectives to broaden beginning in the 1960s, three decades into the Democratic period, clearer distinctions will continue to be made; however, the ease of analysis on the basis of years of notable political and social change no longer suffices as the central critical tool. This is especially true of the group of authors with whom this study concerns itself. While established authorial presences from the 1950s and 1960s struggled with a discrete set of obstacles in approaching the civil war—censorial restrictions and the expressive limitations thereby imposed, at a minimum—a new paradox confronts this group. These authors, as noted in the introduction to this study, have only the narrative connection to it generated by and characteristic of Hirsch’s concept of postmemory; though freed from...
censorial strictures, the writing of the civil war in contemporary narrative is necessarily and inescapably conditioned by narrative, both oral and written. This conditioned connection, based in the reestablished ability to write the war and limited by the reliance on narrative sources, is the a priori paradox that informs this branch of contemporary fiction.

This third group is comprised of writers born during the postwar period. These authors read, studied, and apprenticed under the censorial decadence of the regime, and were able to take advantage the protracted collapse of authoritarian mandates to help create the multifaceted narrative landscape of the 1980s and 1990s in Spain. Julio Llamazares, in “La nueva novela española,” one of his many essays on Spanish cultural life to appear in El país, summarizes the development of writers and writing since the end of the civil war:

Tras un largo diluvio en el que los novelistas españoles, eclipsados por la censura, primero, y por los latinoamericanos, más tarde, vivieron años de vacas flacas (confiados en el arca de Noé del experimentalismo y condenados por ello al anonimato), de repente la situación dio un giro de 180 grados y comenzaron a acaparar las magras cuotas del mercado editorial hispánico. (49)

The coexistence of these generations and tendencies impedes the task of unqualified chronological delineation, but also allows a broad field of inquiry toward trends and tendencies for any who might hope to diagnose the condition of Spanish fiction since
1975. The paradox of the Democratic period is not lost on Llamazares; he, like Baroja years earlier, understands that the revelation of the vicissitudes of the twentieth century in Spain, through either bureaucratic or literary means, can have unintended and often contradictory results:

Seguramente ocurría que, después de un largo tiempo en que los españoles nos dedicamos a conocer la verdad que hasta entonces nos había sido vedado [. . .] volvimos a sentir esa dulce atracción de la menitra, que es tan vieja como el hombre y que tiene en la novela su territorio más abonado. Ahora que ya lo sabemos todo, parecieron decirse los españoles, vamos a contar mentiras para poder olvidarlo. (50)

For Llamazares, the intertwining of the truth and the lies, the combination of history and the slippages of memory that alter it, however slightly or egregiously, is the intermediate ground inhabited by his writing. While the Barojan paradox contends with the limits of objectivity—the author purports to examine, as noted above, contemporary history in an objective way: his contacts in Madrid, a superficial measure of objectivity, do include a provide him throughout the novel with a litany of historically verifiable data—Llamazares and other contemporary novelists battle historical distance and personal detachment from the conflict in their approaches it. Though the nature of these paradoxes shifts and the execution of narrative renderings varies with the development of the postwar period, the civil war—its contradictions and paradoxes fully displayed—remains a central object for narrative consideration throughout the Franco regime and the
Democratic period, and is the chosen material that Llamazares examines in his 1985 novel *Luna de lobos*, the primary text for analysis in this chapter.

II

*Luna de lobos* recounts the travels and travails of a group of four *maquis* hunted in the mountains of León after fleeing the fallen Republican front of Asturias in 1937. One of the fugitives, Ángel, the novel’s narrator, retells four distinct time periods—1937, 1939, 1943, and 1946—though, with very few exceptions, the narration does not escape a harrowing present tense, what Agustín Otero calls “un presente angustioso, omnipresente y casi eterno” (641). Llamazares, writing a decade after the death of Franco, employs this paradoxical temporal conceit—the present tense narration of fictionalized events from fifty years before—as the primary armature for the construction of his novelized space, but this is a mere first facet of what Robert N. Baah has called Llamazares’ “unstoppable journey to the past” (71), the author’s forays into the inhospitable and ambiguous world of rewriting the Spanish civil war.

The first section of the novel takes place in 1937 and recounts the first frantic weeks and months of the flight of the four Republican soldiers. Ángel, Ramiro, Gildo and Juan together move across the rugged terrain of León seeking refuge wherever possible and provisions from whomever might risk offering them. They manage sporadic contact with their families and it is Ángel’s father who recommends their first hiding place, an abandoned mine that had served him as refuge in the past. This is one of the novel’s few recollections, one of the few backward-looking moments within the intense,
endless present of the narration. In their travels and near escapes, the four threaten an already terrified married couple in order to steal their first meal in over a week; steal a wandering sheep—paid for by Ángel in a rare act of generosity—from a local shepherd who understands fully the group’s situation; and watch their refuge, the mine, become an impromptu cemetery for two prisoners of the Francoist army sent to investigate reports of the group’s hiding there. Juan, Ramiro’s brother and the youngest of the group, becomes the first casualty among the four, disappearing without word upon attempting to visit his mother in the town below. The section ends with a frantic firefight between the three remaining companions, having descended to seek information about the fate of Juan, and the soldiers charged with their apprehension. Ángel is wounded by gunfire during the battle, but the three remaining men find refuge in a small cave beyond the altitude to which the soldiers are willing to climb in their search.

Two years of evasion have passed at the opening of the novel’s second section, placed in 1939. The tactics of the group have changed in response to scarcities they endure; the opening chapter of the section describes their ambush of a train traveling, heavy and slow with farmers, herdsmen and their meager wares, early in the morning to market in the provincial capital. This section is comprised mainly of encounters with various segments of the rural society, official and unofficial, around the localities that have become accustomed to their presence—paradoxically only notable because of their ability to disappear—as “los del monte.” Ángel, awaiting the signal from his father that it is safe to approach the house, meets the woman whom he intended to marry; this momentary and voracious passion, however, only leads Ángel to ponder, with
considerable regret, that she is “[. . .] condenada para siempre a esperar a una sombra, a
un fantasma. A alimentar el recuerdo de un hombre que jamás volverá,” (57). Next,
Ángel, entering unnoticed, surprises a soldier from the local garrison to warn him that the
interrogations and beatings of his father and sister should not continue; this episode again
underscores the invisible presence of the companions that forces even the military
elements of the area to adopt and attitude of vigilance driven by fear.

Other elements of the population—woodsmen and shepherds—encounter the
group with a mixture of fear and curiosity. They offer brief company and share their
provisions, as well as some news, however vague, about the happenings below. This
section is most closely defined, however, by the encounters with officials of the society
and government against whom the three struggle. Despite the war’s ending, the hunting
of resistant elements does not slack, and this fact only intensifies their desire for a
definitive escape. When in the course of a robbery Ángel murders a local government
official, the necessity of escape becomes pressing and the plan hatched to finance the
escape will lead to the loss of the group’s second companion. Ángel, Ramiro and Gildo
kidnap the wealthy owner of a local mining concern and hope to use the ransom to secure
the necessary funds for their crossing the Pyrenees into France, but the exchange, early
one morning on a rural road, is an ambush. During the brief battle, members of the
Guardia Civil shoot and kill Gildo while Ángel and Ramiro flee back up the mountain
after executing the mine owner for the deception and the loss of their companion.
Ángel and Ramiro are alone in the third section of the novel, in 1943, but still make their appointed rounds to visit friends and family and to collect whatever supplies might be available. The death imminent in this section of the novel is that of Ramiro and the opening chapter foreshadows the events to which the men’s progress will inexorably lead. The two men visit with Ramiro’s elderly mother, refusing her every offer of more food; despite her entreaties that they stay even a few minutes longer, they depart with replenished supplies and shod in new boots without having informed her of the death of her younger son Juan. Their silence with respect to Juan’s fate serves to spare the elderly woman the grief inevitable as a result of such news, but stems most centrally from Ramiro’s unwillingness to bear the loss of his brother; Ángel and Ramiro, however, have not completed their investigation of Juan’s disappearance. Availing themselves of intermittent pieces of information gathered during the intervening six years, they seek an audience with the priest of the local parish. Their insistence bears fruit when, after surreptitiously gaining entrance to the rectory, they learn upon interrogating Don Manuel that Juan was executed six years earlier and it was the priest himself who alerted the authorities to Juan’s presence. Again, Llamazares fails to demarcate clear lines of good and evil. Given the nature of the priest’s betrayal and the history lived by Ángel and Ramiro, the expectation is of an immediate and merciless execution; after visiting the unmarked grave of his brother, however, Ramiro retreats without any reprisal.

The third section of the novel also focuses on the attempt by Ángel and Ramiro to initiate contact with resistance elements both in Spain and abroad. The first clandestine meeting, with a dissident and smuggler know only as El Francés, aims to garner support
for an armed resistance to the Franco regime or, at the very least, secure passage for the two over the border into France. Neither plot has the chance to succeed, however, as the meeting is uncovered by the Guardia Civil; Ángel and Ramiro are forced to flee separately, amid flying bullets and exploding hand-grenades, and neither can be certain of the other’s fate until they return days later to the cave. Thwarted again, the pair return to their daily routine of invisibility, until Ramiro descends into the throes of a fever provoked by an untreated wound. Resorting to one of the thinning ranks of their contacts in the town below, Ángel transports Ramiro to the house of a friend named Tina, hoping to take advantage of her skills as a nurse before death becomes inevitable for his lone companion. The governmental vigilance, however, proves equal, and as Ángel sneaks into the town to seek the doctor, the troops move in and the house is set ablaze, trapping Ramiro and Tina within.

The novel’s fourth and final section places Ángel, alone and now a part of the landscape, in 1946. The narration of the fourth section is identifiably distinct; as Ángel is now entirely alone and his contact with others more sporadic, the narration becomes increasingly interiorized, its paragraphs flowing longer and delving more deeply and directly into the psyche of the solitary maqui. The two central narrative moments of this section, the funeral of Ángel’s father and his subsequent hiding beneath the floorboards of the goat pen, close the novel in the paradoxical fashion typical of the novel. Upon hearing the news that his father is near death, Ángel has no option other than to return to his home and be with him. Despite the full knowledge that the town will be well-guarded, Ángel—discovering that the police are only observing the rear entrances to the
house—stumbles, barely conscious, through the streets of the town to enter the house through the front door.

This brazen act of final devotion, flaunting the vigilance of the police, contrasts strikingly with the state in which Ángel finds himself as the novel draws to its conclusion. His cave discovered above the town, Ángel is forced to hide with his sister and brother-in-law; he carves a ditch into the ground beneath the goat pen and hides for weeks buried alive and unable to move. He emerges only at night and upon hearing the appointed signal from his sister, but his days are paced only by the eternal presence of the hour at which he will repeat his own burial. But even in this undetectable spot, the fate of the narrator/protagonist is irreversible; repeated interrogations and detentions erode the courage of his sister and her husband. His own mind and body, scarred and worn from nine years of flight, disintegrate almost entirely:

Es el agotamiento de los días de caminar sin descanso y, sobre todo, la constatación final de lo que, en sueños, ya había presentido: la barba helada y las uñas reventadas por el frío, la transparencia gris en que la nieve y la humedad del río han convertido mis huesos y mi aliento. (142)

With a pistol in his pocket and wads of bills sewn into the lining of his heavy overcoat, Ángel hikes to a distant, rural station to board a train in one last, best attempt to escape across the border.
III

Even a brief review of Llamazares’s works reveals what Andrés de Casa Sosas, narrator and protagonist of another of his novels, *La lluvia amarilla*, posits amidst the ruins of his crumbling mountain hamlet upon the suicide of his wife:

A partir de ese día, la memoria fue ya la única razón y el único paisaje de mi vida. Abandonado en un rincón, el tiempo se detuvo y, como un reloj de arena cuando se le da la vuelta, comenzó a discurrir en sentido contrario al que, hasta entonces, había mantenido. (45)

From his earliest writings—collections of poetry under the titles *La lentitud de los bueyes* (1979) and *Memoria de la nieve*, (1982) for which he won the Jorge Guillén prize—memory is the commonplace to which Llamazares returns over and again. The author himself, in a number of interviews and public appearances, has given various iterations of the purpose of his writing, and of fiction writing in general, and most resemble the assessment he offered a journalist from the *Crónica de León* in 1994: “Escribir es intentar salvar historias del olvido,” (Miñambres 27).

One typical conclusion drawn in the criticism of the fiction of Llamazares is that a main concern in his writings is to resist the amnesia imposed by the political machinations of the parties involved in executing the transition to a democratic form of governance. The highly politicized and ideological reading of Llamazares’s works leads to a necessarily narrow understanding of the role of memory in the fiction of democratic Spain. As Silvia Cárcamo holds,
Llamazares se sitúa entre los escritores que han levantado críticas a la amnesia de la etapa que se inicia con la transición y a la propuesta de echar un manto de olvido sobre el período franquista en nombre de la conciliación política interna que permitiera lograr tanto la modernización económica como la integración a Europa. (“Del aforismo”)

Cárcamo reduces the fiction of Llamazares to a political tool for the remembrance of the Franco regime, an attempt to arrive at “una teoría para esta forma singular de ‘presentificar’ ese mundo” (“Del aforismo”). While the political dimension is undoubtedly an important element of Llamazares’s fiction, to focus singularly and dogmatically on these concerns ignores a number of key characteristics that more fully define his fiction. Pablo Gil Casado presents an argument typical of this overly simplified political reading of Llamazares’s fiction:

*Luna de lobos* es una novela criticosocial, cuyo testimonio consiste en contraponer la conducta de los guerrilleros frente al terror desencadenado por la Guardia Civil, por la Falange, y por el Ejército Nacional, de modo que las auténticas fieras son éstos y no aquéllos. (449)

As the following study hopes to demonstrate, while the elements noted by Gil Casado are indeed important in the development of the novel, the novel concerns itself not with which side was Good and which Evil, but rather underscores the inhumanity engendered by the conflict.
Aesthetically, Llamazares’s fiction is often defined as lyrical or impressionistic, owing much to the repeated employment of solitary or isolated characters whose physical surroundings and psychological landscapes are laid bare for the reader. Llamazares employs first-person narration in much of his fiction—as well as in his travel writing—much in the same way that his journalistic work, rife with sarcasm and overt irony, rarely hides the deeply-held beliefs there espoused. Two novels—Luna de lobos and La lluvia amarilla—have received the closest critical attention, and their stylistics share several common characteristics that bind Llamazares’s works. Jordi Pardo Pastor has studied very closely the metaphorical construction of La lluvia amarilla, proposing a semiotic chain that radiates from the adjective “amarilla,” and follows closely the development of the novel’s protagonist, Andrés de Casa Sosas:

La historia de Andrés es el transcurrir de una vida y, a su vez, la muerte de una manera de vivir. Tenaz en su convicción, sin perder la fidelidad a las costumbres propias en ningún momento, será el último habitante de su pueblo natal y de la casa que le ha visto nacer. (“Significación”)

The novel’s semiotic development, in Pardo Pastor’s analysis, encompasses amarillo, fuego, viejo, destrucción, and muerte, but, more centrally, this development can only exist and be supported when experienced by Llamazares’s first-person narrator/protagonist. Even in his travel writings, which blur the boundaries between essay and narrative fiction, there exists a heavy reliance on a first-person narrative presence to support the novel’s communication of meaning, as Nicolás Miñambres notes:
La voz del narrador, en primera person, aprovecha los alter ego de los protagonistas, más próximos al propio escritor a medida que elabora su obra. [. . .] Este proceso de acercamiento entre lo literario y lo humano tiene a su vez una correspondencia estilística: los recursos retóricos se van suavizando de forma sorprendente a medida que la obra avanza, hasta llegar a un adelgazamiento literario absoluto en la última obra. (26)

Where Baroja employs a first-person narrator/protagonist to allow sprawling dialogue on a number of topics, Llamazares pares the novels’ discourse to its skeletal necessities. Though the execution of the narration takes different forms, both authors covet a similar goal: the presentation of a particular place and time through their protagonists.

Robert N. Baah, in the 1997 article “Julio Llamazares’ Unstoppable Journey to the Past: A Comparative Study of La lluvia amarilla and Escenas del cine mudo,” has defined Llamazares’s presentation of characters, his elaboration of physical spaces, and his development of plot and themes—in toto, his manners of composition—as a stylistics of compassion:

By stylistics of compassion I mean a style of discourse that seeks an affective alliance between the reader, the characters, and all others who have a knowledge and understanding of the harsh, menacing, and exploitative conditions to which the narratives of Llamazares speak. (71)

This stylistics provokes a discrete and limited set of thematics to which the fiction of Llamazares adheres, the most evident of which resonate in nearly all the critical study of
his works. In the cultivation of every genre, his works approach the idea of memory; the novels, stories, and essays all examine its power and its weakness, its presence and its dissolution, and the manner in which the dynamics of memory inform and shape attitudes and actions among his characters. For Llamazares, time never ceases to advance, to pass into history, and memory is the only defensive presence in the battle to preserve the past, even if this battle seem destined to be lost. With respect to La lluvia amarilla, Baah notes in a 1998 article, “Constructing a Stylistics of Compassion,” that, “the present experiences of loneliness, silence, madness, and hunger contrast dramatically with those of community, companionship, and sadness that marked the protagonist’s life prior to the civil war” (40).

The intersections of daily reality and the memories of a former reality—through photographs, letters, diaries, chance encounters with others, even dreams and hallucinations—represent a typical technical device and a central thematic focus in Llamazares’s fiction, and, as noted above with respect to the novel’s narrative structure, is based prominently on the preeminence of the narrator/protagonist. Only in this character’s movements and thoughts are the points of connection between past and present, present and future, made plain. In this temporal matrix, the narrator/protagonist exists, struggles, and suffers, helping to create the affective connection between reader and textual world. At a first level, then, Llamazares’s novels produce this connection, and the effects of it occur at a directly personal level.
David Henn analyzes how Llamazaures, through his travel writings, performs the personal pilgrimage, described by the French novelist Michel Butor as “a secular form of pilgrimage [. . .] ‘a journey to those places that speak, that tell us of our history and ourselves’” (716). Llamazaures takes advantage of this idea of pilgrimage in his fiction and his travel writing, and uses the physical movement and reflections provoked by it to engage memory at a personal level; in his two most prominent novels, Luna de lobos and La lluvia amarilla, both the protagonists, Ángel and Andrés, travel this road in literal and figurative senses. In these travels, memory enacts its primary function in his works; Henn notes the dual purpose of memory, echoing Llamazaures’s introductory remarks that El río del olvido “[. . .] will operate at two levels: it will be a geographical (and at times geological) account, and at another level it will deal with the author’s reacquaintance with aspects of his childhood” (717).

Llamazaures himself enacts this pilgrimage at both the levels suggested by Henn. In 1981 he recorded his travels to the sources of the Curueño river in northern León, published as El río del olvido in 1990; Trás-os-montes (1998) is the diary of Llamazaures’s car trip around the depopulated corner of northeastern Portugal, separated from Spain only by the arbitrary geopolitical boundaries whose presence is largely administrative. A third travel narrative, Cuadernos del Duero (1999) plays openly and repeatedly with authorial authenticity. Bona fides are offered in introductory remarks, including hand-written excerpts that accompany the printed version, published “en estado puro” (Henn 723), though questions of style would seem to indicate an amount of ex post facto editing. These narratives are perorations on the geographical features of the
terrain as well as a remembrance of the nation’s history. A native of Vegamián in León, Llamazares witnessed the disappearance of his childhood home, victim to the building of a reservoir and dam. This personal experience of loss—though he only lived a short time in the town—generates the personal elements of memory for Llamazares, but leads to a broader public consideration of the common pieces of a national history lost in the growth and progress of the twentieth century. In Vegamián—or northeastern Portugal, the Curueño river, or any of the fictional representations of such places in his works—Llamazares finds the single entity whose particular circumstances serve to represent metonymically a common memory of both pre- and postwar Spain.

The significance of both popular and individual memories in the development of Luna de lobos will be considered below, but a brief analysis of Andrés’s—the narrator/protagonist of La lluvia amarilla—encounters with memory can illuminate the ideas presented by Henn. Through photographs, dreams, hallucinations and other analeptic elements, Andrés effects his personal pilgrimage before the reader and details the unending imposition of these memories, especially those connected to abandonment and loss. Only through Andrés’s movements and encounters, desired or not, is the gravity of the pilgrimage made clear; awaiting the pallbearers in the hauntingly slowed progression of time before his death, Andrés divulges his history of Ainelle and in his recounts the pilgrimage is made:

La lluvia amarilla turns out to be a tale of loneliness and silence preceded by abandonment, caused in some measure by the ravages of war, and
resulting in an involuntary but inescapable march toward death. Thus, the story generates a constellation of themes, including the lack of communication, the passage of time, memory and remembrances, hunger, misery, poverty and death. (Baah, “Constructing a Stylistics” 36-37)

From the earliest moments of warmth and community—both as real memory and fever-induced hallucination—in the mountain village of Ainelle, Andrés recounts the deaths of neighbors, his children’s abandonment of home, his wife’s suicide, and his ultimate demise, as the town—literally, in the collapse of number of the homes around him—disintegrates. In the temporal and historical signposts noted in the novel, Llamazares constructs the deeply personal history of one man, though their metonymic value is readily evident as well. The throes suffered by Andrés resonate both for rural Spaniards whose way of life is increasingly considered an anachronism, and for any other citizen whose life shares a direct or familial connection to the dynamics of the unrelenting urbanization that has emptied the Spanish countryside over the past decades, phenomena both noted by Néstor García Canclini in his studies of the cultural production of recent decades in Spain.

Agustín Otero has studied Llamazares’s use of natural spaces as settings for the construction of a popular memory; it is this memory, widely known and publicly assimilated, that grows from the close attention to particular characters in the works of Llamazares: “Llamazares quiere transmitir al público las historias que le fueron contadas en su niñez en un intento de rescatar del olvido la memoria colectiva a través de la
literatura‖ (Otero 641). This process is undertaken, in Otero’s view, by means of a “cronología subjetiva” that obeys “[. . .] no a un orden exterior de cosas, sino al orden interno, mental” (641); despite the subtle and overt temporal references presented in his novels, the forward movement of time is a secondary element, superseded by the personalized progress of each narrator/protagonist. Through the precise focus on a particular case in all of its at times excruciating details, Llamazares calls attention to the general historical development of the moment in question: “[Llamazares] quiere dar así valor a la historia de los hombres que siempre serán ignorados, lo que constituye lo que Unamuno llamó la ‘inrahistoria’ de España” (641).

To this end, Llamazares draws on real figures and events as inspiration for certain elements of his fiction. One of the clearest examples of this process served as a primary component in the writing of Luna de lobos. In a column in the newspaper El país, and later in the collection of essays En Babia, Llamazares reveals that, “[. . .] para relatar su historia se basó en parte en episodios de combatientes republicanos que sus mayores le habían contado cuando era niño allá en su montaña leonesa” (Otero 641). The specific reference is to Gregorio García Díaz, known as Gorete, who evaded the Guardia Civil during more than a decade after the end of the civil war and serves—in flattering and negative lights—as the model for Llamazares’s protagonist Ángel. As a concrete piece of postwar lore, the story of Gorete—along with those of other legendary figures of resistance—creates a common point of connection for readers for whom postwar history is not an academic discipline, but rather an integrated segment of memory.
This combination of highly individualized narration and concrete historical evidence renders the unique, unrelenting approach to both history and memory in the fiction of Llamazares. Placing each narrator/protagonist in recognizable historical spaces and times, but only allowing time to proceed at the will of the narrator/protagonist, Llamazares engages history at a personal level, but allows specific, real elements of that public history to engage the reader and produce both an affective and an intellectual effect on the reader:

Exploraciones detenidas de una memoria individual—reflejo parcial de otra colectiva—los textos de Julio Llamazares repiten una idea obsesiva. Soledad, memoria, silencio, sueño u olvido son las palabras claves alrededor de las cuales se va estructurando el universo particularmente denso del autor. (Herpoel 110)

The aesthetic and thematic elements produce the density to which Herpoel refers. Llamazares repeatedly deploys solitary characters in desolate spaces and offers a deeply personal and introverted narration; these elements, in turn, engage memory and history at two levels. First and most obviously, the first-person narration provides access to the highly personalized dynamics of memory for the narrator/protagonist and insight into the points of intersection between history and memory, however distressed or distorted those points might become as the novel advances. Secondly, the simultaneous engagement of personal and public memories opens the reader to the reconsideration and scrutiny of their own history and that of the nation, permitting the establishment and assignment of
validity to histories, in opposition to a monolithic History, a process present in much of the fiction of the regime’s final years, as David Herzberger has demonstrated with respect to the later fiction of Camilo José Cela:

[. . .] rather than rivet history to a series of enactments of key figures and events that make claims to eternal authenticity, Cela seeks to destroy the myths of foundation and essence that under Franco had collapsed into reductivist narrations of single-voiced truth. (133)

Llamazares’s fiction seeks the intermediate ground, the space in contemporary fiction where the rhetoric of extremity—be it from the political left or right—gives way to an unscrupulously honest, albeit fictional, rendering of the war and its consequences. As the historian Antony Beevor has noted, these extremist discourses and behaviors represent a major contributing factor to the unraveling of the Second Republic: “Ningún país ha sufrido más que España a causa de la retórica extremista. La retórica de Calvo Sotelo o de Largo Caballero.”14 Algunos dicen que las palabras no matan, pero yo no lo creo” (“La violencia”). For Beevor, this suffering extends through the years of the regime and into the Transition: “Cuando hay algo como el Pacto del Olvido es como si quisieras tapar una herida profunda. [. . .] En España se tapó, nunca se discutió una vez muerto Franco” (“La violencia”). While Llamazares, through character, plot, and thematic selections, unabashedly broaches historical topics—often those with contemporary political resonance—his novels hardly evince clear lines of heroic and vicious behavior; to reduce his works in such a way blunts their primary thrust and thwarts any personal or public
attempt at reconciling the atrocities of the civil war in contemporary Spanish life for both perpetrators and victims of every stripe.

*Luna de lobos* exemplifies Llamazares’s fiction in the majority of the characteristics noted above. Its central narrative conceit opens the consideration of the paradoxical nature of the novel; Llamazares situates the novel in recognizable historical frameworks—1937, 1939, 1943, and 1946—yet each of these moments exists only in Otrero’s anguished and eternal present. Ángel, the narrator/protagonist of the novel, narrates each of the temporal frames in the present tense, providing only the briefest reminiscences into the past about home and family or life before and after the war. The paradox in this case is extra-textual; the contemporary reader, whether directly affected or not by the events of 1936 to 1939, maintains a connection, most frequently narrative in nature, to the years in question, and the novel approaches them not in conventional retrospective narration, but in an unrelenting present tense. In this way, Llamazares literally “presentifies” the period encompassed by the novel, and the development of the novel presents, both openly and quietly, a series of paradoxes that constitute the core of the novel’s communication of meaning.

Critically, Llamazares’s novel also presents something of a paradox. The novel’s chronological placement is unmistakable, though critical perspectives regarding different points in the development of twentieth-century fiction—specifically the teeth of the dictatorship, the 1950s, and the period of the transition, the 1970s and the early 1980s—can help show the hybrid nature of contemporary fiction in general and the paradoxical
elements of Llamazares’s novel in particular. The second extra-textual paradox, the simultaneous presence of characteristics attributed to distinct branches of fiction, seems a valuable and useful point of departure for the study of the ambiguous and contradictory novelistic space of Luna de lobos.

IV

In her 1985 book, The Contemporary Spanish Novel, 1939-1975, Margaret E.W. Jones examines, as the title might suggest, the narrative fiction produced in Spain during the Franco regime. While the overt chronological organization, the 36 years of the regime, engenders certain difficulties—as previous analysis in this chapter has shown—Jones combines chronological analyses of the immediate postwar period, the 1940s and 1950s, 1962, and the 1960s and early 1970s, with established literary-historical movements based on characteristics both stylistic and content-based. Following an initial dearth of literary production in the four years following the end of the conflict, Jones cites the tremendismo of Cela, Laforet, and other authors whose works less fully fit the tremendista mold as a trend evident in the 1940s which attempted, like the simultaneous movement in French Existentialism, to assess human reactions in limit situations. For Jones, however, tremendismo is a short-lived phenomenon, as it represents a brief deviation in the broader development of realist fiction in Spain, present and significant since the second half of the nineteenth century:

If considered as a discrete literary movement, tremendismo was confined to a few writers. As a variant of realism, however, it is long-lived in the
sense that many novelists have freely used its aesthetic of truculence for their specific and often varying purposes. (25)

Neorealism, “a critical interpretation that betrays a greater commitment to nonaesthetic concerns” (Jones 27), is that trend that holds a dominant position in Spanish fiction during the 1940s and 1950s, and Jones nuances this chronological division by splitting the broad trend into three branches: Objectivism, the Social Novel, and Subjective Neorealism. Objectivism, represented for Jones by Cela’s La colmena, Jesús Fernández Santos’s Los bravos, and Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio’s El Jarama, is the form most closely associated with traditional Realism. Jones connects the growth and impact of larger Western intellectual movements, behaviorism and phenomenology specifically, to the appearance of Objectivism in Spain, which aims

[. . .] to eliminate authorial intrusion and present only perceptible reality from which the reader must gather and sort out the elements he deems most important. Only surface phenomena are present, and any psychological content not directly observable (e.g., tears as an indication of unhappiness) is eliminated. (32)

The Social Novel counts as its most outstanding representatives Armando López Salinas’s La mina, José Manuel Caballero Bonald’s Dos días en septiembre, as well as a number of narratives under the ample umbrella of “travel literature.” Jones points to three central characteristics as dominant in these works: “[. . .] the use of the chronological present (both in the story and in reference to the actual time period in...
which the novel is set); regional or urban Spain as locale; and socioeconomic problems as preferred themes” (50). The Social Novel is the most overtly ideological of the neorealist forms, focusing singularly on the problem at hand—whether political, economic, or otherwise—and avoiding almost entirely mitigating factors like cause and consequence, preferring to engage in “the effort to maintain documentary realism” (58). The third branch of Jones’s construction of mid-century narrative, Subjective Neorealism, is the most pertinent to the analysis of Luna de lobos and will be examined thoroughly below.

Jones next highlights 1962 as a critical turning point in the fiction written under Franco. Nearly every aspect of Luis Martín Santos’s Tiempo de silencio—“the personal, subjective tone, the language, the multiple points of view, experimentation in tone and styles, bitter criticism of national as well as social issues” (85)—was a radical departure from the fiction produced under the regime until that time. The mere appearance of Tiempo de silencio, for Jones, allows a subsequent group of authors—among them Jones counts Ana María Matute, Miguel Delibes, Juan Goytisolo, Ana María Moix, and Juan Marsé, to name only a few—to pursue a “New Novel” that transcended the boundaries of Neorealist fiction.

As the 1960s drew to a close, a new set of thematic and stylistic concerns emerged and began to raise “[. . .] questions concerning the very nature and perception of reality itself” (97). In the midst of the expansion of this movement, the regime is experiencing its final throes, beset by strikes, student protests, and selective attacks like that made on president Carrero Blanco in 1973. The unexpected mandate for elections
and the drafting of a new constitution allows the more controversial segments of the
narrative market—specifically with regard to political and graphic content—to inundate
bookstore shelves throughout the 1980s. Chronologically, this closes Jones’s analysis of
the narrative of the regime’s years; the remaining chapter of her study deals with
novelists in exile during the Franco years in, by her own admission, a cursory way. Jones
cites primarily the works of three prominent exiled authors—Ramón J. Sender, Francisco
Ayala, and Max Aub—and underscores the characteristics that bind not only writers in
geographic exile but also, following Paul Ilie, those whose exile was psychological:

In Literature and Inner Exile, he [Ilie] develops the notion of residential
exile in addition to territorial exile. Alienation, frustration, moral
deprivation, and a sense of failure also characterize the attitudes of some
who remained in Spain, an “expatriated” mentality that appears in the
reiteration of themes such as rootlessness […] and the prisoner theme.
(127-28)

In Jones’s view, both bodies of work—from within Spain and without—represent the
consequence of the repressive apparatus in place after the civil war, regardless of the
physical location of the author in question.

Returning to the period in question—the multi-faceted mid-century period cast as
Neorealism—Jones identifies the third strain of Neorealist fiction, and the one most
pertinent in the case of Luna de lobos, as subjective neorealism, though Jones emphasizes
that it takes distinct names within the critical cannon: “It is variously called critical
realism, intimate realism, poetic realism, psychological realism, or personal realism, all terms that acknowledge the presence of a transcendent dimension in these works” (67). This branch of mid-century fiction, while as critical of the social, economic, and historical conditions of Spain under Franco, differs from its contemporaries—for Jones, the Social Novel and Objectivism—in its eschewing attempts at documentary realism: “The subjective writers [. . .] replace the ‘impersonal’ reportage of the other modes of neorealism with a rich variety of literary and structural elements” (67). Jones elaborates a generalized field of characteristics that loosely bind the works of this kind; though interests vary among authors, she points up elements of character and theme, as well as the treatment of time, as typical of this type of fiction. As the following analysis hopes to demonstrate, Llamazares’s novel falls squarely within the boundaries of Jones’s understanding of subjective neorealism.

The first and most important characteristic of these works is the prominence of the individual in the development of the narrative. While other modes of mid-century fiction focus on the commonality of place or the collectivity of characters—one need only think of El Jarama or La colmena—subjective neorealism restores “the individual to a place of preëminence: his personal problems, relationships, emotions, and development override the social issues” (68). This concentration carries with it an exploration of the characters’ immediate surroundings and an elaboration, often intimately tied to those surroundings, of his psychological landscape. Jones underscores that, despite this narrowed focus, questions of historical and social circumstance still occupy an important place in the narrative development, but the time and place are simply filtered through the
lens of the individual. There is, however, a change in the narratives’ focus: “The basic sense of dialectic is still maintained, but the emphasis shifts from opposing social forces to the dissonance between interior life, ideals, and hope and the various manifestations of social or historical existence” (68).

Luna de lobos is narrated in an exceedingly individualized first-person voice, and the action of the novel follows only the movements and encounters of the narrator/protagonist. The understanding of the conditions under which the narrator and his companions must survive relies therefore on the observation and recounting of the narrator/protagonist; tracking the characters’ daily interactions—even at irregular intervals and in an subjective chronology—intimately familiarizes the reader with those conditions. The novel does not hope, however, simply to enumerate the hardships of the group or present an encyclopedia of the difficulties encountered by those attempting to evade capture. One of the central aims is to present, through the eyes of one man, the rational decisions and irrational reactions produced by conditions like these; physical necessities like hunger, thirst, shelter, clothing—the instinctual prompts for survival—combine with psychological battles—again, highly individualized in their narration—introduced by solitude, fear, justice and vengeance to set a stage on which the characters’ actions can be observed and through which those actions might be better understood. As Jones notes, then, novels of this type thrive on the primacy of the individual, and the narrator/protagonist Ángel defines succinctly the function of his own protagonism and its importance in the novel’s development when contemplating the manner in which the Guardia Civil regard his presence: “Ni un solo instante se olvidan de mí. Nueve años ya
persiguiéndome noche y día y continúan mi búsqueda sin cejar un solo instante” (128). The reader is obliged to follow Ángel during those nine years, and his unavoidable primacy is precisely the prominence to which Jones refers.

Jones characterizes next the type of individual through whom these psychological particularities are revealed:

Most of these characters are estranged from the society in which they live, whose values and behavioral patterns they cannot or do not wish to share. Thus strange, abnormal, or alienated people take the role of main protagonists, expressing their separation from conventional existence [. . .] (68)

The qualifiers employed repeatedly by Jones—solitary, alienated, disillusioned—apply equally to protagonists young and old; the incomprehensibility of the world remains, and its expression is pared through a singular focus whose connection to that world is ever more tenuous. The parallels to the fiction of Baroja are evident; the prototypical Barojan protagonist, as explored above, cuts an alienated—when not entirely alien—figure in fin de siècle Spain, as do the protagonists of exemplary texts16 provided in Jones’s analysis of this strain of mid-century fiction. The narrator and protagonist of Llamazares’s novel, Ángel, provides a renewed avatar of alienation fitting very closely the characteristics set forth by Jones.

Ángel, though accompanied by his companions, is precisely this figure. He is forced into a position of estrangement by political affiliation and can only ever be, given
the progress of the war and the tactics of Franco’s army, a victim of the behavioral patterns cited by Jones. Any reëmergence into the public life of the region will result in his immediate arrest and execution; Ángel only understands this reality, paradoxically, in the sporadic contacts he does manage with the members of his family. These meetings with his father and sister, under cover of darkness or in solitary places in the country, are defined by frustration and loss, distance and disconnection. On one occasion in a darkened bedroom that prohibits the two from seeing one another, his father hands him a wad of bills—his entire savings—and begs that he leave the country as quickly as he can; on another, his sister insists, her back to him during the conversation to avoid detection, that he and his companions flee after the Guardia Civil arrests and executes another maqui whose circumstances differ very little from Ángel’s. However understandable their motives might be—their pleas are for his protection, after all—those closest to him push him away and encourage his disappearance during infrequent conversations that exude detachment even when the interlocutors are inches from each other.

This strain on formerly close relationships figures in Jones’s analysis as well:

Anguish, pessimism, alienation, disappointment, and despair follow these characters, whose solitude is apparent even in the company of friends and family. Lack of communication is a constant leitmotif: the characters are unable or unwilling to share their concerns with others. (70)

As the novel advances, the distancing becomes more profound. Beginning in the novel’s second section—the end of the civil war and the establishment of the Franco regime—the
danger implicit in any relationship with Ángel or his companions is made plain. Constant surveillance, searches, arrests, and physical intimidation by government officials become common tactics, understood far too well and suffered far too frequently by those considered to be connected to Ángel. The novel’s temporal progress—the nine years between 1937 and 1946—is paced by the dwindling and disappearing contacts maintained by Ángel in the public world and his ever-greater inability to access them. Even within his own band, the progress of time and the doggedness of the enemy increasingly limit human contact for the narrator/protagonist. Each of the novel’s four sections is punctuated by the death or disappearance of one of the group, and while the first section recounts meetings with many—family members, a married couple, the miller, a shepherd, and a local boy—by the fourth and final section of the novel, Ángel becomes, “[. . .] lo que siempre ha sido: un hombre perseguido y solitario. Un hombre acorralado por el miedo y la venganza, por el hambre y el frío” (136). His isolation from the world is complete, the dissociative power of his circumstance revealed not only in his physical solitude, but also in the abandonment of the first-person for a disconnected third-person narration.

What begin for Jones as characteristics of particular protagonists also become, given their ceaseless presence, the primary thematics of the novels of subjective neorealism. Pessimism, frustration, alienation, and solitude all become vital touchstones in the construction of these novelistic identities. But they are not only attributable to the main characters in question, since they serve also as the core concepts in the novels’ communication of meaning. The preceding analysis of Ángel and his circumstance
demonstrate clearly the former function, and because of the intensely personal nature of the narrations of this type, fulfillment of the latter function—the characteristic as theme—become readily apparent as the novel develops. Ángel is alone in his attempt at evasion and survival, and this is evident from the novel’s first pages; solitude is pervasive, however, in his relationships, his encounters with strangers, and, perhaps most importantly, in the imposing landscape into which Ángel disappears throughout the novel. Ángel most obviously exists alienated from society, though alienation functions in a larger orbit as the standard relational mode in the novel. The clearest example of this idea is the group of four maquis and their circumstance, but the examples of detachment and estrangement populate the text. From the hometowns whose inhabitants observe one another with suspicion and report to the local garrison on questionable activities, to doctors and priests who abandon their basic professional principles for fear of governmental reprisal, those typically understood as neighbors suffer a distancing imposed by circumstance and reinforced with each passing year of repressive control.

In addition to the psychological themes pointed up by Jones, two particular thematic commonplaces figure prominently in both the texts that constitute subjective neorealism and in Luna de lobos. The first and most obvious of these, given the period that these texts approach, concerns the discrete set of social and political circumstances forged by the first years of the post-war period. The civil war, holds Jones, “[. . .] becomes a focal point in many of the works of subjective neorealism, although these novelists do not write war novels in the true sense of the word” (70); to wit, in these novels the civil war is a looming referent and inescapable presence, though its
vicissitudes do not appear prominently in the development of the novel. Many characters in these novels experience the conflict, directly and indirectly, but rarely are these of primary importance; rather, the consequences of the experiences—i.e. their recurrence and their being revisited over the years after the war—figure more centrally:

[T]he results of the holocaust, emotional as well as political and economic, the predicament of those who did not win, their subsequent ostracism or mistreatment, and the loss of friends, family, and particularly of ideals for which one has struggled form a personal history that appears time and again in the works of the Mid-Century Generation. (70)

_Luna de lobos_, as it follows four soldiers fleeing the conflict, represents the atypical civil war novel; its main characters, despite the stunted and forcibly limited nature of their communication, construct personal histories of this type. In staccato bursts of dialogue throughout the novel, the reader learns that all four men have known hardship of all stripes, have borne the burden of losses both personal and ideological, and will never have the opportunity even to return home, much less reconnect in a meaningful way with families and friends. The constant evasion of, and repeated skirmishes with, the troops loyal to Franco—substituted by the Guardia Civil at the end of the war—represent the conflict itself and constitute the elements of a standard war novel; each character’s severed connections, however, mark the secondary consequences of the atypical war novel cited by Jones. The mother of Ramiro and Juan provides provisions but does not know, even six years later, of her younger son’s death; the father, sister, and
brother-in-law of Ángel whose providing of necessities, an open secret in the town, leads to repeated searches, interrogations, and savage beatings; the wife of Gildo, who, after his death, hands over his belongings to the surviving companions; María, the fiancée of Ángel who lives as a widow despite occasional visits from her intended; all of these connections can never again be as they were, and Llamazares pours sadness, solitude, distance, and desperation into every encounter. *Luna de lobos*, as a novel of the civil war, underscores not the battles between advancing and retreating armies—as Jones notes: “[. . .] the conflict transcends its historical importance to become a paradigm of other conflicts” (70)—but rather the disintegrating relationships that are victims of the march of time.

The final major theme that Jones attributes to subjective neorealism is that of time:

The novelists mold the subject of time into a theme as well as a structural determinant, so that it transcends its complementary function to become the topic of the work. The simple present becomes a springboard for and investigation into the complex nature of time. (71)

In *Luna de lobos* Llamazares organizes the novel according to a relatively standard device. The novel’s four sections are each marked with a year whose significance is external in nature, and each section’s temporal placement follows a clear chronological pattern, beginning with the middle of the civil war (1937) and advancing to the first stage of the postwar period (1946). The reader places the particular scenes of the novel—
meetings with a given character or characters, firefights, narrow escapes, disappearances, and deaths—in each section, assigning a year to each, allowing the attribution of an intelligible progress around the structure of the novel. This progress is only structural, however; Llamazares employs the present tense as the singular mode of communication in each of the sections. Chronology within each of the sections, therefore, is relative and irregular. The companions—how many ever remain at any given point in the novel—simply move according to their needs and according to the seasons; there is no particular pattern to the appearance of the seasons, but certain events and behaviors suggest their onset or presence: the profound silence and interminable nights of winter, the gray blanket of mist and rain and the arrival of shepherds—and a renewed food source—each spring, the shaving of beards and shorter nights of the summer, the need of new boots and the procuring of supplies in the fall in preparation for winter. This temporal movement is an example of what Jones calls “the use of interior time and space” (72). Though formal structure frames the narration, the narrated segments of the text obey no fixed chronology and advance irregularly through the novel.

Accordingly, those narrated events show a disjointed progression that does not create chronological confusion, as Jones notes: “The subjective neorealists decompose experience into fragments, rearranged according to emotional, not chronological, time. This explains the heavy reliance on the interior monologue characterizing so many of these works” (72). At the broadest structural level, the novel is divided into its four chronological segments, but within each of the sections, the disposition of the fragments—at times a single, lyrical paragraph, but often a longer, traditionally narrative
passage—is not reliably chronological. The reader merely follows Ángel and his companions, and the events recounted are those that occur during their wanderings. The first three sections of the novel are littered by short bursts of dialogue among the companions, but in the novel’s fourth section—when all the others have finally abandoned Ángel—the interior monologue to which Jones refers becomes the primary narrative technique. Once Ángel begins to experience the absolute solitude of the mountain without company, Llamazares prefers sprawling paragraphs in which Ángel reflects on both the physically imposing surrounding landscape and his rapidly diminishing position in it; the novel closes, embracing the ambiguity of an uncertain conclusion, with the dissolution of the narrator/protagonist into the landscape: “Sólo hay ya nieve dentro y fuera de mis ojos” (153).

In each of these respects—structure and style, the primary function and particular psychology of the protagonist, and the typical thematics—Luna de lobos can be categorized as representative of the segment of mid-century Spanish fiction that Margaret Jones calls subjective neorealism. Attention to a distinct set of characteristics, however, produces an analysis that places the novel in a different category, both critically and chronologically; in his 1995 book, Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Postwar Spain, David Herzberger proposes the reexamination of the nature of narration in post-civil war Spain, and Herzberger’s analysis substantiates this shift in the critical perspective of Luna de lobos.
Juxtaposing two disciplines, fiction and historiography, traditionally understood as distinct and unique, Herzberger offers a contextualization that highlights the intersections between the two narrative endeavors and reveals the strategies and techniques that, beyond the textually constructed and academically sanctioned division between “fact” and “fiction,” produced the narrative reality of Spain after the civil war. His analysis draws from both Francoist historiography—the regime’s attempted insertion of itself into the inevitability of the progress of History—and fiction from various moments of the postwar era:

The crucial task at hand, therefore, is to avoid the hegemony over the past granted to the mimetic adequacy of fiction and history, and to draw to the fore the potential locations where the discourses intersect and reshape the past. [. . .] The salient issue at hand, therefore, is not what empirically real objects are represented by the fiction and history of postwar Spain, [. . .] but rather from which textualizations do the works of history and fiction most fully reveal their capacity to mean. (11-14)

Before exploring the varying approaches to dissent executed in the writing of fiction, Herzberger first outlines the tactics plied by the regime in authorizing and codifying the writing of history. This is no small task, when carefully considered; the regime’s apostolic, eternal, and monopolistic claim to Truth penetrates not only the political apparatus of the nation—official bulletins, legislation, and other policy documents—but
also the cultural organs underwritten by, and therefore subject to, the orthodoxy of the regime. Herzberger examines the discursive results—in sources from regime hierarchs, journalists, essayists, and the authors of academic texts—of the regime’s attempt to buttress its “self-endowed historical authority” (30):

Francoist historiography is resolutely shaped by a conception of truth and temporality in which history is viewed [...] as an unfolding of time that is repetitive, deterministic, and radically unchangeable. Hence time (history) is perceived not as a progression or a becoming, but rather as a static entity anchored in all that is permanent and eternal. (33)

In attempting to reinscribe the grand deeds and monumental achievements of the regime into a mythology that harkens to the nation’s glorious past—the Cid, the Catholic kings, the conquest of the Americas, Phillip II, among other elements—Francoist historiography quashed dissent and controlled dissemination when possible; this reliably paternalistic and nearly formulaic limitation on expression, however, had very little capacity to eliminate resistance even from within the literary establishment.

Herzberger examines in the subsequent chapters precisely those voices of dissent whose works, though often approved by censors, work in more subtle ways to undermine the regime’s claims to legitimacy and to history. Herzberger analyzes Cela’s La colmena (1951) and José Manuel Caballero Bonald’s Dos días de septiembre (1962) as exemplary texts of the larger literary movement of Social Realism:
[...] the view of history and narrative proposed by the social realists is generated through contrast with the prevailing norms of historiography and the myths that pertain to this historiography. Rather than the past, the social realists focus on the present; rather than the epic, the mock epic; rather than the individual, the collective; and rather than the heroic, the quotidian. (64)

In counterposing its own linguistic system with the reality of the reading public, social realists attempt to present an alternative to the “postapocalyptic tranquility advanced by historians of the Regime” (65); that is, by exposing the circumstances of lived reality and employing those circumstances metaphorically to uncover the narrative discourse(s) imposed by Francoist historiography, social realists present a particular resistance and brand of dissent to the regime. A second form of discursive resistance offered by fiction writing, following Herzberger’s analysis, is the novel of memory:

In contrast to social realism and the historiography of the State, therefore, the novel of memory lays out history as a series of disruptions—of time, of self, of narration, and most importantly, of the referential illusion of truth and wholeness. (85)

Among the texts representative of this branch of postwar fiction are Carmen Martin Gaite’s El cuarto de atrás (1978), Juan Goytisolo’s Señas de identidad (1966), and two novels by Luis Goytisolo, Recuento (1973) and La cólera de Aquiles (1979). These novels constantly reinforce the constructed nature of all narrative and resist the univocal
voice of an unchanging history, as Herzberger emphasizes: “the novel of memory works consistently to decenter the paradigm of myth and to reconstitute the center as a moveable construct that always questions the past and remains open to the hermeneutics of dissent” (86).

Much in the same way that Jones privileges Luis Martín Santos’s Tiempo de silencio as a singular watershed text in the development of postwar narrative, Herzberger distinguishes the singular focus of the works of Juan Benet as worthy of unique attention:

But more than any other novelist of postwar Spain Benet reveals in his work a primary concern both with history and the writing of history. This intentionality can be discerned in nearly all of his fiction, and is enunciated as well in a number of essays that define his historiographic thinking. (88)

Benet repeatedly underscores the paradoxes inherent in the writing of both fiction and history; his essays contrast the fluidity of historical fact—based on both the party pronouncing those facts and the moment in time when they are pronounced—with the authoritarian strictures imposed by the regime in its teaching of history. For Benet, contradiction is not to be avoided or hidden away. Rather, it is made a central component of historiography and embraced as a fundamental principle of the act of narration: “[. . .] his [Benet’s] is a world constructed and sustained not by the rigid adherence to one reality or another, but by the enriching openness of contradiction and uncertainty” (92).
This dynamic, following Herzberger’s analysis, surfaces in the breadth of the works of Benet, not bound to one text or genre. Herzberger succinctly expresses Benet’s project:

By putting an end to myth rather than to history, Benet opens the past to rearrangement, re-presentation, and regeneration. Thus rather than equalize difference and disperse disparities, as did historians of the Regime, Benet demands that we ponder the vital discrepancies of history and historiography amid the vital discrepancies of his literary texts. (115)

Benet’s impact on Spanish letters can hardly be understated; his working in Spain in the middle decades of the twentieth century provided a space in which narrative dissidence, however necessarily subtle or impenetrably byzantine, could find root in the waning days of the regime.

The chapter in Herzberger’s study that most concerns the present study, however, is the fifth, titled “Postmodern Dissidences.” The case can be made for the analysis of Luna de lobos as representative of one of the three branches, subjective neorealism, of the mid-century neorealism cited by Margaret Jones and others. When this critical perspective is connected with Herzberger’s analysis, the first paradox informing Luna de lobos is revealed; the concept and composition of Llamazares’s novel allow a broad field of inquiry that disrupts the traditional critical priority of unambiguous categorization. In the final study of his book, Herzberger draws out several characteristics of postmodern fiction in Spain using works by Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, Camilo José Cela, and Juan
Goytisolo, and as the following hopes to show, Llamazares’s novel can also be characterized as a part of this critical cross-section of contemporary fiction in Spain.

As with any other attempt at analysis of questions postmodern, Herzberger first offers the requisite caveats; certain stipulations must be made, of course, in order to outmaneuver the radical nullification often attendant in the construction of postmodern theoretical discourse. When “meaning itself has no meaning” (Herzberger 119), and any meaning sought is merely textual derivation of other referents and ultimately changeable, a certain berth must be allowed and certain battles left to be fought another day.

Herzberger refuses, however, to abandon the linkages between fiction and historiography even in the face of the larger theoretical discourse that would seem to “settle for absence and obliteration” (119):

But I wish to insist upon the usefulness of postmodern fictional texts as a crucial determinant in the way that we know the world and its history. This usefulness must be understood as something more than simply laying out the standard postmodern argument that the real is fundamentally nonsignificant, that everything is fabulation, that all narrative is masturbatory. (119)

The narrative techniques employed by authors connected to the postmodern movement in Spain, Herzberger argues, posit a particular brand of dissent derived from the attempt “to destroy narrative paradigms that historians rely upon to give sense to the past” (118), and
his analysis outlines a collection of authors, texts, and approaches that perform important roles in the execution of that dissent in the years following Franco’s coup d’état.

For Herzberger, the overarching conception of postmodern fiction in Spain—and the idea that places squarely in opposition to Francoist historiography—is the resistance to totalizing narratives. Authors of this particular type of fiction in the waning years of the regime and the first years of the Democratic period actively eschew any claim to History or Truth in their writing. Despite the ideological commonplace of assaulting the essentialist worldview imposed under Franco’s mandate, each author examined demonstrates a distinct approach to the task of dismantling the regime’s metanarrative historiography, and from this analysis a number of characteristics evident in Luna de lobos can be extracted. In studying Gonzalo Torrente Ballester’s Fragmentos de apocalipsis (1977) and Cela’s San Camilo, 1936, Herzberger highlights two basic questions of narrative perspective, each present in one of the novels, grounding the novels’ constructions of meaning.

While the regime’s discourse focuses on “the mythic essence of heroism with the correlative of lofty deeds” (123) in order to reinforce continually its uniquely crafted vision of Spanish history, these two exemplars of postmodern narrative produce dissent by divorcing history from mythic conceptions. Torrente approaches history as “the random occurrence of nonessential events” (124), granting primacy to the events themselves and their textuality, but at no point in the novel are those events held up as significant signposts in any larger narrative endeavor. The disjointedly episodic nature of
Fragmentos allows the author greater—unlimited, really—flexibility in the temporal shaping of the novel, as Herzberger holds: “Torrente splinters the past and scatters it about his narrative landscape. The microevents of history are therefore constructed with no apparent conjuncture in time or space” (124). This fracturing of traditional chronology—and its logical consequence, the disruption of causal relationships—is less characteristic of Cela’s fiction, but a similar technique helps to develop and express the same function of implicit dissent:

Rather than suggest that narration sublimely (and accurately) reflects reality, Cela turns in San Camilo to the problem of interpretation and meaning. [. . . ] Cela clearly asserts that to know the historical is to mediate and to narrate it with the voice of a subject and with a language that must be one’s own. History is therefore made private (and personal) in the novel, but becomes no less complicated. (130)

The denial of neatly packaged historical referentiality and the dissolution of a comprehending and comprehensive narrative self produce a resolute instability that acts as the primary weapon in the deconstruction of foundational myth and the history constructed on it by the discourse of the regime. Novels like San Camilo, 1936 rely on—and take advantage of—individualized renderings of events in their construction of history; Herzberger points to the self-centered narration as the first element in the fiction of Cela that “serves to deconstruct any hierarchical system of values within society and across history” (130). Combining Herzberger’s observations regarding these two
novels—first, the more concrete structural and thematic elements, and second, their
generalized discursive characteristics—the postmodern tendencies of Llamazares’s novel
are revealed and in these tendencies, the subtle project of remembering proposed by _Luna
de lobos_ takes shape.

The first and most obvious thematic element of _Luna de lobos_ is its overt use of
congrete historical reference points to establish the novel’s geographic and historical
placement. An epigraph to the novel gives a very real orientation in both time and place.
A succinct, two-paragraph note placed before the novel’s first section describes the flight
of Republican soldiers after the fall of the Asturias front in 1937 and introduces,

[…] un tema hasta esa fecha poco tratado en la literatura española, pero
que a partir de la necesaria recuperación de la memoria tras los años de la
‘amnesia forzada’ de la transición de la dictadura a la democracia, se hizo
más presente en la literatura y el cine: el tema de la guerrilla española del
la posguerra. (Izquierdo 98)

As noted previously, Llamazares makes no secret of his use of the popular figure of the
guerrilla fighter Gorete in the construction of the novel. This conscious, sincere
placement of such a figure in its relevant historical frame would seem, however, to run
counter to the historical decontextualization proposed by the project of the postmodern.
Herzberger’s caveats regarding postmodernism’s penchant for historical nullification
serve well; one of the crucial thematic elements of _San Camilo, 1936_ is precisely its use
of concrete historical setting as a counterbalance to the dominant discourse of the regime.
As José María Izquierdo explains, the existence of any resistance during and after the civil war, be it guerrilla or of any other type, was not tolerated and was actively criminalized by the regime. The recuperation of these stories in textual form only became possible after the establishment of the new constitution in 1978, and even at that juncture the pactos de olvido\textsuperscript{20} discouraged publicizing what Otero refers to as “una estela imborrable y legendaria en la memoria popular” (641). These stories, of fighters brave and true\textsuperscript{21} enduring years of hardship against the greatest odds, hold a place in the public consciousness and therefore allow a direct link, by way of received memory, between the novel and the reading public. Discursive combat against institutionalized dismemory is in part realized by the concrete measure of placing the novel in a known space and time, and in this way, \textit{Luna de lobos} mirrors the act of resistance represented by \textit{San Camilo, 1936}.

Underscoring again the systemic paradox of Llamazares’s novel, however, the value of concrete historical placement is undercut by the relative generality and insignificance of the events taking place in the novel. The historical frame of the novel gives way, in its structure, to a collection of what Herzberger describes as “serialized events from the past that bear no overt transcendence” (124). This narrative procedure, in the fiction of Torrente, “splinters the past and scatters it about the narrative landscape” (124), and reinforces the paradigmatic shift that frequently informs the structure of postmodern fiction in Spain: “In other words, the events of the past are not connected in reality but rather, if they are to be connected at all, within and as discourse” (124). Despite a decipherable structure more coherent than that which Torrente presents in
Fragmentos de apocalipsis, Llamazares’s novel evinces a similar narrative atomization critical in the structural analysis of Luna de lobos.

The basic provisions of the structure of the novel are simple and clear. Each of the novel’s four sections is marked by a year, and the circumstances of the narrator and his comrades correspond generally to their status as fugitives, first as members of the Republican army and later as enemies of the state in the newly-minted Spain of 1939. The process of temporal distancing from the active conflict of the civil war dictates the slow deterioration of the conditions their existence, and the establishment of legal and law-enforcement policies and procedures under the aegis of the Franco regime tightens the restrictions to their movement and survival. Superficially, then, the organization of the novel presents little difficulty and would seem to contradict the precepts of narrative fragmentation and randomness embraced in postmodern fiction. This simplicity of construction, however, disappears when the narration is joined; within each of the novel’s sections, chronology becomes largely insignificant, and vignette becomes the principle narrative method. Beyond the unifying presence of the narrator Ángel—whose identity in the novelistic world, and whose ability to identify with other elements of that world, crumble as the novel advances—narrative continuity dissolves into the landscape of León, echoing a “rhetoric of silence” (Herzberger 128) in which comprehensibility is not altogether lost, but rather re-formed in such a way that welcomes “sense as it may be constructed in other contexts” (128).
The context in question, and the informing impetus of the places and players encountered therein, is the inhospitable wilderness of rural León, and the vignettes that make up each section present that space in time in typically paradoxical fashion. Oneiric and airy prose blunts every grotesque injury and heinous act; firefights and foreboding pieces of news about the soldiers’ diminishing likelihood of survival appear surrounded by an awesome landscape indifferent to the minutiae of human dealings. Close scrutiny of the organization of the vignettes reveals no metanarrative arc; common places of contact occur—Ángel’s family home, for example, or the mountain-top lookout in which the group eventually takes refuge—and a certain cross-section of the region’s human geography is revealed, but the chronology of each section is almost entirely self-referential. The only markers of temporal progress are events subsequent to earlier anecdotal events from each section, and even when a temporal relationship between events can be positively identified, it is through textual, not temporal, channels: the shaving of a winter beard, the disposal of a spent pair of boots, a clandestine meeting with a newly-forged ally, the newly deepened bruises of sister again detained for questioning, the annual first arrival of the region’s shepherds. Without belaboring the structural elements by enumerating them, a selection of the vignettes should suffice to demonstrate the irregular rhythm of the novel’s advance. Within the novel’s first section, the group can be found desperately assaulting a young married couple for their first food in days, hiding among riverside heather for a brief contact with Ángel’s sister, carving a shelter in the profound darkness of an abandoned mine, and paying the last of their
money to a local shepherd\textsuperscript{23} for, again, their first meal in days. The narration of these encounters is interspersed with the novel’s single vein of continuity:

Al atardecer, cantó el urogallo en los hayedos cercanos. El cierzo se detuvo repentinamente, se enredó entre las ramas doloridas de los árboles y desgajó de cuajo las últimas horas del otoño.

Entonces fue cuando, por fin, cesó la lluvia negra que, desde hace varios días, azotaba con violencia las montañas. (11)

The unwelcoming landscape and aggressive conditions are constant companions in the group’s movements and attempts to survive, and serve structurally as the common point of orientation in the desperate and arbitrary journey in time undertaken by Ángel, Ramiro, Gildo and Juan.

The disappearance of Juan closes the first section of the novel, and the action jumps to the grizzled group of three blockading train tracks to stop and rob the train to the provincial capital. Ramiro shakes down the passengers—surreptitiously excusing the old, the infirm, young mothers, and those who might have aided their cause in the past—and the three disappear into the forest, resupplied yet again. Another of the fragments recounts the robbing of a local tavern during which Ángel shoots and kills a town official in response to an inconsequential verbal insult. Both of these episodes highlight the paradoxical interconnectedness of kindness and inhumanity present throughout the novel, and dispel the simplicity of a binary conception of the historical context in question. For Herzberger, this process, the “recurrent sublation of binary oppositions” (125), is a
crucial amplifier of counterdiscourse in postmodern fiction in Spain, and is a key concept on which more analysis will be based further on. In the examples above, the indication cannot be made clearer; despite a reader’s inclination toward pity for the protagonist’s plight, Llamazares entangles concepts like Good and Evil to engender consistent questioning of the codes employed in deciphering the conflict decades after the events have occurred. Ramiro’s selectivity in victims, despite its occurring during the willful robbery of a train, and Ángel’s unrepentant murder, despite the official’s continued role in the tireless hunt for the fugitives, allow no singular moral or ethical clarity to be derived.

The subsequent episodes recounted in the second section move first to Ángel’s family home and, some time later, to the home of one of the soldiers responsible for the interrogation and beating of his sister Juana. They also meet and receive information and provisions from a local team of woodsmen. This vignette stands alone in that the woodsmen do not appear at any other time in the novel, but their recognition and comfort in the presence of the fugitives underscores the vignette structure itself. Dorothée te Riele has shown how metaphoric and metonymic processes in the narrative of Llamazares occupy a privileged role: “The most striking feature of the two novels [Luna de lobos and La lluvia amarilla] are their universality, the many metaphors and the symbolic significance of their settings” (211). This single meeting with the nonplussed woodsmen, sympathetic actors unshaken by the group’s presence, calls immediate attention to the constancy and immutability of their condition as “los del monte,” despite the brevity of the novel in toto and of its constituent parts. Other segments from the
second section of the novel include continued exhortations by Ángel’s family that he flee across the border in to France, the kidnapping of the owner of a local mining concern, the botched collection of the ransom and the resulting gunfight with the soldiers assigned to ambush the exchange.

The connection between the kidnapping and the collection, again, is marked textually and lacks any specified chronological progress. Ramiro does pronounce that the owner’s wife will have until Friday to gather the ransom—though no indication of the present day is given—and this is as close to an identifiable date as appears in the novel. Once the abduction occurs, however, time again recedes from any prominence, and only indeterminate moments during the captivity are recounted. One particular exchange with Ángel again underscores the moral ambiguity laid bare by Llamazares:

—Se habla mucho de ti por ahí—me dice como disculpa.

—Supongo que no muy bien.

El dueño de la mina mide bien esta vez su respuesta:

—Tú sabes igual que yo. Para unos, sois unos simples ladrones y asesinos. Y, para otros, aunque no lo digan, sois unos pobres desgraciados que lo único que hacéis es tratar de salvar la vida. (81)

This confusion of perspective foreshadows a physical chaos later in the section. The darkness of night and the smoke of gunfire cloud the closing paragraphs as the Guardia Civil attempts to ambush the group. Gildo is killed during the exchange, and the smoke
clears to reveal the mine owner staggering backward in a futile attempt at escape: “Pero el disparo de Ramiro atraviesa su corazón y le aplasta contra la puerta” (86).

The novel’s third and fourth sections follow similar patterns of narrative atomization as Ángel and Ramiro, and then Ángel alone, tread the same paths years later, pursued by the same Francoist troops cum institutionally-validated Guardia Civil. The novel’s third section moves between a brief visit to the home of Ramiro’s mother, a confrontation with the local parish priest, several clandestine meetings with elements friendly to the plight of Ángel and Ramiro to plan either an armed confrontation of local authorities or their flight across the border into France, and a consultation with the local doctor in search of medication to cure a wound in Ramiro’s foot. This section clarifies further the paradoxes presented by Llamazares and underscores most clearly, at the level of the novel’s content, the moral ambiguity of the task of representing the civil war. In the character of Ramiro, these contradictions are unmistakable. He is unflinchingly dedicated to his family, and even six years after his disappearance, refuses to admit to his mother the truth of his brother’s fate despite making it his mission to follow every lead and trace every rumor related to Juan’s disappearance. The preponderance of the evidence points him to Don Manuel, the local priest, and after a series of his stammered denials and justifications, Ángel and Ramiro order him to show them where Juan is buried. Once there, they shove him to his knees and tell him to pray, and the chapter closes with a foreboding image:
La brisa azota con suavidad las espadañas y las ramas de los chopos.

Ahoga un instante el bramido del río. En el centro de la campa, una luna lejana y fría ilumina la figura del cura, arrodillado frente a la rama de espino, y la pistola que le apunta fíjamente a la cabeza. (95)

Ramiro is, throughout the novel, the soldier of the group; his demeanor and behavior reveal his acceptance of and willingness to endure the hardships and necessities of their life in the mountains. He has the most military experience, plans and leads every operation, and does not hesitate to use lethal force when necessary, as he did in the case of the mine owner. In the case of Don Manuel, however, he displays uncommon patience and generosity. When the pair wakes later in their cave, the soldiers swarming around them—though laughably unable to locate the well-hidden warren—reveal that Don Manuel, his life paradoxically spared by the typically ruthless Ramiro, has informed the authorities of their location and continued activity.

Within the schemes of metanarratives concerning war, death for a soldier such as Ramiro is meant to be heroic; it ought encapsulate his personal bravery and commitment to his cause and be a worthy representation of those characteristics. His death ends the third section and upends this mythic perception, however, and the circumstances surrounding his death are mundane, if not pathetic. After leaving the cave briefly, carelessly barefoot, he steps on a tin can and gouges his foot. The resulting infection and fever require that he and Ángel descend to the home of Tina, a nurse and occasional collaborator, for medical attention. While Ángel makes his way to the town doctor in
search of medicine, the police surround the nurse’s house and burn it to the ground; Ramiro, finally unable to mount a counterattack or execute an orderly retreat, salvages what dignity he can, despite Ángel’s attempt at optimism:

[…] quizás Ramiro y Tina lograron huir a tiempo y ahora contemplan desde el monte, como yo, el incendio y el cerco de las guardias.


Casi a continuación, el tejado se desploma envuelto en llamas.

(121)

The fourth section opens thus, Ángel alone and pursued. His isolation is complete—“Hasta que, poco a poco, hube de reconocer que él, el silencio, era el único amigo que me quedaba ya” (127), he laments—and the initial fragments of the section relate another series of different events, unspectacular in their normalcy, or what has become normalcy in this existence: daily movements up and down the mountain to recover provisions left by friends and family, drinking milk directly from a cow’s udder, sneaking by night to meet Gildo’s widow for new clothes. Ángel learns of his father’s impending death and, fearless in exhaustion and brave in the knowledge that only rear entrances will be under surveillance, he walks into his family’s home through the front door. His visit to the house is poignant for its purpose, but also fortuitous in its timing. During his absence his cave is discovered, and his return there begins as a vertiginous race to stay ahead of his
pursuers but very quickly descends into a staccato meditation on the rapidly deteriorating possibility of his survival:

Dos días y dos noches duró la tormenta. Dos días y dos noches huyendo por los montes, en medio de la nieve, siempre hacia el norte. Hacia el confín del viento y de la soledad. […]

Dos días y dos noches duró la tormenta. Dos días y dos noches huyendo por los montes, cegado por el viento, sin comer ni dormir, sin saber dónde esconderme, a dónde ir, sin otra fe en mis fuerzas que mi propia, infinita, inexpugnable desesperación. […]

Dos días y dos noches duró la tormenta. Ahora es ya el amanecer del tercer día. Para mí, tal vez, el ultimo. (142-43)

It is at this point in the fourth section that the narration becomes terminally interiorized, as Ángel finds himself, as a last resort, buried in the goat pen of his family home. This will be his hiding place until his departure in the last chapter of the novel, and also presents a pertinent point at which to abandon the structural elements of the novel for the more generalized discursive points of contact with Herzberger’s analysis. His burial alive and his daily existence limited to the darkness of night are merely two of the binary armatures—recalling the importance of the discursive procedure of the “recurrent sublation of binary relationships” (125)—in Llamazares’s reconstruction of the history of the Spanish civil war.
In his explication of the role of oppositional relationships, Herzberger underscores the difficulty presented by Torrente’s novel; not only does Fragmentos de apocalipsis invert or contradict standard binaries, it also attempts to exise them entirely as a valuable in the transmission of meaning:

Rather than accept one aspect of the opposition or another, he [Torrente] decides instead to disallow the opposition from the beginning. […]

History does not just have a double face (the Good and the Bad) but multiple faces, which resist both hierarchical ordering and transcendent subjectivities. (126)

Llamazares follows a similar discursive tack in the construction of Luna de lobos, though the dissolution of comprehensibility is not quite so profound. The dwindling group of companions sets the limits of periphery in the novel, both literal and figurative, and this relationship defines the spaces explored. In the historically contextualized understanding of the novelistic space, the towns and peoples below the group in the mountains constitute the center of Leonese society. While the war lingers during the first two sections, this “normal world” continues below the group, and the soldiers rely heavily on that world for their continued survival. In the remaining two sections this centrality is institutionally legitimized, as is the alterity of the fugitives; forays by the group into the towns in question are sporadic and secretive—with the single, grand exception of Ángel’s arrival at his father’s funeral—and most frequently end in violence, death, or the threat of
both. The narrative focus, however, privileges the life and perspective of the peripheral
types, and this demonstrates the first paradoxical positioning of the novel with respect to
binary relations; the disarray in defining center and periphery, though immediately
evident, represents a crucial component in the discursive disposition of the novel.

Other binaries play important roles in the novel’s development as well, and their
functions are equally problematized. The clearest of these can be understood to divide
the world of the living from that of the dead, and it appears in multiple forms as the novel
advances. Llamazares places significant attention on the passing of days, or more to the
point, the endless repetition of day’s fading into night. Metaphors of light and
darkness—and their functional representations, day and night, and sun and moon—litter
the novel and orient the reader to the circumstances faced by the group over the years of
their flight. This orientation defies standard definition, however, in that the group—
marginalized in all senses, except to the reader—functions most often and best in the dark
of night or in the total blackness of an abandoned mine or a hidden cave. Ángel returns
on multiple occasions during the novel to the wisdom of his father to pronounce what
becomes the novel’s refrain: “Mira, hijo, mira la luna: es el sol de los muertos” (65). The
cover and, through time and custom, comfort of darkness is pervasive, and recurs
ceaselessly throughout the novel; in the novel’s first section, the following descriptions
are offered, spanning three distinct vignettes:

Aquí abajo, sin embargo, siempre es noche. No hay sol, ni nubes,
ni viento, ni horizontes. Dentro de la mina, no existe el tiempo. Se
pierden la memoria y la conciencia, el relato interminable de las horas y los días.

Dentro de la mina, sólo existe la noche. (29)

Ya no hay sol; pero la luz indestructible de la tarde golpea nuestros ojos con violencia. Se resisten a absorber tanta luz. Tanta luz. (29)

Cuando se olvidan el color y la textura de la luz, cuando la luna se convierte en sol y el sol en un recuerdo, la vista sigue más el dictado de los olores que de las formas, los ojos obedecen al viento antes que a sí mismos. (29)

The fleeing soldiers forget the standard function of light and dark; their senses are honed to the slightest sound or smell, but their visual perception becomes insignificant. Light itself becomes aggressive and painful, and represents for them and their movements a constant threat of betrayal; they are too easily tracked in the daylight and therefore restrict their movements to the night, so much so that the moon, its icy, silver light much more convenient to their ends, replaces the sun outright.

The inversion of the relationship of light and dark presages another of its own common metaphorical extensions: life and death. Throughout the novel, consistent reference is made to the fact that, under the given set of circumstances, the members of the group are already dead, as Ángel makes clear, in a description of Ramiro, from the novel’s first page: “Al contraluz lechoso y gris del cielo que atardece, su silueta recorta
en la abertura de la puerta como el perfil de un animal inmóvil, quizá muerto” (11). The physical hardships of their existence—inadequate clothing and shelter, a lack of steady provisions, declining health and decaying bodies—point up the imminence and eminence of death in the surrounding environment. Nonetheless, Llamazares repeatedly obscures any opposition of life and death, or of its simple inversion, by juxtaposing life’s end with its continuation; every life taken postpones or prevents the death, or assuages the suffering, of another. When the companions slaughter a sheep, the brutality of the act laid plain in the technical recounting of its execution, it increases their strength and staves off starvation; when Gildo and the mine owner are killed, it allows both Ramiro and Ángel to escape and to survive; when Ángel’s father passes away, it provides the final motivation for an attempted escape, and his flight across the border—a disappearance and figurative death—relieves his sister and brother-in-law of the burdens of repeated interrogation and constant threats of violence. There is no ludic resonance in the misplacement and displacement of the oppositions in the text, nor is there a self-conscious or ironic tone; Llamazares uncouples and reshuffles these binaries, in a general sense, to call into question the narrative schemes plied in the writing of history, to underscore the deleterious simplification that results from the loss of historical memory that frequently accompanies the passage of time and the imposition of “reductivist narrations of single-voiced truth” (Herzberger 133). In this particular case, Llamazares joins the battle against what Herzberger, following Lyotard, calls “historiographic terrorism” (132). Narratives of resistance to the Franco regime and its historiographic project proliferate in the immediate post-Franco period, and *Luna de lobos* represents a nearly unspoken form
of this struggle: the guerrilla fighters within Spain whose resistance carried on years after 1939.

More than the support of any particular ideological agenda, however, the result of Llamazares’s novel is, as noted above, the confusion of clear lines of Good or Evil during the civil war and the subsequent immediate postwar period. Llamazares carefully dismembers any orthodoxy or one-dimensionality, and the resulting focus in the novel becomes radically human; on display throughout the novel are the certainties and the doubts, the pride and the humility, the sins and the virtues, and the inescapable contradiction of every character beyond any social, political, or historical affiliation that might seem to define her. This position becomes clear in the novel’s fourth section, in which Llamazares shows his protagonist, finally and wrenchingly alone, as he grapples with his solitude and the utter absence of agency. In the brief four chapters, his environs, physical suffering, and mental disarray conclude the dissolution of his once-integral self, demonstrated most clearly in the melding of man and beast and the elimination of the distinction between the two.

References to the animal world appear throughout the novel, though their presence in most of the novel is environmental; between corralled livestock and roaming herds, hooting owls and abandoned dogs, the soldiers trespass in the animal world and can only carve out their space in order to survive in a land not their own. The final section of the novel explores Ángel’s struggle with his fading humanity, as Llamazares blurs the distinction between beast and man. In the four chapters of the section, the list of
animals to which Ángel compares himself includes both the general—“alimaña” (126) and “animal muerto” (142)—to the very particular—“culebra” (127), “un lobo en medio del rebaño” (129), “un topo” (133, 147), “un lobo [en] la soledad de la noche” (139), “un perro herido” (141), “una res caída” (143)—and these only represent the direct descriptors. The figurative language plied in this section pushes Ángel further and further in to the animal world; verbs like roer, aullar, acorralar, rugir, acechar, and olfatear lend repeatedly an animalistic precision to his actions as the novel presents the confrontation between his human consciousness and animal body. Watching his physical self deteriorate does not lead to a desire to reengage the human population or seek contact, however: “Hace mucho que aprendí a desear menos la compañía de los hombres que la de los animales” (144). Ángel instead embraces silence and solitude, disrupting the traditional opposition between silence and communication; for Ángel, the quintessential human activity—and social necessity—of communication becomes first distasteful, and ultimately unnecessary, as he attempts to disappear:

Tengo que huir, romper este cerco angustioso que me empuja cada día un poco más hacia el suicidio. Tengo que escapar de esta tierra maldita y poner kilómetros de silencio y de olvido entre mí y mi recuerdo, entre mí y esta fosa donde el calor y la desesperación se funden en una sustancia putrefacta que comienza a invadir ya a todo mi cuerpo […] (151)

Ángel opts for escape and erasure, and the first stage of his flight is the final chapter of the novel. His definitive departure—though only its ambiguity is definitive; Llamazares,
in typically postmodern fashion, offers no clear resolution—hopes to silence his memory and afford his family tabula rasa with the institutional forces in power. Paradoxically, it is his disappearance into the mountain morning that will cement stories like his in popular memory in the months and years that follow the war. Llamazares secures the presence of both this particular protagonist and narratives of resistance generally by concluding with the undefined and indefinable circumstances of Ángel’s disappearance.

Both of the processes proposed by Herzberger and here examined—the accumulation of disjointed events in episodic structure and the disruption of binary oppositions—play crucial roles in disallowing, in Herzberger’s terms, “the very possibility of a coherent metanarrative that is capable of rendering a single view of history” (124). Llamazares’s novel represents one of the very few novelistic expressions of guerrilla activity during the Franco regime, and in its publication and dissemination resides the act of discursive resistance to counter the project of institutionalized dismemory explicated in Herzberger’s study. Confronting the pactos de olvido tacitly approved in the period of the Transition, Luna de lobos opens the taboo topics to revision and stoutly refuses to identify winners and losers. Adherence to and reliance on any singular system of meaning can never sufficiently communicate the inevitable detail of human interaction and the novel negates the assignment of moral identifiers like guilt and innocence by interposing circumstances that invalidate every attempt to generate adequate definitions of either. Llamazares distills the experience of Ángel and his companions into “a series of abrupt and inorganic ruptures that serve to reveal more a state of affairs than the answer to a coherent set of questions” (Herzberger 124-25), and
delays, or prohibits, any clarity of conclusion; as noted above, Ángel, in executing his escape, slumps into the train seat and all around him fades to white. This interruption of assumed frameworks of knowing and understanding, of skeptical deferral, matters greatly in the postmodern rewriting of the civil war, Herzberger argues in his conclusion, because,

[…] what is deferred is the very sense of an ending because endings, as the mythic discourse of historiography shows, close off narrative from the prime matter of life, from the chaos that enables and compels narrative to transgress and transform. (150)

Llamazares—through the definition of characters, structural and thematic patterns, and discursive attitude—transgresses dually, presenting a last technique common in postmodern fiction in Spain: double referencing. In the first instance, the writing of the maqui story opposes both Francoist fiat and the norms adopted during the Transition; the expectation of such a narrative act is to embrace the wronged Republican side, to remedy the injustices of the preceding decades. Llamazares’s novel, however, dispels in turn the opposing orthodoxy, laying bare on both extremes of the ideological spectrum “the extraordinary tension between words that reveal their power to invent, as in postmodern fiction, and words that claim to be the equal of reality (as in Francoist historiography)” (Herzberger 143). Llamazares rejects metanarrative practices and subverts standard codes of meaning and creates in Luna de lobos an intricate network of meanings that
resists singular and unified understanding of history, placing the novel squarely within the discursive frameworks of postmodern fiction in Spain.

VII

In the days preceding the 18th of July, 1936, Pío Baroja, hiding just behind the thinly veiled voice of Carlos Evans, avers that, “Las revoluciones antiguas, principalmente la Revolución Francesa, dejaron algo. Estas modernas no dejan nada, más que montones de muertos. Todo es viejo, en la política, manoseado y mediocre” (92). Leaving aside the bellicose nostalgia, a sort of ubi sunt for lessons of bloody civil strife, Baroja’s message is echoed, generations later, in Llamazares’s rendering of the civil war. Both novels pile one reprehensible act upon another, irrespective of victim and perpetrator, and paint a violent, base portrait of behavior surrounding the conflict. There are moments, of course, of generosity and equanimity, and their presence serves to nuance the grotesque circumstances inspired by the battle to shape modern Spain, but they are fleeting and hardly offset the horrors. Baroja catalogues the events in the manner of his earlier fiction; in chapter after chapter, his narrator/protagonist recounts the military maneuvers carried out in and around Madrid—including the more famous events at the Moncada barracks and Modelo prison24—while at the same time recording the theft, detentions, beatings, assassinations, extrajudicial executions, and other abuses taking place, carried out by members of every faction from the FAI to the FET-JONS.25 Baroja leaves no contradiction unnoticed; Carlos Evans astutely highlights any

25
incongruence he observes, and the advantage of both Baroja’s direct personal knowledge and first-hand testimonials of those days in Madrid allows much to be observed.

Luna de lobos, however, relies on a different sort of access to the events of those years, and the interruption of decades, and more importantly the staunch institutional efforts to generate an alternate understanding of history, would be immediately problematic were Llamazares’s novel the stylistic equal of Baroja’s Miserias de la guerra. In Luna de lobos, Llamazares instead relies on popular and received memory, replete with lacunae, errors, inventions, and omissions inserted and excised during the intervening years, as a starting point for his novel. The repeated narrative reconditioning of history prevents any encyclopedic precision, but the resulting narrative nevertheless offers what Herzberger refers to as “a state of affairs” (124), an interpretation crafted from public history, infused with elements drawn directly from archival history. This particular narrative disposition allows the novel to fit distinct critical criteria; its focus on a solitary, marginalized narrator/protagonist and its use of highly personalized chronology place it under the broad umbrella of mid-century neorealist fiction, while the inconsequentiality of metanarrative cohesion and its contrarian and contradictory position with respect to stable patterns of meaning evince a closer relationship to postmodern fiction in Spain.

Paradoxical critical positioning merely introduces the problematic stance of Llamazares’s novel with regard to history. The self-conscious deployment of conspicuous history—an epigraph relating the verifiable historical context from which
the novel’s action springs, the story of Gorete taken from popular lore, extant place names in rural León—performs a similar function to that which Herzberger emphasizes with regard to Fragmentos de apocalipsis:

Hence what appears in Fragmentos to underscore the essentially nonadversarial function of postmodern literature in the way that it turns inward to be about itself, at the same time raises general questions about the nature of discourse as a sense-giving component of cognition and introduces specific questions about how the past is signified by narration.

(120)

Llamazares’s novel cannot be understood in any significant sense as documentary history, but the resonance of familiar elements results first in what Baah calls an affective connection with the reader, and second, consequently, in a cognitive process that exposes the inevitability of this narrative reconditioning in the understanding of history. This expanded definition of history means, in a very general sense, that narrative fiction plays an important role in both the production and consumption of history as a public discourse, and, in the particular case of Luna de lobos, that the overwhelmingly human elements of this history—fear and hope, violence and generosity—require retelling despite both their apparent contradictions and the ideological orthodoxies that would hope to undercut them.

Into this breach, then, Llamazares rushes headlong with Luna de lobos; embracing the inconsistent and contradictory nature of human behavior, the novel opens for
reconsideration preconceived notions of the war and its participants, and reveals the inadequacy of any text, or discipline for that matter, that would claim singular possession of such knowledge. Llamazares repeatedly refuses to organize parties into facile architectures like Left and Right, Good and Evil, or even Nationalist and Republican, precisely because the actors in question, whose motivations run a broad gamut and rarely coincide, defy the possibility of any such clarity, as Pío Baroja recognized decades before upon the siege of Madrid in November of 1936:

Muchos católicos se han hecho ateos, no sabemos si definitiva o provisionalmente; al menos hablan como tales. Hay conservadores que se han declarado comunistas mientras sopla el viento de Moscú. Hay jóvenes ricos que siempre miraron al trabajo como algo horrible y ahora quieren ser obreros. Y hay no pocas muchachas dignas, hasta hace poco recatadas y pudibundas, que aspiran a ser bacantes. Quien más, quien menos, todo el mundo se siente arrastrado a ocultar su auténtica personalidad, procurándose una provisional para ponerse a cubierto de tropiezos peligrosos. (228)

It is this commonality in chaos—the desire for safe-conduct in an environment devoid of safety—that Llamazares’s novel regards as essential in the reconsideration of the civil war, and from this frenzy can be discerned the central paradox—the inhumanity of human relations—that defines Luna de lobos.
Endnotes

1 The Club de papel is the daily meeting—until the circumstances of the war impose themselves and certain members can no longer attend—during which Carlos Evans, touting his diplomatic and impartial disposition, listens and recounts the daily events leading up to the 1936 coup. Among the attendees are Hipólito, a reader of Marcus Aurelius and Kant and devoted anarchist, the cynical journalist Goyena, the devout communist professor Valdés, the ironic and clever Dr. Hurtado, and a number of other characters representing every political stripe across the ideological spectrum.

2 Fernando VII, king of Spain in 1808 and then again from 1813-1833, was known as el Deseado, or the Desired one. He supplanted his father, Carlos IV, in 1808 after the Motín de Aranjuez, only to be removed from power by the Napoleonic machinations that lead to the war for independence in Spain beginning in 1808. He languished in Bayonne, France, during the reign of José I de Bonaparte, until 1813, when he returned to quash the work of the Cortes de Cádiz between 1810 and 1812, and to reestablish an unassailable monarchy. The importance of his reign and policies cannot be understated in any study of the civil war; many historians, among them Raymond Carr in his Spain: 1808-1975, argue that the civil war of 1936 can be understood as the climax of a protracted clash of monarchical, constitutional, and popular powers begun during the three Carlist revolutions that spanned to 19th century and began with the death, without a male successor, of Fernando VII.

3 These particular elements are taken from Baroja’s 1901 novel titled Aventuras, inventos y mixtificaciones de Silvestre Paradox. Silvestre Paradox also appears as the protagonist of the 1906 novelized drama Paradox, rey.

4 The attempt noted here is Miserias de la guerra, the first segment of a trilogy titled Las Saturnales. Originally written in the late 1940s, Miserias was presented to government censors in 1951, but the number of deletions and changes required led Baroja to abandon plans for publication. The remaining two volumes are in different states of completion, and their publication is, at present, questionable. A detailed account of the writing, attempted publication, and recent events of the entire cycle can be found in the essay, “El Madrid en guerra de Pío Baroja” by Miguel Sánchez Ostiz; the essay is included as an appendix to the 2006 Caro Raggio edition of Miserias de la guerra.

5 Perhaps his best-known and most autobiographical protagonist, Andrés Hurtado serves as the reader’s guide to fin de siècle Madrid in El árbol de la ciencia (1911). Quintín García Roelas protagonizes La feria de los discretos in which Baroja, according to Arthur Owen, offers observations on the city of Córdoba on the brink of the Gloriosa revolution of 1868 in “[…] a sort of imperfectly digested Nietzscheanism” (18). José Larrañaga is the protagonist of the trilogy Las agonías de nuestro tiempo (1925-26), whose character, for Arnold Kerson, “[…] se nos presenta como una especie de héroe existencialista.
fracasado, algo kierkegardiano‖ (71). Philosophical considerations of Barojan protagonists put aside for another study, what is evident in criticism of Baroja’s fiction is the importance of the protagonist as presenter and communicator of the author’s perspective on whichever historical moment he assays.

6 Much of the analysis of Luna de lobos later in this chapter will be based on David Herzberger’s 1995 Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Postwar Spain, in which he explores in considerable detail the particular strategies employed by the Franco regime in its attempts to produce an alternative historiography after the civil war. Another text that attempts to catalogue and reconcile legal and narrative restrictions during the years of the regime is Carmen Martín Gaite’s Usos amorosos de la posguerra española (1987), of which analysis in undertaken in another chapter of this study.

7 As noted above, these divisions begin to appear as critical apparatuses begin to evolve and the sheer volume of writings prevents the hyper-simplification of chronological schemes:

Ya entrados los años sesenta, y quizá como reacción ante el marcado formalismo de la novela hispanoamericana, o por otras causas concomitantes (evolución interna de la crítica, más amplia perspectiva histórica…) empiezan a aparecer estudios que, a la mera organización cronológica, añaden otras consideraciones. (Ynduráin 320)

Years of separation from the conflict also seem to play a crucial role in the drive away from Manichaean “pre-“ and “postwar” delineations; temporal and historical distance allow the immediacy of the conflict’s impact to dissipate, allowing more attention to the novels themselves and greater perspective on their style and content. Very brief explications—with bibliographical references—of each of the terms here noted can be found in Ynduráin’s article, “La novela: preliminar” (1980).

8 As Margaret Jones points out in the introduction to The Contemporary Spanish Novel: 1939-1975 (1985), the 1966 Ley de prensa e imprenta represents a first step in the liberalization of the Spanish publishing industry under the Franco regime. Most centrally here, it eliminated the requirement for authors and periodicals to consult with government censors prior to publication. Despite the appearance of openness and liberalization, the law changed very little in practical terms; it simply shifted the timing of censorship and penalties—ranging from fines to imprisonment—making them subsequent to publication.

9 The examples given here will necessarily be limited, however the studies cited in the note six above provide ample contextualization for the lives and professional endeavors of the authors cited here.

10 Derived from the French maquisard—scrubland, underbrush of heather and other tangled low growth—the term maquis refers to members of the Republican resistance who employed guerrilla tactics in battling the forces loyal to Franco even after the end of the civil war. It was also subsequently used to describe members of the French
Resistance after the establishment of the Vichy government during World War II. According to José María Izquierdo, “Los guerrilleros españoles son los únicos en el mundo que se denominan según la palabra francesa maquisard, en español maquis, criminalizándose y extranjerizándose así su lucha política,” (98). Izquierdo is, at best, overzealous and, at worst, intentionally inaccurate in analyzing the use of the term maquis. He hopes to measure the manipulation of history by both the Franco regime and the pacts of silence during the Transition. While the intention is laudable—to describe and document more fully the last 70 years of history in Spain—the execution lacks factual precision; the resistance fighters, in both Spain and France in their given times, were so named for their willingness to hide in and attack from any terrain, including the exceedingly unwelcoming environments from which the name is taken.

11 Baah calls this temporal arrangement “triple movement.” As he explains, Temporality’s triple movement, that is, past, present, and future, provides a gradual and complete picture of the experiences of the narrator-protagonist and of his community. More than that, it underscores the ponderably futile and pathetic situation of the narrator-protagonist. (40-41)

12 The first-person narration of Llamazares’s travel essays is, of course, the pertinent aspect to this study, but the ludic aspects of problematized authorial authenticity do offer another insight into the postmodern aspects of Llamazares’s writing. Henn underscores this idea:

This is not by any means ‘meta travel literature,’ but these occasional reminders that the journey is being recorded en route serve to enhance the immediacy and authenticity of the finished work. Yet we should also be aware that, since the text does not give us access to what is being written down, we lack information on how, subsequently, the road-notes might have been polished up or otherwise embellished. (719)

13 Nestor García Canclini is an Argentine anthropologist and cultural critic who studies, among a wide-ranging list of topics, the dynamics of population movement in the era of globalization. Citing his 2001 book Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts, Cárcamo here analyzes how artists in general confront the encroachment of modern culture on more traditional populations:

[. . .] los artistas manifiestan en el cine y en la literatura una sensibilidad especial frente a las tradiciones regionales. La memoria compromete en este caso a la ética de las políticas de la memoria y de la identidad como forma de contrarrestar la fuga hacia el futuro impuesta por la tecnología [. . .]. (“Del aforismo”)

14 José Calvo Sotelo (1893-1936) was a right-wing politician and ideologue who came to prominence as a minister in the cabinet of Primo de Rivera, and led the right’s coalition during the Second Republic. His assassination by government forces in 1936 is
frequently cited as a tipping-point for the coup in July of 1936 that sparked the civil war. Francisco Largo Caballero (1869-1946) was a left-wing leader whose necessary political affiliations ran the gamut from Anarchists to Trade Unionists to Communists and Socialists. He was one provisional president of the Second Republic during the civil war, but a rift with the Communist party led to his government’s dissolution in 1937.

Cárcamo argues that the sole purpose in Llamazares’s “presentifying” the civil war is to bring to light the atrocities committed by the Francoist forces and the Guardia Civil during and after the war. As this study hopes to demonstrate, the “presentification” proposed by Llamazares is, more than anything else, a stylistic device to heighten the immediacy of the text for the reader and to deepen the narrative tension, as Agustín Otero’s analysis argued earlier in this chapter.

Jones lists among examples of Subjective Neorealism El camino (1950) and Las ratas (1962), and Cinco horas con Mario (1966) by Miguel Delibes, Juan Goytisolo’s Duelo en el Paraíso (1955), Luis Castresana’s El otro árbol de Guernica (1967), Ana María Matute’s Los hijos muertos (1958) and Primera memoria (1960), La oscura historia de la prima Montse (1970) by Juan Marsé. The chapter dedicated to this branch of mid-century fiction focuses most directly on Primera memoria and Cinco horas con Mario.

Herzberger focuses his analysis of Social Realism on Fernández Santos’s Los bravos (1954), Caballero Bonald’s Dos días de setiembre (1961), Sáchez Ferlosio’s El Jarama (1956), and Luis Goytisolo’s Las mismas palabras (1962).

Herzberger, following the analysis of Paul Ricouer, holds that the revelation of these discourses is in part carried out through “split referencing,” which “[. . .] suggests, reveals, un conceals . . . the deep structures of reality to which we are related as mortals who are born in to this world [. . .]” (64).

The capitalization of both ideas, History and Truth, is intentional. Here and at any other mention in this chapter, capitalization implies a recognition of the attempted creation of singular metanarrative definitions of those concepts.

Beyond the civil and criminal amnesties legally codified during the Transition, the unspoken set of norms generally referred to as the pactos de olvido were, initially, a step to quell social unrest and maintain order when the young institutions of governance had yet to establish a national presence and significance. As those institutions became entrenched, however, and the government stable, questions begin to arise regarding the validity of silencing the difficult history of the civil war and the Franco era. The debate over these pacts has surged to the fore very recently with the publicization of mass graves from the civil war at various sites around the country and the Socialist Party’s promotion of the law of Historical Memory, approved first in 2006 and enacted in 2007.
This description, to be scrutinized further on with respect to Llamazares’s novel, is obviously a dramatic simplification of the reality of the historical cases that make up what does exist of a textual record of these fighters. In both interviews and essays, Llamazares refers often to the “[...] episodios de combatientes republicanos que sus mayores le habían contado cuando era un niño allá en su montaña leonesa,” (Ótero 641).

The continuity of the presence of the narrator is not, of course, the only unifying element of the novel. An argument could be developed to establish the existence of certain metanarrative frameworks—that of survival, or of family, for example—but their relevance shrinks as the novel advances. The significance of these frameworks dissipates as the narrative turns inward during the fourth section, as Ángel attempts to understand, “Lo que un hombre solo, completamente solo, sentado en un rincón o paseando entre las cabras, es capaz de pensar a lo largo de una noche” (147). No longer pursued in the terrain above the town, he struggles night after night to reconcile who he was with what he has become. This is problematized identity can be understood as characteristic of the dynamics of Hirsch’s postmemory; in her analysis of Art Spiegelman’s graphic novels Maus and Maus II, Hirsch describes the process through which the author renovated almost entirely his understanding of his family’s history. The consequences of this reconsideration, Hirsch argues, are evident in the differences in form and content between the original and the sequel.

This is the first occasion on which Llamazares makes clear his posture with regard to the opacity of the lines drawn between vicious and heroic behavior. Simplistic renderings and clear divisions of the morally righteous or aberrant nature of human behavior do not appear in Luna de lobos. The group arrives at the shepherd’s mountain hut in aggressive fashion, brandishing their weapons and demanding his silence and acquiescence. He cooperates, and reacts with mild surprise when Ángel produces a wad of bills from his pocket in order to compensate him for the loss of the ewe.

A number of these historical particulars are taken up in Baroja’s novel, and the subsequent study, noted above, by Miguel Sánchez Ostiz offers valuable insight into the events of the early days of the war.

FAI is the Federación Anarquista Ibérica, and the FET-JONS is the Falange Española Tradicional-Juntas de Ofensiva Nacional-Sindicalista. These two groups represent, during the civil war, the farthest points left and right, respectively, on the political spectrum. They were chosen as example simply for that reason; Baroja spares no faction in his examination of the conflict.
CHAPTER 4

The Women’s Section: The Discourse of Femininity and the Matrilinear Heritage in Marina Mayoral’s Recóndita armonía

“Ese tema interesa poco aquí.”

In the decades since the death of Franco in 1975, one of the most visible and fastest-growing segments of Spanish narrative production has been the so-called “escritura femenina,” or women’s writing, a term cynically employed to demarcate fiction written by women that, according to the journalist and novelist Laura Freixas, falls into one of four categories: “[. . .] (1) feminist, politically incorrect, or opportunistic; (2) intimate, emotional, and sensitive; (3) commercial (directed to a wide female leadership); and (4) particular, in other words, not universal” (Henseler 11). In its most global and dismissive application, the term describes fiction by women that often focuses on overtly physical sexuality and superficial or feminist treatment of literary themes, and has been employed to relegate some female authors to a certain second-class citizenry among their contemporaries (11). As the 1980s advanced, however, sheer numbers began to challenge this estimation; the expanding economic interests of the publishing industry were supported by the growing participation of female authors whose works resonated with a growing segment of the market, namely the female reader. In her 2003 book Contemporary Spanish Women’s Narrative and the Publishing Industry, Christine Henseler points up how surveys of public reading habits in Spain repeatedly show not only that more women than men read in Spain, but also that women read much more
frequently than do men (10). The existence and sustained growth of such a market are crucial factors in stimulating the increase in the publication of female authors throughout the democratic period in Spain.

As recently as 1990, however, critical attention to female authors and the issues raised in their writing remained, in the Spanish context at the very least, a topic of little interest, as the critic Germán Gullón recounts in his contribution to the 1995 collection of essays *Discurso femenino actual*, edited by Adelaida López de Martínez. He writes of an encounter with a high-ranking editor at a prestigious publishing house in Madrid, during which Gullón presented the idea of a volume of essays dedicated to female authors and feminism in Spain. The editor’s indifference, for Gullón, encapsulates the generalized attitude toward the issue, and therefore serves as the epigraph to this chapter: “Ese tema interesa poco aquí” (33). Nonetheless, the 1990s saw not only continued growth in the number of female authors, but also an increase in the amount of academic attention given to those authors and their works.¹

This chapter parts from the simplest premise: that female authors in Spain indeed merit inclusion in the roster of writers for study, and that their works are equally worthy of critical attention from scholars of questions contemporary. To that end, this chapter opens by surveying the work of scholars whose analyses underscore the need for a critical reevaluation of the significance of these authors, and provide an initial bibliography from which others can part in examining those questions. It next examines the structural, thematic, and historiographic elements of two mid-century giants of both twentieth-
century Spanish fiction in general and fiction of the civil war in particular who, fortuitously, are women. In examining the points of connection and distinction between Marina Mayoral’s 1994 novel Recóndita armonía and the works of Carmen Laforet and Carmen Martín Gaite, this portion of the study hopes first to place Mayoral’s novel squarely within the broader trend of contemporary fiction relating to the civil war. As a result, secondarily, it hopes also to reemphasize that, despite any perceived lack of editorial interest, fiction by women has long constituted a critical segment of Spanish letters and represents an essential component of the literary identity of Spain in the twenty-first century.

Akiko Tsuchiya localizes the difficulty of the term “women’s writing” at the intersection of commercial publishing forces and gendered discourse. The commercial aspects of the phenomenon are evident; as the 1980s and 1990s advanced, publishing interests in Spain, hoping to increase sales and overall visibility, relied more and more heavily on the weight of authors’ personae than on more standard literary considerations. In other words, Tsuchiya argues, the noteworthiness of an author bears the majority of the responsibility for his or her success, and in the case of female authors,

[. . .] the mark of gender (like that of age or generation) contributes to the rise of “women’s literature” as a commercial phenomenon which, in turn, creates cultural expectations as to what women’s literature is and should be. (240)
The existence of such a subgenre is underpinned by the basic paradox of gendering cultural production, and this contradiction is central to Tsuchiya’s analysis. The putative sector of the literary market identified as women’s literature carries with it a clear gender identification that separates that segment of narrative from the literary production of male authors, whose works never carry such a distinction. Men’s writing, identified only as Literature without regard for the author’s gender, is therefore imbued with a universality and gender-neutrality never afforded texts written by women, as Henseler shows by way of Freixas’s analysis. This inevitably leads to what Tsuchiya calls “an essentialist and homogeneous conception of all literature authored by women” (241). Continual categorization of this segment of Spanish fiction as univocal and undifferentiated is indefensibly insufficient as a critical position, given the variegated stylistic and thematic characteristics of the narrative of female authors in Spain. The first portion of this chapter, then, is dedicated to studies produced by critics like Tsuchiya whose work reveals and attempts to rectify the gap in scholarship concerning female authors.

As professor and critic of literature, Marina Mayoral is keenly aware of the gendering to which Tsuchiya refers, and she “[. . .] uses scholarship as a vehicle for her insistence on the reality of its existence [that of gender difference] and on the validity of the female point of view” (Bellver 185). She focuses much of her critical analysis on the works of the two most prominent Galician female authors, the poet Rosalía de Castro and the novelist Emilia Pardo Bazán, and the paradox of gendering cultural production is not lost on Mayoral the critic:
Me molesta que se hable de una literatura femenina porque me parece una discriminación. Se podría hablar de una literatura que tuviera una problemática preferentemente femenina pero no creo en esa distinción hombre-mujer a la hora de escribir. (185)

Mayoral’s fiction undoubtedly draws on both Pardo Bazán and Rosalía de Castro, among many others, to create portraits of family dynamics, relationships—amorous, platonic, and professional—and the social and cultural norms that characterize Spanish society at the moments she chooses as settings for her novels. Two other sources in the contemporary narrative landscape are Laforet and Martín Gaite; decades of critical attention and perspective by scholars of Spanish cultural production have effectively eliminated the possibility of examining either of these authors in the facile, gender-based mode.

In theme and style, the most evident parallel to draw is to Laforet’s 1944 novel Nada; Mayoral’s novel also traces an introverted young woman’s travails on the road to adulthood and simultaneously exposes a broad swath of the socioeconomic condition of the country. The postmemorial aspects of contemporary fiction here become readily apparent in that Mayoral’s creation relies entirely on a narratively wrought understanding of the condition of women in Spain during the first decades of the twentieth century, and the same is true of the segments of the novel dedicated to the civil war; Mayoral’s rendering of the conflict can only ever exist conditioned by intervening narrative adaptations. Equally important to the more traditionally literary concerns like theme and
style, however, are the historiographic cues that the novel takes from Martín Gaite’s 1987 collection of essays titled *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*, in which she lays bare the Francoist project of conditioning womanhood to propagate the ideological purpose of the regime. Plumbing these two texts for insight into both the writing of womanhood and the exploring of the civil war, this chapter hopes to highlight the presence and demonstrate the significance of Mayoral’s novel.

II

*Recóndita armonía* (1994) recounts the life and adventures of Blanca and Helena, best friends who meet at their convent school as teenagers and live inseparably, in various settings around the country, through the majority of the twentieth century. The pair live virtually every archetypal rite of passage for young women—first crushes and sexual encounters, struggles in the educational and professional worlds, and confrontations with their familial and social histories, among others—and Mayoral relies on the protagonists’ characters and histories to orchestrate every possible permutation of these encounters. Blanca and Helena are effective foils in almost every way, even the most stereotypical: Blanca is an orphan and a ward of the church, cared for lovingly by the bishop of her diocese, while Helena is the daughter of hereditary nobility whose progressive and liberal tendencies open for her every possible educational and professional path. Blanca, timid and introverted, seeks solitude at every turn, but Helena, graceful and well-heeled, occupies the center of attention in every setting that she enters. Blanca is dark-completed and does not conform—in her own estimation—to any
traditional form of beauty, and Helena, slender, blonde and angelic, represents the standard of beauty; nevertheless, it is Blanca who creates genuine, meaningful relationships with men, while Helena provokes physical attraction that most often leads to superficial sexual relationships. The pair moves together in every environment—the convent school, university, the vibrant Madrid of the Second Republic, active fronts during the civil war, Helena’s family’s Galician estate—as the century progresses, and they encounter every obstacle to a woman’s potential progress in the first half of the twentieth century in Spain. Blanca and Helena defy standard mores and professional norms—briefly being lovers, for example, or working in experimental physics or as nurses at a field hospital—and it is this underlying and unflagging determination for equality that stands out as the informing principle of Mayoral’s novel, as well as for the critics whose works begin this chapter’s analysis.

Even a cursory glance at the bibliography of Feminine Concerns in Contemporary Spanish Fiction by Women (1988) demonstrates what much scholarship of the democratic period in Spain recognizes as the standard state of affairs in Peninsular criticism. There exists, undoubtedly, a relatively extensive bibliography of articles and book chapters—authored by a distinguished collection of critics—dedicated to serious study of fiction by women in Spain, but reading through a listing of this nature offers a deceptive and partial perspective on the quantity of scholarship devoted to either female authorship or feminine concerns within literary works. The editors, Roberto Manteiga, Carolyn Galerstein, and Kathleen McNerney, cite statistics presented by Janet Pérez in her 1988 book Contemporary Women Writers of Spain to put this scholarly work in
perspective as a fraction of the work carried out by Hispanists, though they perceive cause for a very cautious optimism, as they note in their introduction: “While there have been many interviews and book reviews, until very recently, few substantial articles of scholarly criticism have appeared, and even fewer full-length studies” (2). Pérez, after presenting the aforementioned statistics, devotes much of the first chapter of her book to compiling the titles that, to that point, had approached the topic of female authorship, though her view of the situation is similar: “Thus, although interest in certain writers [Martín Gaite, Elena Quiroga, Ana María Matute] has intensified, it has by no means become generalized to the remainder of women writing” (2). Nevertheless, these two volumes, along with Joan L. Brown’s *Women Writers of Contemporary Spain* (1991), are among the first attempts to catalogue twentieth-century fiction by women, and to explore the structural, stylistic, and thematic elements present in and unique to that fiction. None of the critics seeks to identify and ghettoize fiction by women; on the contrary, their purpose is, as Brown holds, “[…] twofold: to correct previous neglect of excellent writers and to illustrate the diversity of literature by women in contemporary Spain” (13). Moreover, Brown argues, “[…] that literature by women in modern Spain, though united by important gender-based commonalities, is characterized even more by diversity” (23). Scholars of every literature contend with the identification and classification of these diversities, but critics of fiction by women in Spain face other obstacles in the execution of their charge.

Bibliographic and organizational difficulties, specified below, pose a significant obstacle for any critic approaching the study of the feminine and female authorship in
Spain. Even before proposing that task, however, a unique and ironic problem presents itself: the perception of gender bias. The generation of critical volumes dedicated solely to the works of female authors, in the earnest and necessary hope of rectifying what Pérez calls “generalized scholarly neglect” (2), can be perceived, albeit cynically, as a form of gender discrimination. Brown recognizes the irony in this inversion—that “only a book devoted to literature by women can challenge the validity of its own existence” (23)—and poses the question, in the introduction to the collection of essays, of whether or not the extraordinary concession of monographic analysis of women’s fiction can create any significant shift in critical bias. Brown’s recognition of the status of her field and enthusiasm for its expansion are evident in her response:

For Spain, the answer is yes. At present [1991], this affirmative action is necessary to bring outstanding, underappreciated literature to the attention of a wider readership. However, once introduced, it is unlikely that the work of these authors will need any special treatment in order to be featured in literary anthologies or bookstore displays. (23)

Almost two decades on, Brown’s supposition has proved true, though not in the thoroughly systematic way she might have hoped. Scholarship on female authors and their works has expanded significantly in the professional critical arena and now overshadows the earlier “critical” work of earlier decades, which

[. . .] tends to dwell all too often on the personal lives of the authors and not enough on their work. It is assumed that everything the writer says is
autobiographic and that, once she has related her own experiences, there is
nothing left to say. (Manteiga 2)

One difficulty exists around what Brown refers to as “bookstore displays.” Increasingly
this term includes not just brick-and-mortar displays in shop windows, but also in the
television- and radio-based dissemination of authors and their works, as well as in print
and electronic media presences. While it is certainly true that female authors have carved
a niche to generate sales and visibility, others argue that this recognition—especially of
those authors whose notoriety often stems from the overt use of physical sexuality—
produces no shift in the generalized attitude toward fiction by women. Henseler, after
interviewing a number of female authors for her 2003 book, takes a more optimistic tack;
she believes that the very organization constructed and maintained by men to promote
male authors—the publishing industry in Spain—is now precisely the vehicle toward the
recognition of female authorship:

To draw a dividing line between the center and the margin is
counterproductive to the contemporary advancement of literature written
by women. [. . .] Women writers begin to have the power to contest the
dominant structure when they show they are economically profitable. One
way to undermine the dominant [. . .] is to join the system; by joining it,
literature written by women can change the dominant structure and diffuse
its initial project. (14)
In either case—whether taken by force in Brown’s frontal assault on the critical canon or infiltrated less subtly in Henseler’s overt operation within the publishing industry—fiction by women has in its own right become a significant portion of the literature produced in Spain today, and the critical corpus has begun to follow suit. That is to say, the question of whether or not fiction by women is worthy of critical attention has largely been rendered moot. With this a priori existential paradox overcome, the more specific difficulties of executing a study about such a broad field of inquiry are revealed.

All of the critics and editors examined thus far—Pérez, Brown, Manteiga, and Henseler—rightly highlight the first major obstacle in working in the field of women writers in Spain: the bibliographical. One of the first volumes to address the gap in scholarship on Spanish women authors in the American academy is Pérez’s *Contemporary Women Writers of Spain* (1988), written explicitly under the auspice of marking the historical female authorial presence in Spain. Citing the lack of comprehensive bibliographical studies regarding in this academic subfield, Pérez provides an introduction to the writers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries in order to combat what she terms, as noted above, “generalized scholarly neglect” (2):

> Several bibliographical projects are currently under way; […] however, the only relevant material in English requires a piecemeal approach to the subject of Spain’s women writers in this century. There is no general introduction or reference work on contemporary women narrators, only
studies of individuals or a handful of such writers who share some common denominator. ("Preface")

Her study opens with a cataloguing of the numerous, yet limited, bibliographical resources available to the scholar of fiction by women in Spain, retreating as far back historically as to credit the Theatro crítico universal (1726-1739) of the Benedictine monk Benito Jerónimo Feijoo with one of the earliest defenses of women. Pérez takes her teleological cue from the Benedictine friar, producing a volume that fiercely disrupts the conception that female authorship in Spain be an oddity relegated to a position of prominence simply for its anomalous nature.

Though neither as historically thorough nor as anecdotally illustrative as Feijoo’s accounting, female authors are exhaustively catalogued in Pérez’s study, and her deference to early, foundational writers like Cecilia Böhl de Faber, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Ana García de la Torre, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, and Carolina Coronado provides a solid base from which to consider the existence of a continuum of female authorship in twentieth-century Spain, rather than the exceptional case worthy of inclusion, a perspective that pervades much of the bibliographical scholarship produced throughout the modern era. Her study opens with early twentieth-century writers whose works in many cases run parallel to the production of the luminaries of the Generations of 1898 and 1927. While some are considered “minor contemporaries” of those groups, others—among them Caterina Albert, Carmen de Burgos, Concha Espina, and María Teresa León—exhibit many of the same characteristics of their male contemporaries, and
express concerns unique to the condition of women in Spain during the first decades of the twentieth century:

They are no longer limited to a relatively noncommittal [sic] presentation of injustices inherent in the feminine condition and occasional pictures of nondomestic (and/or nonconventual) roles for women, but begin to express more audible dissent: not merely women who work or seek options beyond matrimony, but women who reject patriarchally inscribed definitions of womanhood [. . .] (38)

These authors, disadvantaged particularly by the set of social, religious, and economic codes imposed in Spanish society, nonetheless perform a vital function in Pérez’s view; their work within that highly restrictive environment, and its subsequent inclusion in critical work like hers, dispel the notion that one female author or a small, select group comprises the entirety of women’s cultural production during those years.

Pérez next examines the period of the Second Republic which, though brief (1931-36), produced a talented and progressive collection of writers that studied under and collaborated with other, more recognizable authors of the period,5 despite their paradoxical exclusion from all but the most current scholarship. On the basis of her prolific career as poet, novelist essayist, and critic, Carmen Conde serves as another of Pérez’s standard-bearers for the reconsideration of female authorship in Spain. The other two authors cited in this chapter, Rosa Chacel and Mercedes Ballesteros, represent equally imposing literary figures whose prominence—Chacel was once a candidate for
the Cervantes Prize, for example—has frequently been ignored by the critical
establishment. Pérez’s later chapters are dedicated to detailed bio-bibliographical
sketches of women whose careers have seen a significant reinvigoration thanks, in part,
to studies of this type. Mercè Rodoreda, Mercedes Salisachs, Concha Alós, Carmen
Laforet, Dolores Medio, Elena Quiroga, Ana María Matute, and Carmen Martín Gaite are
among the authors that make up what Pérez identifies as the first post-war generation of
authors; each woman’s bibliography is extensively rendered in the chapters, as are the
broad thematic lines of each œuvre. The volume’s final two chapters are dedicated to
“recent narrators” in Spain, both in Spanish and in varying regional languages. These
authors—again the listing is extensive, but includes Lidia Falcón, Mayoral, Ana María
Moix, Ester Tusquets, Rosa Montero, Lourdes Ortiz, Soledad Puértolas, Cristina
Fernández-Cubas, Adelaida García Morales, Montserrat Roig, and Carme Riera—have
produced the majority of their works since the death of Franco, and have constituted
much of the aforementioned increase in the cultural visibility and economic viability of
female authorship in the last three decades in Spain.

“The best notion of change in the interim can be gained by comparing the women
writers of several generations, their themes and techniques, and observing the evolution
(as well as revolution) achieved” (11), Pérez claims in the introduction to her study; as a
bibliographical tool, Contemporary Women Writers of Spain is a first salvo in the two-
fold project of first recuperating and anthologizing the marginalized female writers of the
first decades of the twentieth century, and second discovering and promoting the newest
narrators whose works will comprise the expanded bibliography in the field. She
acknowledges the initial progress realized in the first years after the death of Franco and extols the great possibility of future success, despite some apprehension about literature in Spain generally since 1975:

On a more positive note, Spanish women are writing in record numbers, and some of the most exciting literature in Spain today is being written by women. [...] Women writer’s new numbers, new visibility, and new freedoms, their heightened levels of consciousness, education, and self-awareness, improved channels of communication, and increased contacts with one another offer hope that the best is yet to come. (11)

Pérez’s text offers an important tool—a well-organized, detailed bibliography of women writers in Spain—in the critical evaluation of this new literary production; subsequent studies, taking advantage of and expanding on Pérez’s work, prove her hope well-founded.

In the same year in which Pérez’s volume appears, a collection of essays appears with a similar goal, titled Feminine Concerns in Contemporary Spanish Fiction by Women and edited by Roberto Manteiga, Carolyn Galerstein, and Kathleen McNerney. The volume is comprised of essays from various scholars—among them Pérez herself, Biruté Cipliauskaitė, Roberta Johnson, and Catherine Bellver—and seeks to reexamine one of the principle difficulties of literature concerning women in Spain during its modern history: “As several critics have already pointed out, the feminine presence has never been lacking in Spanish literature. But, with relatively few exceptions, the fictional
woman character has been the product of a masculine mentality” (1). The question of perspective—that is, who gives form and voice to female characters and to the feminine—is the unifying thread to the collection, but the authors and texts proposed for study extend from the end of the civil war, through Francoism, and into the first years of the Democratic period. Manteiga, Galerstein, and McNerney recapitulate the number of valuable studies up to that point, and underscore the number of studies being promoted and taking place, both for particular journals and in book-length studies. The premise for the collection, they state, is very clear:

The aforementioned collections notwithstanding, to date there has been no major study written which deals specifically with the concerns of women as presented in the works of a particular group of Hispanic women writers.

The present volume is an attempt to do precisely that. (3)

A number of the articles presented deal with broad topics regarding the feminine; Ciplijauskaitė, for example, measures the historical novel by women in Spain against texts from the French and German contexts, while Elizabeth Ordóñez explores the intersections of history and myth in the novels of three different Spanish authors, and Janet Pérez examines the representation of the “liberated woman” in novels by a number of mid-century Spanish authors. The remaining studies explore aspects of the feminine, highlighting a novel or novels by female authors whose careers span the second half of the twentieth century.
Another collection of essays with the purpose of overcoming the bibliographical difficulty is *Women Writers of Contemporary Spain*, published in 1991. The volume’s editor, Joan L. Brown, takes great pains in an introductory essay to identify, corroborate, and reject the exclusion of female writers in Spain. After detailing a portion of the scholarly debate taking place at the time—regarding authorship of the *khajar*s—Brown takes certain figures in the academy to task for their systematic dismissal of female authors:

> It is only with great difficulty that intellectual status can be granted to women in a social system characterized by the ethic of machismo. Even a traditional literary critic like Gonzalo Sobejano finds that “atavisms” along with economic (under)development and religion, have historically functioned to enforce women’s intellectual inequality in Spain, and that the scarcity of women’s literature can be explained by their inferior status.

(18)

Brown departs from the atavistic preconception of female inferiority and, citing statistics seen in earlier volumes and other more detailed analyses of those statistics, begins to make the case for ever-increasing participation by female authors, in both the literary and critical arenas. The collaborating scholars—among them Robert Spires, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Phyllis Zatlin, Margaret Jones, Randolph Pope, and Concha Alborg—explore concepts related to the feminine and feminism, each with specific author for examination, and, “[w]hat emerges from their chapters is a broad and many-faceted picture: in addition
to providing readers with the necessary fundamental information, these essays offer new insights into writers whose fame still has not caught up with their talent” (22). Most pertinent to this study is Alborg’s essay “Marina Mayoral’s Narrative: Old Families and New Faces from Galicia,” which, examined more thoroughly below, examines how Mayoral’s fiction “is defined and unified by themes and techniques that pervade all of her novels” (23).

The bibliographic barrier to the study of female authors and the feminine has diminished significantly in the two decades since the publication of the volumes by Pérez, Manteiga, and Brown have noted. At the publishing of the volumes noted, between 1988 and 1991, the number of results pertinent to the fiction of Mayoral was small, and it was unlikely to find scholarly articles uniquely dedicated to her novels; at present, a database search of just the author’s name yields dozens of journal articles, book chapters, and interviews. This increase is indicative of a cultural shift in the tastes of the American academy, and serves the community of scholars well in undertaking a study on this topic. Even with this marked increase in scholarship, all three studies—and the dissertations, journal articles, and books produced and published in the intervening years—provide valuable bibliographical footing for the critical evaluation of the relative position of female authors in the contemporary context, and as both Brown and Pérez stress, the presence of female authors as subjects in current critical dialogue is constantly increasing, as is the number of women that participate in that dialogue in the role of scholar.
The second difficulty in approaching a topic of this nature is organizational; as the
critical bibliography on female authors in Spain continues to grow, one inevitable
consequence is the division of the once monolithic “women’s writing” into smaller, more
closely-defined subcategories in order that a tighter, more focused study of those authors
and their works might be undertaken. All the traditional divisions, of course, are
possible; generational schemes and generic—as well as subgeneric—divisions are
prevalent, as are stylistic and thematic divisions. The simultaneous coexistence of a
number of generations of female writers during the democratic period allows for a
convenient chronological organization, and the paradox of the battle over “women’s
writing,” again, is made clear. To bring about any semblance of equality between male
and female authorship within the canon of Spanish letters, a viable space for the
consideration of the ways in which women write must be defined without being
segregated; the only effective means to this end, honoring the need for historical
perspective, derives from the examination of female authors’ literary forbears, as Pérez
notes: “As Spain ends its first decade as a democracy, an unparalleled four generations of
women writers share the literary scene with three-quarters of a century of varying
experiences, values, perspectives, and ideologies” (11). Only by recuperating the
historical female authorial presence in Spain, Pérez argues, can a relevant understanding
of modern literature by women be produced.

For this reason, one of the main avenues for the organization of studies of this
type follows a generational scheme. The three studies noted above all, in greater or lesser
degree, apply this approach. Pérez includes in the introduction to her study a section
titled “Heritage of the Nineteenth Century,” in which she briefly reviews the female standard-bearers of the epoch, and her attitude toward these foundational authors is unequivocal:

Pardo Bazán, Monserdà, and several lesser contemporaries lived until well into the present century, so that the new feminine writers appearing on the scene after 1900 were not alone, bereft of tradition and preceptors, as had been essentially the case a hundred years before. Their establishment of an initial feminist canon helps to explain the surprising quantity, quality, and visibility of women writers in Spain today. (14)

Manteiga, Galerstein, and McNerney’s volume presupposes the necessity of such a historical perspective. Between chapters on Ester Tusquets and Lourdes Ortiz, another study wrangles with thematic concerns of several mid-century authors; amid essays on Rosa Montero and Montserrat Roig, two different chapters examine the fiction of Carmen Martín Gaite. Brown’s collection of essays opens with studies of noted postwar authors—Laforet, Dolores Medio, and Elena Quiroga—and ends with contemporary authors like Adelaida García Morales, Mayoral, Montero, and Ortiz. Even in studies whose focus is thematic or stylistic, scholarship on this topic rarely escape either the presence of the founding mothers or their impact on contemporary fiction.

A unique organizational concern, the linguistic and cultural differences of a number of autonomous regions in Spain, also problematizes the critical work surrounding female authorship in Spain, especially of those authors whose careers begin after the end
of the Franco regime. The existence of various regional languages that, while Spanish in
concrete geographical terms, express a wholly different cultural experience exposes an
avenue for critical attention particularly apt in this chapter. The end of the centrally
enforced nationalism of the Franco regime allows a reinvigoration of the Basque,
Catalonian, and Galician cultures that continues today in virtually every public sphere
from the artistic to the political. Mayoral illustrates both the difficulty and the benefit of
this change; in her work as a scholar, she frequently focuses on the works of prominent
Galician authors, but her work is not ever limited to the particular geography of Galicia.
More pertinent, perhaps, is her literary career, during which she has published novels and
short stories in both Galician and Spanish. Pérez dedicates the final chapter of her study
to the writers—whose careers resist facile categorization, and expand into fields like
journalism, philosophy, and education, as well as the theater, television, and film—that
represent the cultural differences that have flourished since 1975. The appearance of
authors in all of these languages, bringing to bear the cultural and linguistic aspects that
are more characteristic than exceptional of Spain’s modern history, complicates the
literary landscape in contemporary Spain; it adds another layer of organizational
difficulty to any scholarly approach to the idea of female authorship in the contemporary
moment, but allows for a broader, more diverse field of inquiry that parallels the effort
toward increased recognition for those same authors.

This is not to say, however, that the studies thus far undertaken rely solely on
chronological organization or convene only around canonical historical signposts. Nor
does this critical work, despite the potential appearance of gender-based polarization of
Peninsular literary studies, segregate female authorship. Rather, it defies the received wisdom of the critical establishment by drawing out the ways in which fiction by women in Spain fits many of the same critical paradigms employed in the analysis of fiction by men. The content of each of the volumes examined offers ample evidence to support this claim. The critical work undertaken spans the thematic, stylistic, and theoretical gamut, in step with the analytical trends of Hispanism in general at the beginning of the 1990s.

Pérez’s study, emphasizing the necessity of a comprehensive bibliography of women’s literature and detailing uniquely aspects of that literature, is the exception in this case, while both the Brown and Manteiga collections demonstrate the analytical breadth of this branch of the field. In both volumes, feminist literary and cultural critique is understandably present, though hardly the dominant critical mode; essays applying historiographic, narratological, intertextual, and reception analyses comprise the majority of the scholarly approaches, while other close-reading techniques—examination of particular genre concerns, tropes, and motifs—also explicate the texts of some of the prominent female authors of the Democratic era and begin the complex task of organizing, for critical attention and for general readership, fiction by those authors.

Two examples of the increased theoretical attention to, and sophistication of, the analysis of fiction by women in Spain are Elizabeth Ordóñez’s *Voices of Their Own: Contemporary Spanish Narrative by Women* (1991) and Catherine Davies’s *Spanish Women’s Writing, 1849-1996* (1998). The introduction of each tome is a brief history of the obstacles facing female authors and, subsequently, feminism itself and feminist critics in Spanish letters; Ordóñez founds her study on prominent theoretical figures in literary,
cultural, feminist theories—Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucoul, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray—and analyzes the particular problems facing the modern iteration of Arimneste: the feminist scholar of Spanish women’s literature. She assails the underrepresentation of female authors, which in her calculation can be attributed to,

[..] a paucity of relevant theories that would have made paying attention to this body of texts more compelling, and that would have opened them to a reception process more disposed to reading sense into what may have appeared as non-sense to earlier theories or nontheories of the narrative text. (14)

That novels by women would appear “curiously unmanageable,” or lack “classical values” for many critics in Spain, or that women would exist solely as “a subset of the male species” (15-16), are the central obstacles facing the feminist critic, and Ordóñez seeks to dismiss these misconceptions and release female authors from the strictures of preexisting critical paradigms. Her study covers female authors from the mid-century through the 1980s seeking to establish a critical understanding of the “heterogeneity” and “multivocality” of female authorship:

So there emerge no rigid lines of demarcation nor easily fixed categories. The process of reading contemporary Spanish narrative by women advises us rather to abandon classifications that have failed to address the attributes of women’s texts and invites us to engage, instead, in an
alternative perception of the maternal connections or continuities among women’s voices. (28)

Ordóñez’s chapters—stressing, as their titles suggest, ambivalence, ambiguity, parody, subversion and transgression—hope to create a viable space for the “proliferation and continuation of difference” (195), within the general project of positioning deserving female authors squarely amid the canonical roster of twentieth-century Spanish fiction.

Davies’s study forms part of a project called “Women in Context” whose intent is to bring the sociopolitical and cultural circumstances of women to the fore in through study of different national literatures. The study is therefore more general in nature, and reaches further back into Spanish history—as her title notes, her study parts from 1849—and offers a more traditional historical analysis punctuated by theoretical insights from the perspectives of feminist and performance theories. Drawing from the particular political and labor policies of both traditional monarchic Spain—and its latter-day coreligionary, the Franco regime—and progressive republican moments in the 1870s and 1930s, Davies identifies the roadblocks that define the progress of women, both in letters and in society generally, during the last 150 years. Davies highlights the overarching retrograde attitudes, interrupted very occasionally, that mark Spain’s development with respect women’s education, suffrage, and independence generally: “This pattern of retardation followed by a sudden spurt of progressive activity has been symptomatic of modern Spanish politics: the forces of tradition hold back reform until breaking point” (5).9 In literature, however, political and economic factors matter less than does the
historical factionalism of literary celebrity; male authorship—again, innately imbued with a universality rarely afforded female authors, as Tsuchiya notes—has ever been reinforced by an almost entirely male critical establishment, and by the stylistic and generational lines that group has dictated. The themes and subjects approached by female authors, Davies contends,

[... ] may differ quite considerably from those of more prominent male contemporaries, the authors who are usually identified with influential literary cliques. Literature by women, if measured with the same rod, can seem strangely out of tune and uninteresting. Consequently, it was often marginalized, trivialized, or simply ignored. (2-3)

One main aim of Davies’s study, and of Ordóñez’s as well, is to redraw lines for both the critical and general publics, in order that strategies for reading be understood anew, and that Spanish literature enjoy, to extend Davies’s descriptor, a new tonality that incorporates multiple voices and prizes that diversity as characteristic.

The obstacles to analytical work on female authors in Spain—generalized dismissiveness of “women’s writing,” the lack of a critical bibliography commensurate with the quantity and quality of the work of female authors, and the pragmatic difficulty of organizing the purportedly uniform body of those authors’ writings—are very real, and require continued critical attention. However, bolstered by the expansion of academic consideration both dedicated to and inclusive of questions of the feminine, a growing proportion of scholarship currently confronts these topics. If Henseler’s theory of the
infiltration of the organs of cultural currency is projected forward, her goal, though never measurably attainable, can certainly be approached in a meaningful way:

As women authors become commercially more visible, their work slowly moves from a negative to a positive pole (first on the market, then—perhaps but not necessarily—on a critical and academic level). [. . .] As women authors become commercial icons, their once marginalized status increases their promotional visibility. (Henseler 16-17)

As the presence and acceptance of female authorship—commercial, literary, and critical—grows, the system itself becomes largely self-sustaining. that is to say, as female authors and their works begin to form part of the recognized canon in Spain, that presence is, literally and figuratively, inscribed within the storehouse of cultural knowledge. In this way, these authors and works become inextricably linked to the moment et milieu of their appearance, and therefore, most logically, included in future critical study.

Two authors for whom this is already the case—that is, very rarely are these authors exempted from any serious consideration of literature during the Franco regime—are Carmen Laforet and Carmen Martín Gaite. Laforet and Martín Gaite have found critical success not only as female writers, but also as recognized turning points in post-civil war literature. Laforet’s Nada in 1944, though not unique in its unabashed portrayal of postwar Spain, is often cited along with Cela’s La familia de Pascual Duarte as the first texts of the trend of social realism that would dominate the literary landscape
in the years after its publication. Similarly, Martín Gaite’s *El cuarto de atrás* (1978) has been credited, again, not without the collaboration of numerous other authors and texts, with the consolidation of the postmodern movement in Spain, given its metafictional elements and the provisional nature of its resolution. Mayoral’s *Recóndita armonía* presents a conflation of these two novels; the first part of the novel echoes Laforet’s novel closely in the coming-of-age story of the two protagonists, while the retrospective and metafictional elements of the second part mirror the project undertaken by Martín Gaite in her novel. Upon examination of these similarities, Pérez’s affirmation is upheld and strengthened: the female writers of the post-Franco period represent the contemporary segment of the continuum of female writers, not an exceptional case worthy of nominal attention.

An initial analysis comparing *Nada* and *Recóndita armonía*, then, can establish declarative connections between Mayoral’s fiction and that of her literary foremothers; the historiographic elements of Mayoral’s novel, however, are perhaps better elucidated by another of Martín Gaite’s works. In the 1987 monograph titled *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*, Martín Gaite combines the factual and archival elements of historical essay and the personalized subjective aspects of memoir to provide an exhaustive account of the social reality for women in the years following the civil war. Martín Gaite scrutinizes virtually every aspect of the mores of Spanish life for women of the time—from home economy to education to fashion to the political climate—and the era during which much of Mayoral’s novel takes place materializes within those pages. The approach taken by Mayoral in *Recóndita armonía*, when read in the light of the
fictional world created by Laforet and the chauvinistic and patriarchal reality presented by Martín Gaite, offers valuable insight into the manners in which female authors have begun to write the civil war during the Democratic period in Spain.

III

It has been argued that Nada demonstrates the key characteristics of the “female Bildungsroman,” and some critical analyses of Recóndita armonía have asserted similar conclusions, but questions regarding whether or not the two novels can technically be regarded as such might best be left for a more detailed analysis of those particularities. More important to this analysis are the evident points of comparison between Nada and Recóndita armonía, both structural and thematic; basic structural similarities pace the development of characterization in each novel, and deep thematic ties emerge as the gamut of each protagonist’s attributes takes shape. Both novels trace the progress of a female protagonist—Andrea and Blanca, respectively—as they confront the rites of passage typical of young women in the period presented, and the experiences painted rely heavily on the relationships and encounters the girls find in their paths. The only structural distinction between the novels in this regard is a question of chronological scope; while Andrea’s trials take place over the course of one year, Blanca’s extend between early adolescence—the novel opens when she is twelve or thirteen—and adulthood, and the structural commonality established here is precisely that. Each novel is the narrative rendering of the chronological progress of the young women. In turn, this progress—punctuated by particular, discrete narrative fragments populated by a wide-
ranging collection of ancillary characters—produces considerable thematic similarity
between the novels.

The fragments that represent these different rites of passage create parallel
structures in the novels and will, of course, vary given the disparity in chronological
scope between the novels, but, even in this distinction, the importance of the focus on key
narrative moments is not diminished, as Elizabeth Ordóñez argues:

[. . .] much of contemporary Spanish fiction by women is essentially
archetypal in its conception of female experience, frequently concentrating
the central issues of the individual text on a major life crisis or rite of
passage. (“Reading” 246)

Both girls undergo an arrival, or introduction, to the new worlds they will inhabit, and, in
fact, Blanca experiences multiple recurrences of this introduction in the novel’s circular
action, from her departure from her village Brétema through her ultimate return there.
Her first introduction is to the bishop whose palace serves as a weekly refuge for the
young orphan; she learns from a very early age that Don Atilano will be a paternal figure
and protector during her young life, and the afternoons of sweet snacks and opera become
a consistent locus of memory for Blanca throughout the novel.12 Her next introduction
comes at the convent school, where she is sent because the bishop is convinced, by
several concerned older women of the diocese, that she is too pretty for her own good. It
is here that she meets and connects with her lifelong friend Helena, and a number of the
presentations that occur throughout the novel are only made possible by Helena’s social
standing—her father, Eduardo, is a Galician marquis—or her cavalier attitude toward social norms.

Blanca and Helena experience a number of introductions together, including at the university, in their first professional endeavor as laboratory technicians under professor Arozamena, a nuclear physicist, and at a Galician front during the civil war, but it is always Helena’s willingness to dive headlong into new situations that drives their movement. Andrea, largely responsible for her own progress, especially for her arrival in the city to study, famously swims from the train into the night of Barcelona and presents herself at the house on Aribau Street; she nonetheless remembers herself as “una gota entre la corriente” (13), disempowered and subject to forces beyond her control, before emerging from the station into the evening air. Her first experiences at the house—crumbling, musty, dark and hostile—irremediably mark her relationship to it and to its inhabitants. Though no formal narrative setting is provided for it, Andrea also moves into other orbits like the university, and, much like her counterpart in Mayoral’s novel, she becomes attached to a close friend against whom she feel incapable of comparing. Ena pulls her into a social atmosphere she otherwise would have ignored, and, according to the optimistic reading of the novel’s conclusion, carries her off to a world of new possibilities in Madrid. Ena’s motives, not entirely based in the sanctity of female friendship, introduce the next structural parallel between the two novels.

Both Andrea and Blanca find themselves thrust into the world of interpersonal relationships in the initial pages of the novels, though it overstates the case to say that
either comes to this formative moment in an organic, individual way; this particular brand of introduction is nonetheless a characteristic rite of passage around which each novel is organized. Ena and Helena, in the experiences of Andrea and Blanca, respectively, demonstrate a propensity for seeking out the company of men from an earlier age than their counterparts, and this precociousness manifests itself most overtly during early encounters to which Andrea and Blanca are spectators. Ena takes Jaime as a boyfriend, leaving Andrea to play the role of companion and chaperone on their day trips out of town, and later, plying all of her considerable charms, she avenges her mother’s shame—a failed relationship with Román years before—while Andrea merely observes and attempts to decipher her friend’s behavior. Andrea, beset by familial strife and shame for the poverty of her condition, nonetheless entertains the attention of some of the young men she meets after becoming friends with Ena.\(^\text{13}\)

In the earliest, most innocent iterations of these secret meetings in *Recóndita armonía*, Blanca is left frequently to play sentry for Helena’s trysts on the horse trails near her family’s estate: “Y así fue. Durante varias semanas recibí clases de equitación y, tan pronto fui capaz de sostenerme con cierta soltura en un caballo, me convertí en su celestina” (71). As the novel advances, Blanca is increasingly likely to keep her attractions and relationships to herself, and Helena, unashamed and unrepentant in her conquests, constantly chides her friend while at the same time envying her capacity to generate real and meaningful relationships with men. For her part, Blanca is no less likely than Helena to become infatuated or fall in love—her love for Helena’s father Eduardo, reciprocated but ultimately impossible, is one of the central narrative threads
across the novel—though her manner of engaging relationships is far more interiorized than is Helena’s. Participation in and observation of these relationships represent only one variation, however, in a larger category of these rites of passage; as Ordóñez argues, two of the central structural axes of fiction by women in Spain are rites of passage and crises. In both Nada and Recóndita armonía, these crises are incorporated into the progress of the standard rites of passage, and help introduce the thematic commonalities that connect the novels.

Andrea steps from one crisis to the next throughout Nada; these run the gamut from the intensely interiorized and psychological, like her fever-induced dreams or her endless worry about the poverty of her existence, to the overtly physical and extrinsic, like her shadowing Juan into the barrio chino or the hunger that gnaws at her after Angustias’s departure. The juxtaposition of the external and the psychological effects of the war underpin the impact of Laforet’s appearance as a novelist in the 1940s, as Catherine Davies notes:

First, it [Nada] undermined the triumphalistic rhetoric of the victorious Right—the boastful claims of a return to order and contentment—by revealing the underside of Spanish society, the misery and dreadful psychological scars caused by the War. The novel focuses on interior spaces of the shattered home and dramatizes the drawn-out, tortured self-destruction of the Spanish family [. . .]. (186)
Most of the crises that Andrea experiences are a conflation of the external and the psychological, and the extended passage detailing Barcelona’s celebration of Saint John’s Eve, the summer solstice celebration of late June, is an example of the narrative integration of the interior and exterior worlds. Before returning to the house on Aribau, Andrea spends a final afternoon with the “bohemian” friends of Pons—with whom she has felt most comfortable and established a certain rapport—and as they depart, he invites her to spend summer vacation with him and his family, and invites her to the party for his saint’s day. The possibilities presented by such an offer—a potential resolution of her social awkwardness and ostracism, solutions to an external crisis—are tempting, though immediately the interiorization of the narrative reveals the strains on Andrea’s inner life:

Sentí al mismo tiempo que le decía esto a Pons como un anhelo y un deseo rabioso de despreocupación. De poder libertarme. De aceptar su invitación y poder tumbarme en las playas que él me ofrecía [. . .], fugada de aquel mundo abrumador que me rodeaba. Pero aún estaba detenida por la sensación molesta que el enamoramiento de Pons me producía. (188)

Andrea, lost in determining whether or not to accept Pons’s invitation—naively and fantastically, it seems, contemplating Cinderella-esque gowns and the idea of her first dance, ever, with a man—returns to the house on Aribau amid “el hechizo que tiene esa noche única” (189), and confronts yet another external crisis, related to the labyrinthine relationships woven between and among the other inhabitants of the house.
On the balcony, observing the bonfires and celebrations below in the street, she becomes a witness to another verbal battle between Gloria and Román, during which the details of their history, intermingled with that of Juan, are revealed. This knowledge, in turn, sends Andrea into another contemplative state, which presents the rhetorical question that, as John Kronik posits in “Nada y el texto asfixiado: Proyección de una estética,” connects Andrea’s narrating self to the character she narrates; more importantly though, the question highlights the tension explicated here, between the external and internal crises confronted by the protagonist: “¿Quién puede entender los mil hilos que unen las almas de los hombres y el alcance de sus palabras?” (194). The result of this contemplation is a vertiginous sprint through Barcelona with no other purpose than to find her friend Ena; she cannot even identify what it is she wants to tell her, and as she wanders the fragrant streets of the Bonanova, she runs through the emotions—love, affection, anger, and jealousy, among the many—that have defined her relationship with Ena. Standing before the gate of the house where Ena is celebrating with her family, Andrea, suddenly startled by the appearance of Ena’s younger brother, manifests in a physical way the confused and often manic responses she offers in these moments of crisis: “Eché a correr a mi vez, sin poderlo remediar, huyendo de allí… Me reí de mí misma cuando me hube recobrado; pero ya no volví a esa verja” (196). As she battles hunger, an aggressive and unwelcoming home, the pressures of her social and academic lives, and the other extrinsic difficulties in her life, Andrea struggles equally evaluate her own understanding of those events, from both the perspective of her 18-year-old self and that of her narrating self. The answer to the aforementioned rhetorical question, both for
what it says and what it hides, namely that her narrating self has now begun to understand, is instructive: “No una muchacha como era yo entonces” (194).

Blanca, throughout *Recóndita armonía*, battles similarly to integrate her interior life with that of the world around her and inevitably suffers moments of crisis; much like the difficulties faced by Andrea, Blanca faces upheavals that she herself generates and others that are imposed on her. The first of these obstacles, and one that is a constant touchstone in attempts to evaluate herself, is her being an orphan. This empty space and the atypical childhood that results from it frequently affect how she relates to the world, most especially with regard to family relationships: “Las circunstancias de mi niñez me hacían ver las relaciones familiares con una distancia que acentuaba sus aspectos negativos” (59). When she first meets Helena’s family, however, she encounters one of the primary difficulties that will problematize her relationships with men during the entire sweep of the novel: Helena’s father, Eduardo. Eduardo is, for Blanca, the personification of manhood, and their first meeting is etched into her memory, despite the difficulties this might cause in her friendship with Helena, and psychological battle that it presents to her ideas of fathers to that point:

Desde mi perspectiva infantil, el padre me parecía un tirano al que todos los miembros de la familia temían y engañaban a un tiempo. [. . .] La idea de casarme y tener que vivir a expensas de uno de aquellos seres barrigudos y ordenancistas me llenaba de congoja. (59-60)
Eduardo, however, becomes for Blanca the ideal of man, and reinforces her contention that, in her life, Helena always presents her with unexpected insights that offer a different perspective: “Eso siempre me ha pasado con Helena: un comentario suyo me hacía ver las cosas de una forma distinta” (43). If not for Helena’s invitation to the polo club—where Eduardo teams with other aristocrats, including Alfonso XIII—Blanca could never have experienced the moment that would almost entirely shape her vision of masculinity: “Me pareció el hombre más atractivo que había visto en mi vida: guapo, elegante [. . .]. En fin, aquel día Eduardo rompió mis esquemas sobre lo que era un padre y, en general, sobre el sexo masculino” (57-8).

Blanca, inseparably accompanied by Helena between her teenage years and her mid-thirties, can escape the immediate difficulties of her feelings toward Eduardo by attending university in Madrid, living in the Residencia de Señoritas de María Maeztu, and, upon completing their programs of study, the women remain in the capital to work as laboratory assistants for a prominent physicist. But even in imposing a significant geographical distance, Blanca is unable to quell the disquiet in her life, most especially those crises that are born of the intimate relationship she shares with her friend. Professor Arozamena, who according to Helena, “Es un ser excepcional. Un genio…” (113), is a conflation, in Blanca’s eyes, of Oppenheimer and the Marquis de Sade; both she and Helena are simultaneously the professor’s lovers, and the distinction in his behavior serves as another indication of the diametric opposition of their characters. Helena cannot hide her awe for the professor’s claims of changing “[. . .] el modo de vivir de la Humanidad” (109), but Blanca is less impressed by his pedantic pronouncements;
nevertheless, both girls become not only his primary assistants on projects surrounding
the production of atomic energy, but also competitors in a closely-formed love triangle.
The professor and Blanca meet in his apartment and she uncovers the more tender aspects
of his personality during languid afternoons, but Helena draws out the tortured, sadistic
aspects in her meetings with him, which only take place in his office and are
characterized by aggressive and violent, albeit consensual, sexual encounters. This
distinction proves divisive for the women, most especially when, contaminated by a
radiation leak in the lab and moments from death, Arozamena looks into Helena’s face,
but is only able to summon Blanca’s name.

The revelation of the professor’s connection to Blanca and the outbreak of the
civil war combine to end the protagonists’ time in Madrid, but cannot impede the
imposition of yet another moment of crisis; Eduardo invites them to return to his estate to
protect them. In her return to Brétema, Blanca, surrounded by the native comforts of
Galicia, nonetheless enters a crisis to which, Helena claims, she has been prone her entire
life. This state of being, which Helena dubs “Zanatismo,” is a mixture of disengagement
and tranquility derived from Thanatos,¹⁶ and leads Blanca to withdraw even from those
closest to her:

El zanatismo es, fundamentalmente, un estado de paz, de quietud.

Desaparecen las apetencias y lo único que perdura es un vago deseo de
evaporarse, de diluirse en la nada; sin dolor, por supuesto. Y con la
apetencias desaparecen también las inquietudes: no se siente, ni se anhela,
ni se añora, ni se teme nada. Es un sosiego total en el que sólo persiste [. . .] el deseo de perder la conciencia [. . .]. (155)

Helena, accustomed to travel, to being entertained, and easily bored by routine and habit, cannot entirely understand Blanca’s devotion to “[. . .] la tranquilidad de lo conocido, el placer de repetir cada tarde lo que ya sabía [Blanca] de antemano que era placentero” (155). For Blanca, however, restlessness and impatience are traits that define Helena, and in these self-perpetuating bouts of psychological struggle—the death of the professor, the outbreak of the civil war, the death of her paternal figure Don Atilano, the departure of Helena for the United States after the end of the war—she attempts to disconnect herself from the practicality of everyday life. Helena, throughout their life as friends, never allows this state to last very long; indeed, Helena—pushed by a consistent desire to leave behind “una huella perdurable de su paso por la vida” (52)—is the impulse each time the women depart on a new adventure or change the direction of their lives. After the professor’s death and the outbreak of the war, Helena decides that, despite her father’s neutrality and willingness to provide them safety, the two should complete a short nursing course and volunteer at a field hospital.

Both Andrea and Blanca encounter both types of crises throughout the novels—the external provoked by circumstances and other presences in their lives, and the internal driven by each’s unique psychology—and in the attempts at resolving each obstacle, a number of parallel thematic threads emerge between Nada and Recóndita armonía. These thematic frameworks are institutional, and all too familiar to scholars of modern
Spanish letters. Family histories and the dynamics of intergenerational interactions are central to narrative development, and the presence of religious, educational, governmental, and military authorities demarcate the environments in which each of the young women can, initially at least, circulate. Many of the novels’ conflicts, moreover, derive directly from the protagonists’ resistance to or outright rejection of those institutional limitations. The historical circumstance of each novel’s publication impacts heavily the degree to which this rejection can be realized explicitly, but the subtlety of resistance in Laforet’s novel—published and awarded during the era of the fiercest censorship of the Franco regime—serves as a forerunner to Mayoral’s novel published fifty years later, and informs the apparent effortlessness with which the latter’s female characters ignore traditionally understood institutional norms.

Nonetheless, institutions and the limitations they place on young women loom throughout both novels and define the experiences of Andrea and Blanca. John Kronik’s analysis details the claustrophobic aesthetic of Laforet’s novel, but what connects Nada most closely to Recóndita armonía is not the enclosure he analyses exhaustively, but rather the instances—numerous, despite their relative insignificance or Pyrrhic results—in which each protagonist defies typical behavior and challenges those expectations despite the potential for serious consequences. This is not to say, of course, that either novel is the triumphal march of a female protagonist set on the task of vindicating women and the feminine in post-civil war Spain; the transgressive acts performed by Andrea and Blanca are as likely to succeed as to fail, their consequences are both expected and unintended, and neither—explicitly or by suggestion—claims the mantle of defender of
the gender. Most centrally, these acts of rebellion or rejection represent, according to Elizabeth Ordóñez, the crux of archetypal readings of Spanish women’s fiction, and allow for multiple readings and mutable understandings, revealing what she calls the “raw tension between archetypal patterns and their rendering in the female text” (“Reading” 247):

[. . .] those rites of passage traditionally central to the female experience [. . .] provide the repetitive patterns of women’s fiction in Spain, and each instance is best read as a part of a systematic structure or system. The reader may then determine whether these archetypal rites are accepted or rejected, a source of joy or anxiety, a cause of alienation or integration [. . .]. (“Reading” 246-47)

Both Andrea and Blanca represent educated, incipiently independent, and highly introspective characters, and in their movements within and around certain restrictions, their unique and exemplary nature as female narrator/protagonists becomes clear. The most evident institutional presence for Andrea is the family, and the intensity of its imposition in her life appears immediately on the novel’s opening. As she tentatively approaches her family’s once-stately home on Aribau Street, trying to square her childhood memories with her ruinous new environs, a simple and devastating understatement upon the door’s opening introduces definitively what the novel will specify within its pages: “Luego me pareció todo una pesadilla” (15). The dynamics at the house on Aribau Street have been exhaustively rendered in Kronik’s work and by
many other critics; each figure there and the physical space of the dilapidated house itself combine to form the repressive apparatus from which Andrea repeatedly attempts to escape. The grandmother’s senility and the decaying portraits stacked around the apartment represent the progressive advancement of the rapidly fading family history, in part due to the wear of time and toil and in part to a consistent unwillingness to face the new reality of the family’s circumstance. Juan and Gloria should, in the more traditional configuration promoted actively by the regime, represent the proud continuation of the family line and symbolize the sanctity of the family structure, but her status as outsider to the family, his violence toward her and the others in the house—with the odd exception of Andrea—and their combined ignorance of the wellbeing of their child, all point up the decadence that plagues the family and traps Andrea throughout her time there.

Angustias and Román, opposing poles in their treatment of Andrea and in their conception of how she should be allowed to live, suggest equally contrasting worldviews, but restrict her movement nonetheless. Angustias’s vision of life as an exercise in endless abnegation and passive-aggressive self-righteousness clearly clashes with Andrea’s illusions upon arriving in Barcelona. In this way, and in her role as the executor of Andrea’s administrative affairs, Angustias exercises a level of control over her niece that she is loathe to cede; even as she prepares to depart for the convent, her venom is hardly contained, and her warnings leave little doubt of her lack of confidence in Andrea: “¡Ya te golpeará la vida, ya te triturará, ya te aplastará! Entonces me recordarás… ¡Hubiera querido matarte cuando pequeña antes de dejarte crecer así!” (96).
Though Angustias is a seemingly omnipresent, menacing figure observing and cataloguing Andrea’s movements, the shadowy, lingering presence of Román imposes equally. His inaccessibility—more aptly, accessibility at his whim—initially generates a great attraction for Andrea, and this estimation is not diminished by the fact that he provides her occasional luxuries like tobacco or that his garret provides a nearby escape from the house without provoking the ire of Angustias for exploring Barcelona alone. The revelations of Román’s entanglements with both Ena and her mother eliminate her only escape, and having sought refuge from the suffocation of the house with Ena, she understands that he, Román, is responsible for the rift in their friendship. If, upon her arrival, Barcelona is for Andrea the trove of adolescent illusion, it is her family that moves to deny her access to it.

Throughout the novel, Andrea attempts to avoid these obstacles rather than run headlong through them. She spends much of her time at the university or with the friends she gradually accumulates, and even prefers solitary constitutionals in the city to any return to the house on Aribau. Her confrontations with the other inhabitants of the house typically consist of her observing the recriminations and violence, or serving as the target of one diatribe or another. She quietly absorbs the feeble attempts at mediation by her grandmother and the desperate explanations of a battered Gloria; she silently accepts Angustias’s lectures on proper behavior for a young lady of her station, and sits mesmerized by Román’s music, tolerating his condescension. The endless repetition of these exchanges indicates the omnipresence of the family as a limiting institutional presence for Andrea, but it is not the only one. In a number of encounters outside the
house, Andrea faces other, less detailed, less overt instances in which she endures limitations imposed from without. One of the most obvious, exposed in her relationship with Angustias, is the church; despite the evident paradox of Angustias’s being a woman, Andrea’s aunt embraces the patriarchal and punitive teachings of the mid-century Spanish church, and eternally attempts to impress its apostolic and incontrovertible worldview upon her niece. In the social sphere, a different experience demonstrates the parallel patriarchal structure; when Andrea rejects the advances of Gerardo, his lecture on how a young woman ought not “andar suelta y loca” (137)—followed by his explanation of how, with him, things are different—reveals again the unrelentingly hypocritical paternalism against which Andrea bristles.

Institutions and the limitations they attempt to impose appear in nearly every episode that makes up Recóndita armonía, but Mayoral’s approach to them demonstrates the sea-change that occurs between 1944 and 1994; in Mayoral’s novel, these bodies are almost decorative, placed throughout the novel as straw-men to be cut from their perches and burned to ash. More precisely, Mayoral’s practical approach to gender relations, her recognition of the concrete inequalities typical of the time period, and her acceptance that those historical circumstances cannot be altered ex-post facto, for as unjust and antiquated as they might seem, allow her protagonists to assume identities approximating superwomen in their fearlessness and unwillingness to yield in the face of ceaseless limitation and chauvinism. Rosalía Cornejo Parriego presents this worldview, underscoring the fact that Blanca and Helena, far from suffering under the weight of these institutions, paradoxically thrive both despite and because of them:
Helena y Blanca no están condenadas al confinamiento y a la exclusión, sino que poseen un espacio público y social bien establecido en el que gozan de la protección de representantes de instituciones típica y tradicionalmente masculinas como el Obispo (la iglesia), el marqués de Resende (la aristocracia), el profesor (la ciencia) y el general (el ejército).

(17)

For Blanca, the establishment of such positions in these exclusive and exclusionary realms is neither a birthright nor easily obtained; as an orphan, the depth of her connection to the church is incidental, generated only by the loss of her parents. Her uncle, a decrepit canon smelling of the ink from his daily reading and writings on theology, serves as her legal guardian and de facto paternal figure, but her weekly meetings with the bishop, Don Atilano, represent the warm, supportive home she remembers most and best as the novel advances.

Don Atilano provides much of Blanca’s education as a young girl through works like Tosca and La Traviata, and supports her in every step of her formal education; rather than a dogmatic and retrograde Catholicism that could be expected as a depiction of the church at that time in Spain, then, the institution appears refined and progressive, and it provides Blanca with the knowledge and opportunity to pursue whatever path she might choose. The church creates and nurtures her connection to the aristocracy as well; she meets and becomes friends with Helena at the convent school to which the bishop, hoping that educational opportunity will offer her a better life, sends her. Neither girl—
they are both fifteen when they meet—is overly pious; Blanca learns at a young age, from
the women of her village and, especially from a servant-woman at the bishop’s palace, to
temper doctrine with practice, while Helena’s family provides her an entire spectrum of
belief from her mother’s hallucinatory visions of heaven itself to her father’s atheism.
The church in *Recóndita armonía* lingers, certainly, as the institutional arbiter of
normative behavior, setting boundaries and attempting to impress its particular
perspective, but the specific representatives of it, most notably Don Atilano, also
repeatedly defy this characterization. Blanca and Helena, empowered by their education
and those who provide it, refuse to conform to the institutionally-accepted definition of
womanhood, what Blanca refers to as, “[…] lo que para cualquier chica de la época era
la aspiración normal: tener novio, casarse, formar una familia” (105).

Upon arriving at the university, both Blanca and Helena ingratiate themselves
with professor Arozamena, and this academic connection introduces them, as his
preferred pupils, to the institution of the university. Arozamena’s decision to abandon
academia, and the women’s decision to follow him, to work in a laboratory setting funded
by the government allows them access to the network of scientists around the world
working to solve the nuclear puzzle in the first half of the twentieth century. One
indicative segment of the novel takes place in the lecture hall during the first days in
which the young women begin trying to find an agreeable course of study; they have
heard that Arozamena is known for the condescending and dismissive way in which he
treats students, and Helena decides—implicating Blanca as well, naturally—that
confronting his eminence will most effectively gauge his receptiveness to both their
studying with him and her charms. To his curiosity about why they might study physics, Helena explains that she doesn’t know and that there are any number of other physicists with whom they might do so, and Blanca responds by refusing to tell him; the women’s attitude toward him evidently impresses him, and they soon become his laboratory assistants. The resulting overlapping relationships during the early 1930s—professionally among the three, and personally between the professor and each of the women—occupy a significant portion of the novel’s first part and, in small measure, reflect the shifting role of women during the Second Republic.

The final institution noted by Cornejo Parriego is the military, and when the war begins, the young women—despite Eduardo’s protestations—abandon the solitude of the estate for a field hospital to work as volunteer nurses, and their knowledge of English grants them the trust and protection of no less than a colonel, elevated after their initial meeting to general, in Franco’s army. As nurses, they do little to defy traditional women’s roles, and they in fact relish the mild fame their identity at the camp concedes them; when they reach fronts as far away from Madrid, soldiers inquire whether or not Helena is the Angel, an identity created and nourished by her relationship with a young injured soldier, of which word has spread. By presenting the pair in both traditional and resistant capacities to each of these institutions, Mayoral reinforces the pragmatic approach to gender relations for which her work is noted—in Cornejo Parriego’s work, to cite only one example—and distances herself from more reactionary forms of feminism. Blanca and Helena are independent, capable women whose economic, professional, and social mobilities render almost any gender-based obstacle moot, as evidenced over the
entirety of the novel’s sweep, but who at the same time accept that certain functions—
that of an attentive, caring nurse, for example—fall to women in their world.

Mayoral’s incorporation of this perspective, anathema in some feminist circles, is
fairly common among female authors in Spain, and should not be considered as a
rejection of feminism or as a willful ignorance of those issues, as Ofelia Ferrán and
Kathleen Glenn note in the introduction to *Women’s Narrative and Film in Twentieth
Century Spain* (2002):

> Not all the narrative and cinematic works discussed are feminist, and even
> those that are do not conform to a rigid, monolithic concept of feminism.
> There are, after all, many ways of thinking and representing feminism.
> Even women writers who reject the label “feminist,” as many
> contemporary Spanish female authors do, can be seen to be contributing to
> a feminist project, and the practices that contribute to such a project do,
> indeed, vary greatly. (xvii)

Ferrán and Glenn enumerate the cases¹⁸ that require more detailed historical and social
contextualization; Mayoral’s fiction unabashedly participates in these projects by
employing protagonists almost entirely unencumbered by traditional norms whose
actions and interactions mark over and again the shift in understanding of the female and
the feminine that occurs during the Democratic period. One of the major thematic
components of this shift, as shown above, is the systematic, if occasionally revisionist,
resistance to institutional limitation; returning to Pérez’s contention, however, the
connection between Mayoral’s work and that of earlier women writers like Laforet presents a strong case for the existence of a continuity of female authorship rather than the occasional and exceptional case. This presence of such a continuity is buttressed further by another thematic parallel that ties these particular authors.

The other broad thematic similarity that emerges from these crises, after that of institutional limitation, is that of female friendship; the dynamics of friendship in both Nada and Recóndita armonía derive, evidently, from the protagonists and their capacity to generate relationships, but as several critics have observed and detailed, the specific workings of female friendships deserve discrete attention. In a 1989 essay on the works of several nineteenth-century female authors, Mayoral herself points up the depth of female friendship as cultivated among this sorority and its readers:

Acosadas en tantos frentes, las mujeres escritoras se refugian en la amistad mutua, apoyándose y animándose a seguir en la tarea iniciada, y también en la amistad de otras mujeres que sí estiman su labor. [. . .] La amistad aparece en estos poemarios como un sentimiento complejo, profundo y lleno de matices. Algunas no dudan en considerarlo superior al amor.

(10)

This seeking of acceptance in shared experience is a critical component in the women’s writing and in their ability to continue working despite an intellectual and cultural environment hostile to the introduction of women’s voices, an environment that only permits women writers to work within, “[. . .] un falso unvierso ‘femenino,’ de buenos
sentimientos, de flores y de pájaros, de cursilerías” (10). Among the group are canonical, respected authors—Carolina Coronado, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Rosalía de Castro—and lesser-known, marginal figures—Ángela Grassi, María Josefa Massanés, Amalia Fenollosa—all of whom worked to establish, “[.. .] para las mujeres un derecho que los hombres se habían atribuido desde tiempos inmemoriales: el derecho de las medianías a participar en la vida cultural del país” (9). In both Nada and Recóndita armonía, the protagonists rely on relationships of this type; Andrea and Blanca, timid young women defined by introversion and penchants for solitude, are introduced to their counterparts early in each novel, and their survival in new and unfamiliar surroundings requires this dynamic of mutual support.

Both Andrea and Blanca are initially solitary, withdrawn figures whose formative circumstances have fashioned very particular personalities unlikely to seek out companionship. Andrea avoids her contemporaries at the university because of embarrassment at both her provincial origin and relative poverty; Blanca lives comfortably in relative terms, but her being an orphan and her spending most of her time in and around the contemplative life of rural Galician clergy drive an interiorization highlighted throughout the novel. Ena and Helena—again, Andrea and Blanca’s foils, respectively—initiate the relationships between the girls. Ena observes Andrea from a distance with a sort of curious amusement; she takes Andrea to be an ugly duckling, and only at Ena’s approach do the two become friends. In much the same way, Helena’s impetus drives the establishment of the relationship between the girls at the convent school. This relationship, however, is not nurtured at a distance; in the close quarters of
the convent, Blanca and Helena meet and define their relationship in the most intimate of terms from the beginning, and this closeness and connection only grows over time.

In both cases, the protagonists find themselves attached to young women largely their opposites; María Camino Noia has noted this with respect to the fiction of Mayoral, but her observation can be applied equally to Nada: “Este tipo de personaje femenino, inteligente y fuerte, la heroína de los distintos relatos, tiene su contrapunto en mujeres que representan otro tipo de valores y están dotadas de cualidades opuestas” (39). The opposition is physical, social, familial, and economic, that is, total; Andrea and Blanca are timid, dark-completed orphans of scarce means, while Ena and Helena are gregarious, slender, blonde daughters of established, wealthy families.

Both Ena and Helena possess and demonstrate the characteristics for which the protagonists yearn. Neither Andrea nor Blanca expects that anyone of such an elevated social standing will take interest in them, and the offers of friendship extended by both Ena and Helena are initially surprising, but will, as each novel advances, play foundational roles for the development of Andrea and Blanca. Elena Olazagasti-Segovia, in her analysis of female friendship in Recóndita armonía, cites the critic Laurie Buchanan in highlighting the basic importance of these relationships:

[. . .] female friendships have been seen as arising from a young woman’s need to re-establish the mother-daughter bond and complete the process which should encourage pride in herself as a woman and the development of an autonomous self. (437)
A brief review of the roster of adult female characters in both novels reveals an addled, traumatized collection of souls, in large measure incapable of achieving independence, self-definition, or autonomy, and neither protagonist can draw heavily on those characters for valuable models to emulate. Andrea counts as exemplars her grandmother, Angustias, and Gloria, who are, respectively, an infrequently lucid elderly woman holding memories of a world no longer extant; an overbearing, self-important, and brutal aunt bent on teaching her a social station to which neither she nor Angustias belongs; and a poor, young woman whose self-worth is derived from her degraded beauty and undercut by constant abuse. Blanca, alternatively, inhabits a world of men; her standards of behavior are the bishop most dedicated to her education and, despite his great affection for her, unable to be father, spiritual father, and mother; her great uncle who barely cares for himself, and can hardly be bothered with her; and, later in her life, professor Arozamena, Eduardo, and Germán, her three love(r)s who in turn adore, abandon, and accompany her. Ena and Helena similarly lack female models, as Ena’s mother loses contact with her daughter throughout the novel, and Helena’s disappears into a mystical haze after a near-death experience. The establishment of the relationships between Andrea and Ena, and Blanca and Helena, initially thrives on what Judith Gardiner has called the intersection of commonality and complementarity; the two pairs of young women complement each other physically, personally, and socially, and each’s need of female contact and support represents their common bond.

The distinction in the relative intensity of the girls’ connections represents one of the major departures between Nada and Recóndita armonía. The former limits the
relationship to an academic year during which the quantity of contact between the girls varies widely in each of the novel’s sections, while the latter introduces the relationship immediately at the outset and never ceases its examination despite the novel’s extending from the girls’ adolescence to their old age. The differences in both chronological scope and regularity of interaction, however, do not diminish the impact of these relationships in the lives of Andrea and Blanca. The tripartite structure of *Nada* roughly defines the general pattern of the particular state of the relationship between Andrea and Ena. The first part presents their introduction and the initial connection that, despite Andrea’s reticence to engage the advances of Ena, will continue throughout the novel. The second part, depicting Andrea’s hunger and Ena’s machinations to exact revenge on Román, presents a separation that tests the limits of the friendship; Ena’s determination and singular focus isolate Andrea, but also drive her to explore other avenues of social interaction and to develop, in Buchanan’s terms, an autonomy of self. The third and final section hints at a definitive separation of the two young women, but concludes with the reunion of the two in an escape from Barcelona that promises opportunity for growth of both individuality and the connectedness of Andrea and Ena. The progress of the relationship in *Nada* shifts broadly across the novel, and each moment of relative intensity—Ena’s chasing Andrea through the rain, or their meeting on the stairs to Román’s apartment, or Ena’s letter at the end of the novel—has as its counterpoint a significant ebbing during which considerable reflection and self-definition can take place.

The connection defined and played out in *Recóndita armonía*, however, hardly flags over the course of the novel. The intensity of the relationship between Blanca and
Helena in *Recóndita armonía* stems from the literal inseparability of the two young women from the very first; in this case, the novel’s structure offers little additional emphasis to the connection because, with the exception of the first and last chapters of the novel, the young women are never apart. There are, of course, moments of frustration and displeasure on the part of one or the other, but these produce at most a brief period of silence, and geographic separation is not a possibility. From the convent school to university, to their first job to the different fronts during the civil war, Blanca and Helena share every moment together; they share academic and professional training, work and travel experiences, loves and lovers, and only with Helena’s decision to abandon Spain after the war do the two separate. In the same way that Ena initiates the friendship in *Nada*, Helena introduces herself upon her arrival at the convent, and sneaks into Blanca’s cell after curfew to talk, to listen to the toast from *La Traviata* on Blanca’s music box, and even to seek refuge from a spider that has ensconced itself above her bed. Blanca’s fearlessness in killing the spider—her playing St. George, defender of helpless maidens, Blanca reminisces—cements their bond, and defines the roles the two will play throughout their relationship. Helena perpetually attempts to ignore the monotony of the present, and looks forward and away to the next possible opportunity, while Blanca routinely concerns herself with the necessary, pragmatic aspects of whichever circumstance faces the two women.

These complementary attitudes function in distinct contexts throughout the novel. As the two attempt to determine a course of study at the university, Helena opts for experimental physics in with the imposing intellect of professor Arozamena, basing her
decision in part on her attraction to his genius, and in part on her desire to change fundamentally “[...] el modo de vivir de la Humanidad” (109); Helena bases decisions on the potentially outstanding results of her choices. Blanca is apprehensive, however, wondering how physics will allow her take the steps necessary to fulfill her goal of returning to Brétema and becoming a pharmacist. As is most often the case, Blanca agrees and falls in line with Helena’s desires, but frequently, Blanca’s practicality causes difficulty for the relationship and generates unintended consequences. When, for example, Helena advocates satisfying the professors sexual desires—echoing to her friend his patronizing term for the girls, “virgenes hipócritas,” though neither is perfectly chaste—she believes that she is serving the greater good of humanity; Blanca’s acquiescence to her suggestion and his advances does indeed fulfill a very practical purpose: the maintaining of domestic tranquility in the laboratory. As Helena tries to ensure the future benefit of all humankind by making the professor as comfortable as possible in his working environment, however, she fails to recognize that Blanca generates a real, sincere attraction from the professor. This tension—between Helena’s romantic, unfettered vision of her importance in the world and Blanca’s prosaic, sensible worldview—is the constant in the novel; certain situations, in this case the issues surrounding the professor, occasionally impose distance between the two women, but none of the intervening stresses carries a significant enough impact to sever the bond between them. Simultaneously complementary and contrasting identities, and the consequent interplay of them, define characterization executed in Recóndita armonía; Lynn Talbot, a year before the publication of the novel, marks this as a persistent theme.
in Mayoral’s fiction to that point, as Blanca and Helena both “[. . .] exemplify independent, free-thinking women who achieve ambitious goals in areas that society often considers masculine” (456).

These two broad thematic lines, of institutional limitation and female friendship, are closely tied, and lead to the final structural element—the last archetypal rite of passage—connecting Nada and Recóndita armonía. In the course of the relationships, Ena and Helena are the drivers of the establishment and development of each friendship, while Andrea and Blanca demur initially and follow along as the novels develop. Nevertheless, the development of the relationships necessitates the concomitant individual maturing process of Andrea and Blanca—again, much more pronounced in Mayoral’s novel than in Laforet’s—precisely because of their experiences with their friends. The intimacy of the relationships both softens the blow of the unfamiliar circumstances and the awkward interactions, and protects the two more timid girls from potentially more negative outcomes. Paradoxically, the presence of Ena and Helena both introduces Andrea and Blanca to, and insulates them from, situations which might otherwise have driven both outsiders deeper into their already considerable introversion. What in early stages of the relationships constitutes revelation and protection develops over the course of each novel into both increased independence of thought and action, and companionship in shared experience. Sheltered in the knowledge of this connection and availed of the maturity nurtured by it, both pairs of young women take decisions about their futures that defy perceived wisdom and standard mores, and in so doing, encounter and overcome repeated obstacles presented by the institutional presences
surrounding and attempting to regulate them. Each novel encounter allows a new
opportunity for independence, and after initial trepidation, its conquest only cements their
willingness to face the next. Andrea flees the crumbling house on Aribau after months of
resisting first the autocracy of Angustias and later the numerous lunacies of her family
and the poverty of her condition, while Blanca can hurdle every conceivable institution,
from the church to the military to the Franco regime itself, once empowered by Helena’s
unending emotional, psychological, and financial support. The resultant developmental
processes of separation from the known and resistance to expectation culminate in the
final structural parallel between the two novels.

The structural similarities between Nada and Recóndita armonía, formed around
particular rites of passage, the introductions, interpersonal relationships, and crises in
both novels, conclude in similar fashion: an escape by the protagonist from her
circumstance. The escape for Andrea is, in large part, literal and practical. The
decadence of the house on Aribau—Angustias’s departure, Román’s suicide, Juan’s
hallucinations and Gloria’s consequent fear for her life—concludes with an awkward
feast and her departure the following morning. Upon receiving a letter from Ena, she
bolts at the opportunity to abandon Barcelona for the renewed possibility of a different
life: “La carta de Ena me había abierto, y esta vez de una manera real, los horizontes de la
salvación” (274). Beyond the literal escape in the chauffeured car with Ena’s father,
Laforet provides a subtle intimation of the self-reflexivity that, three decades later,
becomes characteristic in Spanish fiction and a major element of the international
phenomenon of postmodernism²¹:
Me marchaba ahora sin haber conocido nada de lo que confusamente esperaba: la vida en su plenitud, la alegría, el interés profundo, el amor.

De la casa de la calle Aribau no me llevaba nada. Al menos, así creía yo entonces” (275).

The first sentences correspond precisely to the neo-realist mode of fiction—if not to the more particular brand of it, tremendismo—ascendant during the two decades following the civil war; they convey, in a sort of confessional, the intimate inner-workings of the protagonist, whose metonymic value as representation of a larger sector of society is clear. The final sentence, however, strikes a different tone; the split between Andrea-protagonist and Andrea-narrator here becomes evident and defines the meaning of her time in Barcelona. At that time, the narrator realizes, she viewed her time in Barcelona as lost, wasted in family squabbles and awkward social encounters of all stripes. Only time and perspective, according to the narrator’s unsubtle implication, allow her to reflect and derive some value from her time on Aribau. The value she ultimately derives, the reader understands, is the broader perspective taken by the narrator in producing the text that constitutes the novel. The implication of self-referential narration, limited to very brief, infrequent intrusions in Laforet’s novel, occupies a much more central role in Mayoral’s novel, and defines the protagonist’s escape in far greater measure than any physical or geographical escape.

The concluding displacement effected by Blanca in the last chapters of Recóndita armonía is both an escape and a return, or, more pointedly, an escape by means of return.
The final chapters of the novel recount the years after the civil war, which impose the definitive separation of Blanca and Helena. In the first and most immediate sense, Blanca returns to Brêtema despite the protestations of Helena, who embarks for the United States. The months following the end of the conflict present, beyond the all-encompassing uncertainty and apprehension of the immediate postwar period, a number of crises for the women to overcome. There are deaths to mourn—of don Atilano, Helena’s brother Carlos and a young soldier known as Pipiolo with whom, for a short time, Helena had for the first and only time in her life played the dutiful novia—as well as the emotional and professional difficulties common to any adult making decisions in those corners of her life. In their sentimental lives, Blanca and Helena find themselves in a similar circumstance to that of their relationship(s) with professor Arozamena; Germán, the conscripted doctor at the first field hospital where Blanca and Helena volunteer, yields to Helena’s physical insistence while experiencing a deeper sense of connection to Blanca. His five-year prison sentence for participation in the Galician Socialist Party, commuted from life or execution by the intercession of Helena’s father, proves too long for Helena to wait. This is, initially, Helena’s explanation for leaving Galicia in search of opportunities in the United States, but in reality, she uses the excuse to nurse the damage done by a second rejection—first by the professor, and second, Germán—by a man who loves Blanca and not her.

Blanca, on the other hand, suffers a painful separation from Eduardo, Helena’s father. When he suggests that the three—he, Blanca, and Helena—leave Spain for the United States after the outbreak of World War II in Poland thwarts their initial plan to
travel the continent, her response demonstrates the level of independence and self-assuredness, ironically largely a product Eduardo’s tutelage and support, garnered in her years with Helena: “¿En calidad de qué?” (248). Blanca, unwilling to perform the role of kept woman, and Eduardo, unable to divorce because of his wife’s religious conviction, cannot reconcile their worlds, and depart on their respective paths by her will: “En todo caso, hubo un momento en el que nuestras relaciones dependieron de una decisión y fue yo quien la tomó” (246). The physical separation between Blanca and Helena, independent of Eduardo’s role in their relationship, represents the greatest difficulty for the women; their relationship remains close despite considerable distance, through phone calls and Helena’s occasional visits, but the impact of the absence is inevitable. Helena leaves for the United States to work first on the Manhattan Project, though she departs, she assures Blanca, before the project turns fully toward the creation of a nuclear weapon; later she takes on the role of advocate of the marginalized segments of the population, despite maintaining the self-centered posture so well known to her friend: “Estoy cansada de feministas y de pobres y de homosexuales. Hace años que todo lo hago por deber y por este empeño mío de dejar una huella, algo que perdure” (275).

Blanca escapes the maelstrom of her life with Helena and returns to Brétema to open her pharmacy and to seek the solitude that her life with Helena never afforded her; she retreats into her work in botanical pharmacology and eventually completes a tome on the medicinal properties of Galician plant life, a project initially encouraged, from her youngest days at the estate, by Eduardo.
The more important volume Blanca authors, however, comes at the behest of Helena, and becomes the novel itself. Helena returns to Brêtema and, after offering accolades on her first book, broaches the possibility of her writing their life, at which Blanca initially scoffs: “Me pareció una idea absurda, porque no veía motivos para una biografía ni me sentía capaz de tal labor” (272). The combination of Helena’s insistence and the revelation of her suffering terminal cancer immediately shift Blanca’s view; in agreeing, Blanca finds the hidden harmony to which the title refers. The literal escape, back to the town where she spent the formative years of her childhood, is redoubled by an escape into writing, and this explicit self-referentiality is one of the primary characteristics that places Mayoral’s novel within the parameters of the postmodern. Through Helena, the author even sketches, however briefly, the informing principles of writing such a story:

[. . .] voy a hacerte unas recomendaciones. Primera: no esperes a ser muy vieja, porque chocharás y se te olvidarán las cosas. Segunda: cuenta la verdad, incluso lo que hicimos mal, y cuenta algún detalle, aunque no sea de buen gusto; los detalles ayudan a entender. (273)

The slippages of memory in the passage of time and the relative truth of any work of fiction are two tensions explored explicitly in the concluding pages of Recóndita armonía—and explored subtly by intimation throughout the novel—that further identify Mayoral’s novel as an exemplary text in the postmodern vein. More central, and introductory to the next portion of this study, are the shifting sites of communication
presented in the novel; throughout the novel, Helena seeks interlocutors in her father and her friend, while Blanca, ever the introvert, collects the lifetime of points of connection and seeks to retell “la verdad, incluso lo que hicimos mal” in what the reader encounters in the novel. As Gonzalo Sobejano has observed with respect to the novel of the 1970s in Spain, the end of the Franco regime witnessed a spate of narratives that grappled openly with the preceding years in both aesthetic and moral terms:

Ir elaborando la novela misma ante el lector, entregarle a éste la novela en su proceso de gestación, autocriticarse como atrífice de la escritura, exigirse y exigir al que lee el máximo de clarividencia y de esfuerzo en la hechura y en la recomposición del texto como forma, son operaciones de higiene estética equiparables y simultáneas a las de saneamiento ético que el largo error dictatorial demanda. (502)

Among the narrative procedures favored in this process, Sobejano holds, is the explicit contemplation of interlocution, through which authors produce texts that begin “[. . .] tejiéndose y destejiéndose en segmentos de pasado, presente o posibilidad futura o fantástica” (503); in this way, Recóndita armonía owes much to oeuvre of Carmen Martín Gaite.

IV

As a work of fiction, El cuarto de atrás (National Prize for Literature, 1978) has garnered a place of privilege in the post-Franco canon, and stands as a manifesto for the literally authoritative recuperation of memory in the years following 1975. Nevertheless,
in identifying and marking the presence of the civil war in contemporary narrative, a 1987 monograph titled *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* serves as a stronger point of comparison; Martín Gaite, covering wide-ranging aspects of womanhood and the construction of femininity during the Franco regime, avails herself of seemingly endless archival resources—from speeches and legislation to general interest magazines and lonely-hearts columns—to expose the project undertaken by the state, the church, and the cultural organs of those two institutions, not only to disempower women, but also to retrodefine the feminine according to a model more suited to the sixteenth century than to the 20th. Eschewing novelistic pretense but maintaining the anecdotal structure and lucid, engaging style of her fiction, Martín Gaite combines documentary evidence with personal reminiscence to posit a pattern of abuse, neglect, dismissal, and insult realized by those institutions charged with the general welfare of the citizenry in the years spanning the immediate postwar period and Franco’s death. The essays are a declarative expression of the necessity of the recuperation of cultural and personal memory, and to execute this task, Martín Gaite looks no further than the national media archive to take advantage of the reams of documentary evidence to bolster her case.

The first chapter establishes the chronological parameters of the study—the first decade and a half after the victory of the Francoist army in 1939—and sets the political, economic, and cultural stage of the time under scrutiny. Titled “Bendito atraso,” the chapter offers a brief biographical sketch of General Franco, multiple examples of the marked inconsistencies of the regime’s official positions, most particularly with regard to the role of women, as well as thorough documentation of the economic, agricultural, and
labor-related difficulties faced by Spaniards in the years following the close of the civil war. For Martín Gaite, the fundamental demonstration of the incongruity of the establishment of the dictatorship comes issued from Pius XII, whose relief at Franco’s victory cannot be understated: “Yo envío una bendición especialísima a las familias de los mártires españoles. De España ha salido la salvación del mundo” (17). Passing quickly over the later difficulties that would arise between Franco and the Vatican and the increasing alienation between the two parties—despite the obvious and crucial social and political roles performed by the church in Spain during those years—Martín Gaite focuses on the centrality of Franco himself in the construction of the national image and ideology: “‘¿Quién se ha metido en las entrañas de España como Franco,’ clamaba ya en 1938 el exaltado Giménez Caballero, ‘hasta el punto de no saber ya si Franco es España o si España es Franco?’” (19). The grandeur and glory of the crusading personage of Franco and his ancient, apostolic, and heroic Spain contrast sharply, of course, with the daily reality of Spaniards generally, and in this tension—between the discursive projection of Spain proffered by the regime and the empirical measures of life for the population—the essays find a point of departure and evidentiary bulwark:

[. . .] nadie podía dejar de reconocer que casi todo el mundo pasaba hambre. Y que no había carbón, ni gasolina.

Es bien sabido que aquellos años, llamados triunfales, fueron de gran penuria económica, de rigurosas sequías, de bajos jornales agrícolas,
de falta de vivienda para la gente que emigraba del campo a la ciudad, de mal funcionamiento de los servicios públicos. (22)

To this brand of experiential and personal history, Martín Gaite adds written and transcribed sources, like the pronouncements noted above, made by Pius XII and Giménez Caballero, to highlight the necessity and importance of both memory and document in the dual processes of recovery and clarification of even the most recent history.

The discursive projects of the regime—as demonstrated in Herzberger’s analysis in the previous chapter—relied on an insistent recasting of daily realities from the smallest scale to the broadest. Rationing and scarcity, two realities all too well-known among Spaniards in the 1940s, were not bemoaned as a woeful inability to provide necessary goods and services on the part of the state; rather, they were obstacles stoically overcome by self-sacrifice and ingeniously circumvented by an enterprising population. Strained relations with the United States and Western Europe during and after World War II were not contentious issues generated by massive shifts in geopolitical and economic realities during that time; rather, Spaniards dismissed the superficial materialism exported from those countries, most especially from the U.S., to strike a blow at the advancing decadence of those societies. These are only two of the incongruities addressed in the opening chapter in an attempt to reveal the disjunction between the discourse of officiаldom and the experience of the general public. After defining the cultural stage in
these broad terms, Martín Gaite delves into the particular experience of young women in
the remaining chapters of her study.

The chapters follow roughly the expected progression of young women in Spain
during the first 15 years of Franco’s mandate. From youth through puberty and into
adulthood, the models and guidance available to girls and young women of those decades
are cited, juxtaposing the often contradictory instruction offered for the navigation of the
physically, psychologically, and socially formative years of that sector of the population.
More indicative than the suggestions and recommendations of the textual sources is the
number of behaviors and attitudes dissuaded and against which those authors rail; the
sententious pronouncements of the government itself, Catholic publications of time, the
Falange and its Sección Femenina, and every other cultural organ subject to the
censorship of the regime—with the notably sardonic exception of Miguel Mihura’s
magazine, La Codorniz—frequently concentrate, in Martín Gaite’s analysis, on
prohibition and forbiddance. The women who accepted the vocation as nuns obviously
obeyed a distinct set of obligations and orders, and those who did not were expected, in
the realm of the laic, to live similar lives of abnegation and submission. Failure for
women, in the Manichaean rhetorical confines of official discourse, was defined as
remaining single: “[. . .] la solterona que no había puesto nada de su parte para dejar de
serlo era considerada con el mismo desdén farisaico que el gobierno aplicaba a los
vencidos” (42). For the women lacking religious dedication, remaining single was
discouraged, even for those young women whose physical appearance was not a primary
attraction, as a romantic advice column from the magazine Destino in 1939 makes clear:
‘La hora de las feas ha sonado… De un tiempo a esta parte, la belleza se
cotiza menos que antes… Las mujeres demasiado guapas están algo
dispuestas a la tontez. Y nuestra fea lee, se educa… Facciones algo
irregulares, eso sí, pero mirada inteligente, cutis cuidado, pelo peinado con
sencillez y buen gusto, algo de pintura sabiamente aplicada. […] La fea
no se resigna: lucha y vence.’ (42)

Preparation, persistence, and guile, necessary attributes of the young woman bent on the
successful execution of the maneuvers of interaction with the opposite sex, highlight the
paradoxes evident in this branch of the discursive project of the regime. Attractive and
not, women were meant to fight valiantly in the battle of gaining the attention and desire
of young men, despite the unquestioned knowledge that, after winning the battle for a
man, the only “skills” required were obedience, submission, and the “silencio entusiasta”
(18), proffered by the Sección Femenina and advice columns of the time.

In predictably paradoxical fashion, young women were expected to perform the
delicate game of “tira y afloja” in their relations with young men, first in meeting and
identifying potential suitors, later, in order to “echarse novio,” and finally, in triumphal
fashion, upon marrying. Young women, according to authors like Carmen de Icaza and
periodicals like Destino, Letras, and Medina, needed to “dar pie” sufficiently in order to
assure the attention of young men, but never so much that they might be considered
“frescas.” In dress and presentation, it was necessary to avoid both being known as a
“niña topolino” and committing anything resembling an “americanada”; proper
comportment required that one neither appear “desairada,” nor give the impression that she might suffer “complejos.” The fine line to be toed consisted of avoiding being overly “lanzada” in social interaction, but being certain not to stray far from regular, acceptable socialization for fear of becoming “una chica novelera.” The goal, ultimately, for these young women was to find the man with whom they could “entenderse” in order into begin attending “la escuela del matrimonio,” the period of courtship during which a proper and acceptable woman, forearmed and forewarned, would “darse a valer” by maintaining a defensive posture, by being certain to “pararle los pies” of the interested party.27 In short, young women in the first years of the Franco regime should recognize their evident superiority—based in earnestness, thrift, and sacrifice—to the superficial inanity of Hollywood leading women like Greta Garbo, Veronica Lake, and Marlene Dietrich, and reject any desire to resemble them in appearance, attitude, or behavior. Pilar Primo de Rivera—daughter of Miguel, sister of José Antonio, and head of the Sección Femenina of the Falange—and Carmen Franco were the models for admiration, emphasizing their simplicity, dedication to traditional Spanish customs, resignation to the cause of the glorious national movement, and supporting healthy, wholesome behaviors that would prepare wives and mothers to acquiesce in silently and enthusiastically rearing a new generation of Spanish men to complete the mission begun by Franco’s victory in 1939.

Much of the first chapters is dedicated precisely to these general definitions of womanhood under the new regime. After underscoring the options for young women—the convent, marriage and intentionally remaining single—and demonstrating the patent
unattractiveness of the third of these, Martín Gaite details options for education, explaining the onerous, compulsory Servicio Social and Pilar Primo de Rivera’s Sección Femenina, and the role each played in defining the mid-century conception of womanhood in Spain. In the Escuela Municipal del Hogar, for example, the Sección Femenina designed a curriculum around the necessary knowledge base for young women:

Bastará con enumerar estas asignaturas, cuyos títulos eran los siguientes:
Religión, Cocina, Formación familiar y social, Conocimientos prácticos, Nacionalsindicalismo, Corte y Confección, Floricultura, Ciencia doméstica, Puericultura, Canto, Costura y Economía doméstica. (59)

Other chapters explain the parameters of fashion and style for young women, and how straying from established norms could lead to a reputation as “lanzada” or “suelta.” An entire chapter, titled “La otra cara de la moneda,” explores the seemingly endless list of everything a young woman should not be: “topolino,” “swing,” “bugui-bugui”; a proponent of the “American way of life,” desirous of “prosperity,” or a user of certain superlatives like “bárbaro,” “formidable,” or “bestial”; anything even resembling a “chiquita standard” or “coqueta.” Any young woman who preferred to define her relationships with men as being “en plan,” or who refused to “dejarse cazar,” was on the wrong path, and her prospects for happiness in normality, considering the documents reproduced by Martín Gaite, were limited or non-existent.28
The remaining chapters delve into the detailed remembrance and documentation of the practical steps in the process of converting acquaintance to dedicated boyfriend and boyfriend to husband, and the keys to attitude and behavior that would make this odyssey a success. Connecting these steps are Martín Gaite’s constant misgivings about the manner in which success was formulated under the regime, and about the processes recommended to young women to achieve those goals. These concerns follow three central lines throughout the essays: the unbending limitation defining women’s roles, the unquestioned double standards in behavior and character between men and women, and the gulf dividing appearance and reality in the education and development of young women in Franco’s Spain. In the educational and professional spheres, Martín Gaite explores in nitid detail the institutionalized limitations faced by women under the regime. After a spate of reforms stemming from the first decades of the twentieth century, especially the brief period of the Second Republic, the reversion to an unrepentant patriarchal social and governmental structures exercised levels of control and limitation on women’s development by both unequivocal edict and broad systemic intimation. Particular, directed curricula were designed to channel young women into what the regime perceived as acceptable pursuits for women, and similarly overt measures were taken, in the process of education and through numerous media presences, to limit professional activity and, ideally in the regime’s view, any activity beyond the responsibilities of wife and mother.
Professional competence in any given field was the arena of men, principally, and of single women, but singlehood was roundly discouraged; throughout the texts examined, Martín Gaite notes that,

[. . .] a las solteras que no van a encontrar marido se las margina o se las caricaturiza, pero nunca se habla con ellas realmente. Las alusiones a su existencia no pasan, en el fondo, de ser una abstracción exenta casi siempre de buena voluntad. Resultaba menos enojoso seguirlas incluyendo en el gremio de las que no han perdido las esperanzas de casarse, lo cual significaba ignorar su verdadera identidad, o mejor dicho tergiversarlas descaradamente. (50)

The erasure of this type of woman from public discourse and the consequent curbing of women’s agency underpin the project of disempowering women and relegating them to the home and little else. The resulting infantilization of Spanish women has as a consequence, according to Martín Gaite, the generation of a female population that sought only “cobijo de una sombra más fuerte” (51), powerless to determine their educational and professional circumstances. The lack of available models from earliest childhood, additionally, compromised the ability of young women, upon confronting interpersonal and romantic relationships, to do so in a self-possessed way; these limitations—personal, educational, and professional—and the resultant lack of competent young women capable of determining their own path in adulthood, are the axis on which Martín Gaite builds her analysis.
Each instance of limitation presented in the essays—from early childhood into puberty and into young adulthood—is riddled with inconsistencies and falsehood, and offered a vision of self, nation, and world delimited almost entirely by men and by women representing the interests of the regime, like the directorship of the Sección Femenina. That is, in every role and circumstance in which a woman might find herself, roles and rules shifted when and in the manner that suited male counterparts—represented by official policy or by a father, potential suitor, or husband—and any inquiry regarding that change was dismissed out of hand as unnecessary and unimportant. The validity of the inquiry—or the obviousness of the inconsistency—mattered little or not at all, and the posture of the regime plainly supported this double standard; women, undereducated and limited in professional preparation, were divested of agency on the basis of their gender and the presumed superiority of masculinity, rooted in an antiquated, Galdosian imaginary:

Pero en la España de los años cuarenta permanecía su vigencia [of nineteenth century models of gender], y eran pocas las voces que se alzaban para protestar del tópico que seguía identificando la dependencia al varón con la única felicidad legítima e idónea para la mujer. (51)

The bliss postulated by such a worldview only became possible, of course, after the successful conquest of an acceptable mate. The necessary preconditions for such a victory, however, reinforced this same double standard, and fostered a superficiality that
emphasized above all the role of dutiful wife and mother apprised of the grandeur of Spanishness:

En nuestros pasos por las dependencias del Servicio Social se nos instaba, efectivamente, a disfrazarnos de Dulcineas, sin dejar de ser Aldonza Lorenzo; [...] ambos disfraces nos pesaban por postizos e irreconciliables. Nos enseñaban, en resumidas cuentas, a representar. No a ser. (64)

Within this very limited field of movement, women were resigned to lives of abnegation defined by the men surrounding them, while at the same time being expected to bear that life with the appearance of dignity, good humor, and contentedness; the wholesale inversion of these three general lines of argument connects these essays to Mayoral’s novel.

Martín Gaite does identify a number of “voces que clamaban en el desierto, testimonios excepcionales” (51); these women refused to be cowed into lives of externally-imposed sacrifice, despite the suspicion and difficulty this position might generate in Spain of the 1940s. Not only did they represent the exception to the overwhelming rule, they were also a danger in the eyes of the regime; these points of view, however uncommon, were, “revolucionarios, por entrar en conflicto con la política del Gobierno y de la Iglesia, aliados en su empeño de reforzar el vínculo matrimonial exaltando sus excelencias y ventajas” (51-2). Nevertheless, this line of thinking did appear, and one example that Martín Gaite reproduces from Meridiano femenino in 1949
provides a starting point from which to begin the final elements of analysis of *Recóndita armonía*:

‘Si quieres interpretar debidamente la soltería, [. . .] dejad de pensar en las solteronas como en mujeres que fracasaron, por alguna razón, en casarse. Y empezad a pensar si no fueron las casadas las que, por cualquier razón, fallaron en no quedarse solteras.’ (51)

Parting from the most basic, definitional aspect of *Recóndita armonía*—that it is a fictional memoir of two educated, professional, and independent Spanish women whose adult lives occur during the civil war and the Franco regime—Martín Gaite’s essays have immediate resonance. Closer attention to other particular aspects of the novel shows not only that the characters, plots, and themes present in *Recóndita armonía* coincide chronologically and work actively refute discursive commonplaces, but also that, by presenting that time period in this way, the novel participates in reframing the construct of historiographic discourse with regard to both the civil war and the Franco regime in the decades of the Democratic era.

V

The first and best examples of the intentional inversion of the roles of women come in the form of the novel’s two protagonists, Blanca and Helena. Before entering the role these two characters play in counteracting the long-term consequences official discourse regarding women, some general characteristics of the novel help construct a foundation on which those characters’ attitudes and behaviors can rest. In the
introduction to her essays, Martín Gaite encapsulates the attitude taken in the initial phase of the Franco regime with regard to history:

Prohibido mirar hacia atrás. La guerra había terminado. Se censuraba cualquier comentario que pusiera de manifiesto su huella, de por sí bien evidente, [. . .] Una retórica mesiánica y triunfal, empeñada en minimizar las secuelas de aquella catástrofe, entonaba himnos al porvenir. Habían vencido los buenos. Había quedado redimido el país. (13)

As a discursive projection of a renewed vision of this particular period, Recóndita armonía fits the mode of revisionist histories in the Democratic era; not only does it posit an exceedingly unlikely and exceptional story—two women whose lives hurdle virtually every limitation and prohibition, public or private, leveled against women’s progress—it also upends a number of received notions about the civil war and the attendant ideologies, the lines of which had become all too well drawn in the intervening half-century.

For every conventional caricature of hereditary nobility taking up the cause of the insurrectionists in order to protect holdings and generational wealth, Mayoral offers Eduardo, a Galician marquis of substantial means whose atheism and progressiveness facilitate the continuing education of his daughter and her friend. For every story from popular lore of a church burned, Mayoral offers a local parish whose only damage is suffered, in graffiti, at the hands of Falangists; moreover, for every clergyman painted as a retrograde protector of a militaristic patriarchy, Mayoral presents don Atilano, a bishop
concerned only with the welfare of the faithful in his charge, and entirely dedicated to the academic and cultural preparation of the young Blanca. To every received and repeated story of Anarchists and Communists rampaging and running roughshod over centuries of established moral values, in *Recóndita armonía* Mayoral juxtaposes the pharmacist Evaristo, murdered and hanged outside his home in retribution for his atheism, and Antón el Cañote, a *maqui* hidden in the hills whose singular concern is that his aging and infirm mother know that he is still alive. And for every jack-booted Francoist officer, Mayoral offers Alonso de Andrade, whose generosity and protection guards Blanca and Helena from serious harm during the war, and whose recommendation also reduces the sentence of Germán when the war is over.

Mayoral thus posits the confusion and depth of detail often lost in the production of sweeping historical narratives, and in the corresponding responses of their opposing ideological actors. The binary opposition constructed in the years following the civil war—the starkly drawn lines of *vencedores* and *vencidos*—generally eschews such detail, or prefers to gorge on well-worn caricatures and tropes to make the case for the perspective of whichever side the text serves. In *Recóndita armonía*, Mayoral presents a pair of protagonists who, in the broadest sense, attempt to bridge that divide through their expressed beliefs and their actions. In a narrower sense, Mayoral reimagines the academic, professional, and personal possibilities for women during the war and the years of the Franco regime, and details the presentation of independent, functional, and contributing roles for women; this combination of concerns—from broad to narrow—represents the principal discursive hallmark of *Recóndita armonía*. 
The academic strictures imposed on women during the Franco regime are of particular concern to Martín Gaite. In the wake of the educational reforms realized during the Second Republic, the state-directed educational system, delegated largely to representatives of the Falange and its Sección Femenina, takes on a clinical definition:

Ahora se recomendaba la prudencia en el estudio, como si se tratara de una droga peligrosa que hay que dosificar atentamente y siempre bajo prescripción facultativa. A los primeros síntomas de que empezaba a hacer daño, lo aconsejable era abandonarla. (68)

Writers in regime-approved magazines like Medina, recognized and granted authority as “Consejeros de la Salud Pública” by the government, defined clearly the role and purpose of women in the academic setting:

No nos parece mal este avatar que tranforma a la inútil damisela encorsetada en compañera de investigación. Pero a nadie más que a ella es necesario un freno protector que la detenga en el momento en que una desaforada pasión por el estudio comience a restar a su feminidad magníficos encantos… […] Y puestos a elegir, preferimos a aquella callada y silenciosa, que nos considera maestros de su vida y acepta el consejo y la lección con la humildad de quien se sabe inferior en talento. (68)

The default position for women presented on multiple fronts by the regime, Martín Gaite amply demonstrates, is of inferiority and subservience; even in the case that a woman
were to possess superior knowledge on a particular topic—an uncited portion of the preceding quote reveals this—it was explicitly preferable that she demur and permit her fellow male students to prove their worth. In direct contravention of this jaundiced position on the dynamics of relations between the genders, Mayoral introduces Blanca and Helena.

The initiation of the friendship between Blanca and Helena takes place in the academic environment—in the cloistered atmosphere of the Damas Negras—and begins unspectacularly for the time, even for the critical eye of Martín Gaite, though this “enseñanza de invernadero”\(^{31}\) gels seamlessly with the regime’s obsessive attention to appearance and explicit dismissal of substantive education for women. Within the realm of respectable young women, recommendable friendships were cultivated in such a way that girls of inferior social or economic standing might aspire to a position higher than their own; Martín Gaite debunks the mythology—as does Mayoral in Recóndita armonía—synthesized in this way in the publications of the regime: “‘Las niñas tienden a codearse con niñas de clase superior, con el ingenuo afán de contagiarse de ese halo de brillantez, apellidos y nutridas cuentas corrientes’” (98). Blanca and Helena initially fit this dynamic perfectly, as the narrating Blanca recalls at the opening of the novel:

Empecé a envidiarla desde el primer instante en que la vi. Helena era rubia y tenía los ojos verdes, justo las dos cosas que yo deseaba más por entonces. Su dinero, su posición social y, sobre todo, su familia, las
enviđé después, cuando la conocí mejor y pude darme cuenta de las ventajas que suponía poseer aquellos bienes. (15)

The academic trajectory that awaits the girls—as is the case in every facet of their lives together—becomes, over the course of the novel, much more complex than the superficial social climbing intimated by sources sponsored by the regime; in short order the two are inseparable, and each learns to accept and forgive the other’s flaws and shortcomings, while both women come to envy the abilities and strengths that develop and reveal themselves during their lives. Theirs, however, is a relationship built on complementarity and reciprocity, as their academic progress shows.

The girls’ departure from the Damas Negras and arrival at the Residencia de Señoritas de María de Maeztu—a move considered, “más apropiado para nuestra formación y más seguro que un colegio religioso, dados los tiempos que corrían” (95), by Helena’s father—takes place, as does their time at university, during the years immediately preceding and those of the Second Republic. Upon entering the university, the possibilities, both for study and in general terms, appear limitless:

¡Había tanto que aprender al margen de cualquier carrera!: arte, literatura, idiomas, y sobre todo nuestra propia realidad social y política, nuestro papel de mujeres en un mundo en transformación, decía [Eduardo], en el que los valores tradicionales estaban siendo sustituidos por otros nuevos.

(97)
The overwhelming force of Arozamena’s personality and genius generate Helena’s insistence on Physics, despite the obstacles evident in such a plan:

Habíamos tenido ya algunas dificultades por ser mujeres y debíamos tomar precauciones. Éramos las únicas estudiantes de sexo femenino en nuestra facultad y, aunque los profesores nos trataban con cortesía y afabilidad, se veía a las claras que para cuestiones profesionales preferían a los varones. (99)

Blanca and Helena, working with an esteemed professor in a highly-prized experimental field, earn endless scholarships and awards for their research into questions atomic, become model students, and thereby contradict nearly every indication of what education for women had long been, and to which it returned only a short time later.

With the outbreak of the civil war—coinciding opportunely with the laboratory accident that ends Arozamena’s life—Blanca and Helena undertake a far more traditional, vocational education that destines them for the front lines of the conflict. Much of their nursing experience occurs in the chaotic swirl of the field hospital and lends them the experiential training necessary to perform that job; the brief course in Brétema offers them the most basic preparation in nursing, but the true education occurs in practice:

A los muertos se les hacía muy poco caso. Algunos estaban tanto tiempo con los ojos o con la boca abierta que cuando ibas a cerrárselos ya no se podía. Pero una se acostumbraba. Lo peor eran las mutilaciones, cuando
la metralla se llevaba brazos, piernas y manos, o vaciaba los ojos. Y cuando se rompían los huesos y los trozos se asomaban a través de la carne. (188)

At the front, the young women are expected to fulfill the stereotypical role of women; when the doctor posted at the hospital—Germán, with whom Helena immediately becomes enamored, and who will later be Blanca’s life-long partner, after a prison sentence for having participated in the Galician Socialist Party—introduces them to their new environment, he warns them, in an evidently condescending tone, that should they feel faint, they should do so without breaking any of the equipment or wasting any of the scarce resources. Blanca’s recollection solidifies their distinction: “No nos desmayamos e incluso hicimos algunas curas de poca importancia nosotras solas” (188).

In each distinct moment of their education, Blanca and Helena defy any and all received notions of the roles of women, even as the overarching expectations shift with each advancing step in their path. It is hardly conventional, for example, that an orphan from rural Galicia aspire to and reach the zenith of the academic world; equally unconventional is the decision, after having studied at that level, to complete a basic nursing course and tempt fate by working in a war zone. Blanca recalls being in Eduardo’s library and hearing the advice, as an enamored fifteen-year-old, that becomes a touchstone for her progress:

Yo salí de esa biblioteca dispuesta a no ser nunca estúpida. Injusta, egoísta, privilegiada, incluso malvada, pero de ningún modo estúpida. [..
Para luchar contra la ignorancia, que era madre de la estupidez, teníamos que ampliar nuestro horizonte cultural, no ponernos límites ni cortapisas: había que leerlo todo [. . .]. (63)

In this way, Mayoral participates in the project proposed by Martín Gaite in her essays, inscribing an independent female presence that inverts the image of obedience and submission. Both protagonists reject prescribed women’s roles and seek out opportunities of their choosing; regardless of societal expectations—that nursing was an ideal profession for women, for example—women availed of individual agency and mutual support did indeed succeed when offered the choice to do so. A similar dynamic functions between the texts of Martín Gaite and Mayoral with respect to professional attitudes.

The standard position of the Franco regime and its affiliated organizations and publications was to de-emphasize and discourage professional activity on the presumption that the roles of wife and mother were the true and legitimate endeavors for Spanish women, as publications like *Medina* were wont to repeat: “La verdadera misión de la mujer es crear hombres valerosos. Saber infundir en los hombres este valor que ellas ni poseen ni deben poseer” (150). Martín Gaite outlines the professional limitations experienced by women throughout the chapters of *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*, drawing out the contradictions evident in this official discourse concerning the participation of women in professional spheres. If women were to work outside the home—an ill-advised step, given the radical importance attributed to the successful
rearing of a new generation of Spanish men—the field of possibilities was skeletal at best. Beyond the defaults of wife and mother and the ever-laudable religious vocation, the roles of secretary and nurse, jobs in which the maternal aspects of a young woman’s character could be plied without infringing the intellectual and technical superiority of men, were ideal.

If a young woman were married, especially to a husband working in a professional capacity, one of her main fears was competition from women of lesser moral character, or, more aptly, it would behoove her to fear such interlopers, as the magazine Senda warned in 1941, after suggesting that a wife be her husband’s secretary:

‘(Si no lo haces)... entrará en tu hogar una mercenaria que tal vez, al vivir esas horas de trabajo y afán, de lucha y satisfacción ante el triunfo, de desaliento ante el fracaso... insensiblemente irá ocupando un puesto en el corazón de él... y quién sabe si entonces empezará a labrarse para vosotros... una infelicidad irremediable.’ (146-47)

Placing aside the irrational, misplaced blame being laid at the feet of wives for imaginary workplace affairs of convenience, this occupation required the particular qualities—organization, obedience, discretion—prized in a wife as well, a coincidence not lost on Martín Gaite: “Ya hemos visto [...] cómo el actor José Nieto—y por supuesto, no era el único hombre que opinaba eso—hacía coincidir a la mujer ideal con la secretaria particular ideal, conocedora de sus gustos y de sus ocupaciones” (146). The other set of qualities—curative, affectionate, and supportive—were frequently on display in the other
professional endeavor deemed acceptable, and even heroic, both during and after the civil war.

Nurses, both working on the lines of Spanish fronts and accompanying the División Azul in Russia during World War II, sacrificed their own safety and wellbeing while healing and protecting brave Spanish soldiers; for this reason, the profession enjoyed a place of privilege as the image of mature patriotism expressed by women: “La mujer fuerte tenía que sorberse las lágrimas y olvidar los ridículos síncopes de las novelas sentimentales, con lo cual volvió a revivir el protagonismo sublime de la enfermera” (151). Contradictory indications abound, of course, in glorifying this minimal number of vocations available to women:

‘Cientos de tocas blancas se inclinaban ante la cama del herido. Sangre y muerte en los hospitales de guerra. Y el ridículo pomo de sales de la abuela arrinconado en algún cajón del viejo tocador. La nieta enfermera sabe que no hay nadie más femenino que su fortaleza.’ (151-52)

Not only does this advice disparage intergenerational knowledge—the regime actively sought to beatify all but the most recent history, especially lauding that history that extolled the wisdom of generations past—it also praises that a woman’s primary quality be strength. Strength of will and unflappability in the face of carnage matter in this environment, clearly, though any expression of these traits in a woman’s personal life, as analysis below will show, was roundly discouraged. Nonetheless, Mayoral presents Blanca and Helena as avatars of independence whose professional experiences and
accomplishments dispel prescriptive roles at nearly every turn, underscoring anew the problematic nature of the worldview of the regime. In their first job together as laboratory assistants to Arozamena, the uniqueness of the professional circumstance of Blanca and Helena is evident, and its correspondence with the short-lived progressive reforms of the Second Republic serves an equally overt purpose. The immediacy and necessity of the war pushes them into a rapid career shift, and both women—first Helena and, at her urging, Blanca—engage their new occupation despite its obvious danger and the reduction in professional prestige. Most notable as part of the discursive project, however, is Mayoral’s positioning of the women within the matrix of political and military allegiances.

The simplest narrative tack—and the most consistently trod in the vencedores and vencidos duality—would see educated, progressive young women struggle in a chaotic, undersupplied Republican field hospital; Mayoral muddies this standard ideological scheme and details the difficulty of establishing a narrative rendering of the conflict. Blanca, an orphan and ward of the church, has as her closest guardian a liberal bishop concerned only with maintaining peace in his diocese; Helena is the daughter of an atheist marquis who opens his house regardless of political affiliation:

Esta casa—les dijo [Eduardo]—mientras esté en pie, la casa de los Resende y, sean cuales sean vuestras ideas políticas o religiosas, sus puertas estarán siempre abiertas para vosotros, aunque yo no esté de acuerdo con esas ideas. Espero que no lo olvidéis. (161)
Each of Helena’s brothers aligns himself with a different band, and before ever finding their way to the front, Blanca and Helena encounter, walking through Brétema, the inversion of the representation of stereotyped ideologies executed by Mayoral in *Recóndita armonía*. Returning from the funeral of Evaristo the pharmacist, the young women are accosted by a group of members of the Falange for their jumbled alliances—to a Republican marquis and a “red” bishop—and the aggression escalates when Helena rebukes the blue-shirted group: “Y a algunos cobardes va a haber que mandarlos al frente, donde están los hombres, y no cacareando al sol como gallinas” (165). When one of the men grabs Helena, Blanca reacts and does “[…] lo que las amas me habían recomendado para casos de emergencia: patada a los cajones, empujón y pies en polvorosa” (166), and the only people to have come to their aid were two workers in a nearby alley. When the moment ends, Helena solidifies the confusion of the moment, which Mayoral tries to detail: “¿Te das cuentas, Blanca? Ellos [the workers] nos defendieron y esos cerdos de los falangistas se atrevieron a atacarnos; esto no hay quien lo entienda” (166).

When Blanca and Helena finally reach the front as nurses, they do so at a Francoist field hospital despite their experiences. Speaking both English and French, the pair becomes immediately useful to the leadership of Franco’s band, but their success as nurses—exercising those same qualities earlier noted: caring, affection, tenderness—garners them, through word-of-mouth among soldiers, a certain renown that spreads throughout the rebel fronts and camps. The steadiest companion in their war odyssey is Germán, himself a complicated ideological and personal puzzle. A member of the
Galician Socialist Party, he accepts working as a surgeon for the insurrectionists—to avoid execution or imprisonment, according to the coronel—and also acquiesces to Helena’s advances, despite his deeper sense of connection to Blanca. This duality, explored in detail below, plays a role in the manner in which the professional lives of Blanca and Helena unfold after the war, though the exploration of this time period appears in the novel in the brief final chapters.

Helena, spurned by Germán, leaves Spain permanently in the wake of the war and pursues two paths; in her omnipresent desire to leave a lasting mark in the world, she first works in the United States on the initial stages of the Manhattan Project. She abandons that professional track, however, for academic work on behalf of underrepresented groups in the U.S., and experience considerable success:

[.. .] ya había una cátedra con su nombre en una ciudad americana y a poco que se esforzase tendría una calle o una plaza en Brétema [ . . .]. Era benefactora de la Humanidad. Se pasaba la vida defendiendo los derechos de todos los marginados; en cuanto Franco desapareciese, y ya no podía durar mucho, yo misma haría las gestiones. (272-73)

Blanca, in keeping with her life-long desire to return to the simple, quiet Galicia of her youth, does so and becomes the new pharmacist in Brétema, even reestablishing the “tertulia de ateos” that ended with the death of don Evaristo and would have been unthinkable under the restrictions imposed during the first years of the regime.35 Mayoral, in splitting her protagonists’ paths between the modernization of Western
society and the intentional rejection of that modernization, represents the duality of ideology based on professional endeavor. A similar narrative process develops throughout the novel based on both personality, in the character traits ascribed to Blanca and Helena, and interpersonal relationships; Martín Gaite’s essays focus most intently on the endless iterations of those relationships between men and women, and their deep resonance in Recóndita armonía is, therefore, a fitting conclusion to this chapter’s analysis.

As with their academic and professional lives, Blanca and Helena connect intimately both to one another and in their relationships with men throughout the time they are together. The central make figures in the life of each woman are the same—Eduardo, Arozamena, and Germán—and the manner in which each relates to these men plays a fundamental role in the development of the novel. For Helena, Eduardo is the doting father willing to provide every possible advantage and opportunity for his daughter, and even for her best friend:

[. . .] él nos escuchaba, se esforzaba por complacernos y, sobre todo, por ayudarnos a superar limitaciones y prejuicios. Eduardo decía: Llegará un día en que no habrá diferencia social ni intelectual entre hombre y mujeres y tenéis que luchar para que ese día llegue cuanto antes. (72)

For Blanca, Eduardo is a lifelong ideal of manhood, and each abrupt and definitive shift in her life—the civil war, Helena’s departing for the United States, her own return to Brétema—accompanies a painful break from him. She and Eduardo never consummate
their mutual attraction—revealed to her by Helena as common knowledge in their circles, much to Blanca’s embarrassment—with more than a kiss, but her initial attraction to him over the years of her life gradually becomes gratitude and endless fondness for his generosity and support, even while a measure of the original attraction lingers:

Me quería como un padre aunque también me quisiese de otra manera, y lo sé porque yo sentía lo mismo. Estoy segura de que poco a poco el cariño como hija fue imponiéndose al atractivo como mujer, igual que a mí me sucedía, aunque aún quedase un rescaldo de lo otro. (265)

Eduardo conditions Blanca’s encounters with other men throughout her life and helps anchor her connection to Helena, even when other relationships test the boundaries of their friendship.

Arozamena, as noted earlier in this chapter, is the first shared love affair between Blanca and Helena, and a contentious one in that it exposes the first fissures in an unshakeable relationship. Helena is drawn immediately to his genius and his potential to change the face of humanity; her attraction stems less from physical attraction or shared interest than from her desire to approach greatness, a fact evident in Blanca’s description of Helena’s attitude regarding his unabashed expression of attraction to her in their initial interview: “Era como si le dijese: Eres tan excepcional que puedes hacer incluso esto, que en otra persona estaría mal, pero tú eres un genio y estás por encima de las normas que afectan a los demás hombres” (102). Helena accepts and even encourages this exceptionalism despite the rift that it opens between her and Blanca. When Arozamena
first kisses Blanca in the laboratory and, realizing that Helena has witnessed the whole scene, dismisses both women from his presence, Helena blames her friend not for usurping a potential lover, but for being an enemy of his genius:

[. . .] te estrechó en sus brazos para llevarte con él ¡y tú no lo seguiste,
Blanca! Le hiciste bajar de su mundo sin límites a este mundo limitado y mezquino. Y eso lo ofendió y lo indignó. Por eso nos ha dicho que lo dejásemos solo. Porque en realidad está solo. No le servimos para nada.

(114)

Blanca, to that point equally inexperienced sexually, immediately feels shame and guilt, despite not knowing exactly why: “Estaba tan confusa que no sabía qué decir. Helena me hacía sentirme como los detractores de Galileo y, por añadidura, como un virgen hipócrita, concepto cuyo significado Arozamena nunca aclaró [. . .]” (115).

When the tension of this first encounter dissipates—for Helena, only by Arozamena’s largesse—Helena rushes into the breach to fulfill what she sees as the professor’s needs. Elevating the loss of her virginity to the “martirio sabroso” (122) of Santa Teresa de Jesús, she informs Blanca of the liberation that accompanies the act: “era un dolor que tenía sentido, no como el dolor de muelas o el de cortarse con un cuchillo, sino más bien comparable al acto de librarse de unas ataduras” (122). Very quickly, the professor’s desires and Helena’s acquiescence invade the laboratory space, and Blanca, an unwilling spectator and, she intuits, an implicit participant, can only bear in silence their frequent disappearing into his office:
Yo sospechaba que, además del papel de celestina y guardián que Arozamena me asignaba explícitamente, mi presencia obedecía a otros motivos inconfesables. Al profesor le excitaba que yo estuviese allí y que oyese lo que ellos hacían. Y quizá no sólo a él. (124)

Blanca suffers this imposition in the relationship as she does any number of Helena’s whims; the reticence and passivity she shows define the majority of her role in the friendship. This initial distancing allows her time for due consideration of the circumstance into which Helena introduces them, and also permits sober, reasoned observation of that circumstance.

This observation also allows Blanca to identify the chief distinction between the women in their sexual lives, roughly an extension of their differences in personality. Helena, extroverted and daring, seeks sexual pleasure in a similarly exteriorized fashion, as Blanca describes: “Aunque no tenía experiencia propia, había leído lo suficiente para poner imágenes a los ruidos del despacho y experimentaba una extraña turbación al mirar a Helena y descubrir en su piel señales de su relación con el profesor” (125). Blanca experiences physical pleasure in an intensely internal manner, viewing the physicality of the act in an almost clinical way; when she attempts to explain the phenomenon to Helena, her friend scoffs at the visualization: “[. . .] se trataba de algo que subía de modo incontenible, rebosaba y se desbordaba, siempre en forma de oleadas. Pero lo más habitual era el émbolo. Helena se echó a reír. ‘¡Un émbolo! ¡Un émbolo que hace chof chof!’” (177). These complementary attitudes provide, for Arozamena, the fulfillment of
both facets of his sexual persona; when Blanca begins a sexual relationship with the professor, she finds a timid, attentive lover diametrically opposed to the man who complies with Helena’s insistence on physically aggressive sexual behavior. The triangular relationship and the continued functioning of the laboratory rest on the balancing of these desires, but Helena’s jealousy and Arozamena’s true feelings prevent their maintaining domestic harmony.

As Blanca occupies more and more of the professor’s time and attention, Helena, unable to compete with the earnest, genuine attraction between the two, makes the desperate gesture of telling Arozamena that she is Eduardo’s lover and a kept-woman. This breach of trust between the protagonists and the events that unfold in its wake are indicative of the nature the relationship Mayoral constructs in Recóndita armonía. A brief interlude between Arozamena’s death—which conveniently helps exorcise the pain caused by the rift his presence helped cause—and their decision to work at the front presents the weeks of turmoil before the entrenchment of the civil war, during which Blanca and Helena experiment briefly as lovers. Mayoral focuses less on the salacious details of such an affair, preferring to underscore that this minor aspect of their friendship represents only one component of the ties that bind them:

De cualquier forma, decir amantes para referirse a la relación entre Helena y yo es desfigurar la realidad. Amantes supone amor, pasión amorosa, algo sujeto al tiempo y a mil circunstancias que lo destruyen y lo desvirtúan. Lo que nos unía a Helena y a mí no era amor; era algo más
duradero e indestructible. Y excluir de esa relación la sexualidad no tenía demasiado sentido [. . .]. (168)

The series of experiences and relationships, successes and failures, transcends any particular aspect of their friendship and allows them to maintain an enviable intimacy, despite occasional betrayals like Helena’s attempt to recapture Arozamena’s attention and desire. Even when Helena commits virtually the same betrayal—in this case with Germán after the war—the totality of the relationship overpowers any single event involving satellites in orbit around Blanca and Helena.

The throes of the civil war condition the genesis of the three-way relationship among Blanca, Helena, and Germán, and its course parallels that of the Arozamena affair, despite his initial resistance to their mere presence:

Ese hombre era Germán, el médico del puesto de socorro, que nos recibió de uñas, cosa comprensible dadas las circunstancias. Había pedido un practicante y enfermeras de carrera, y llegamos nosotras que no sabíamos nada. (186)

The remaining development of the relationship occurs in nearly identical fashion, though on a schedule extended by circumstances resulting from the war; Helena thrusts herself into the arms of the wary and, unsurprisingly, willing Germán, dedicates inordinate time and effort attempting to impress him or to provoke his jealousy, and ultimately learns that her physical favors pale against the deeper connection that both common background and shared aims generate with Blanca. Germán and Blanca only establish their mutual
attraction across a partition in the visitor’s room in the prison where he spends five years
at the end of the war, but that visit only takes place after Helena’s second attempt to
sabotage her friend’s possibilities. Helena, visiting Germán in prison first, tests the
waters by again lying and informing Germán that Blanca plans to leave Spain with
Eduardo; his pallor at the news gives Helena all the information she needs, echoing the
first dismissive assessment Helena offers to Blanca upon seeing him at the field hospital:
“Se enamorará de ti, como siempre” (186).

This conclusion takes on a special resonance when read in the light of Martín
Gaite’s essays. One of the frequent targets of analysis are the mythologizing novels,
magazine serials, and comics that promoted as exemplary the young women of scarce
means whose patience and sincerity could, through her willingness to persevere, sacrifice,
and endure ridicule, allow her to live the Cinderella fantasy. One of the narrative
revelations connecting Blanca and Germán is that, before facing the gauntlet together at
several fronts—Mayoral specifies Somiedo, La Braña, and Madrid—the two had met
years before at a Madrid reception for a sculptor, as Blanca recalls:

Yo estaba allí perdida y mal a gusto, porque en Madrid no me conocía
nadie y no me importaba que me vieran con Helena [. . .]. Así que acabé
metida en el hueco de un balcón, que compartí con un chico larguirucho
que parecía tan mal a gusto como yo [. . .]. (189-90)

Mayoral plays with this narrative commonplace of the forgotten encounter years before;
both Blanca and Germán are youthfully enamored with others at the time of the
reception—Blanca with Eduardo and Germán, a sculptor’s wife named Cecilia—and, moreover, Blanca’s Cinderella must wait for her Prince Charming to complete a five-year prison sentence before they can be together. The most telling inversion of this mythology for women, however, is that despite the committed, monogamous relationship between Blanca and Germán after his release from prison, the two never marry and maintain separate residences.

One of the examples reproduced by Martín Gaite is the story of Daisy Templeton, and its saccharine reduction of the female success to salvation by a man finds in Martín Gaite a diligent chronicler and staunch opponent:

[. . .] también las chicas modestas, que tenían un trabajo rutinario y nunca se iban a poner de largo, eran fervientes consumidoras de aquella droga que semanal o mensualmente les iba a deparar su encuentro en el papel con un hombre ‘distinto,’ o que las hiciera creer que ellas podían ser distintas. Cuanto más desgraciadas se sintieran en la realidad, más necesitaban de aquella identificación [. . .]. El mago de esta alquimia, por supuesto, era siempre un hombre. (143-44)

The story of Daisy Templeton is, by Martín Gaite’s admission, “elemental y pueril” (145), but the basic characteristics of the story encapsulate precisely her critique of Francoist use of women and the feminine as a pillar of its authoritarian project. The poverty of Daisy’s conditions is disconnected from Spain and exoticised to deemphasize the scarcity and misery of many Spanish communities after the war; Daisy works
tirelessly and defies every economic obstacle, even fashioning, from whole cloth presumably, a dress to attend a social event that might allow her to improve her socioeconomic lot; her simplicity yields results by attracting a prince, whose image is divested of any real characteristics—he is a pilot, avatar of modernity, and no less than a military pilot, representing the valor and steadfastness of the institution tasked with the salvation of the Nation. Most importantly, however, Daisy finds her supposed salvation—from poverty, toil, ridicule, and the ugliest fate, remaining single—in the uniformed man who seeks her out to clarify the misunderstanding that caused her flight from the ball: “Perdone, señora Templeton,” he pronounces to her mother at Daisy’s doorstep, “Pero Cenicienta tiene que volver al baile” (145). Martín Gaite exhausts primary sources in denouncing the patronizing, paradoxical, and dishonest discourse of the regime, and Mayoral, through her fictionalized memoir, participates in the same task, inverting the academic, professional, and personal possibilities for women during the majority of the twentieth century in Spain.

VI

That Mayoral’s novel reflects dominant modes and motifs of women’s fiction requires little recapitulation; the structuring of Recóndita armonía around the rites of passage associated with young women, nuanced by the broad thematic lines of institutional limitation and female friendship, marks clearly the connection that the novel shares with the works of other prominent female authors in Spain. Similarly, it is hardly a novel suggestion that a work participating in that tradition during the 1990s would
deploy protagonists whose attitudes and adventures would reflect an unabashed rejection of received norms for the roles and behaviors of women. One of the principal aims of this chapter, then, has been to place Mayoral’s novel within this historical trajectory of narrative by women, by tracing its similarities to Laforet’s *Nada*, while at the same time marking its progressive stance in resisting the patriarchal dominance imposed in a specific historical context, by drawing out the ways in which *Recóndita armonía* realizes, in fictional form, Martín Gaite’s cultural critique in *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*.

In her treatment of the civil war, Mayoral clarifies the novelty of this approach, and identifies the basic, defining characteristic of this shift as centering the narrative experience of war on two young women. This focalization allows the novel to cast a distinct shadow in the historiography of the civil war; Blanca and Helena are not only cast as non-combatants in the conflict, but they also attempt to maintain neutrality in their humanitarian approach to it. Mayoral verbalizes the difficulty of such a position through the narrating Blanca, but there is no doctrinaire choosing of sides in *Recóndita armonía*; the complexity of the ideological spectrum prohibits facile binarism:

> Tenía razón. Podías estar en el ejército de Franco y ser republicano, socialista, cenetista, comunista o separatista, cualquier cosa; igual podías estar en el ejército de la República y ver en Franco a un Salvador de la Patria. Podías estar en un bando y odiar las ideas de ese bando y desear su derrota. Pero no podías ser neutral. (200-01)
Blanca and Helena shift the point of focus away from any military or political factionalism and toward the relationships they engage and experience; despite Helena’s occasional fantasy—about Germán’s heroic protecting of his patients from the advancing Republican hordes, for example—Mayoral offers a largely prosaic rendering of the war, as revealed in the cool understatement, after Helena’s heated imagining, expressed through Blanca:

Nos fuimos todos y se quedó [Germán] con un pequeño grupo de heridos que no podían ser evacuados ni podían moverse por sí mismos. Además de la bandera de la Cruz Roja, Germán puso un paño blanco a la puerta del hospitalillo. Nuestra última visión de él en la Guerra fue muy poco heroica: sentado y echando parsimoniosamente tabaco en la pipa. Lo demás lo inventó Helena [. . .]. (237)

In Recóndita armonía, the civil war remains an irremediable rupture in the lives both of Blanca and Helena, and of the country, but the radical departure from normalcy only accumulates meaning as a function of the relationships that form, shift, and deteriorate throughout the novel. Mayoral privileges this interpersonal construction of the conflict and these relationships play a central role in identifying Mayoral’s contribution to writing the war. Absent from the novel’s plot is any detail of military movement or depiction of combat, save the occasional geographic cue; the consequences of the unnamed and undated battles, their physical and psychological remains, serve an evidently metonymic purpose of mirroring the difficulties—shared by soldiers and
civilians alike—of confronting and digesting the consequences of a murderously partisan conflict waged by citizens upon citizens. And as these remains appear along the arc of the novel, the distinct narrative episodes dedicated to sketches of temporary relationships ruptured by the unforgiving nature of war examine one attempt to qualify this particular history, to identify the human impacts of the civil war. What differentiates Recóndita armonía from the other novels in this study, and what stands out as a characteristic of Mayoral’s writing of the war, is that narrative cohesion derives from the process of interlocution born of the points of interconnection between the spheres in which Blanca and Helena move.

Mayoral mixes three broadly drawn worlds to carry out this examination. The first is Helena’s existence, and that of her family, in the rarified air of wealthy well-placed families in the years leading up to the war. The second is Blanca’s childhood home of Brétema, notable most for its solitude, and for providing Blanca the hidden harmony referenced in the title, and the third is the mobile world of field hospitals in which Blanca, Helena, and Germán develop their relationship. These three spheres connect and overlap through the presence of Blanca and Helena, and Mayoral details the nature of those connections through the characters with whom the two protagonists interact. Helena’s world boasts Eduardo, most notably, but also a number of other interstitial characters whose fates provide insight into the consequences of the conflict. Carlos and Pedro, Helena’s brothers, support different sides in the war, and Carlos’s death—for which Helena initially blames Blanca; if she had fallen in love with Carlos rather than Eduardo, he never would have gone off to war, Helena concludes in the throes
of her grief—deals a significant blow to the family. Evaristo and Antón el Cañote, two well-known figures in Brétema, provide exemplars of two standard types in the writing of the civil war: respectively, the Atheist and the Maqui. They share a common fate, and in this way Mayoral again specifies the human costs of the war; their violent deaths highlight neither statistics of dead and wounded nor other historical concerns of a documentary nature, but rather the disappearance of identifiable individuals from a small community during the war. The Legionario and Pípilo, two Francoist soldiers convalescing in the care of Blanca and Helena, rejoin the war after their time in the hospital, only after presenting two types drawn from the other end of the ideological spectrum: the grizzled Veteran and the low-ranking Innocent. The Legionario disappears back into the chaos of battle and does not reappear; Pípilo, who never stopped believing in Helena’s being a real, earthly angel, expresses his eternal gratitude and love to Helena in a letter only to be delivered upon his death in battle.

Eduardo, a touchstone between these worlds, permits and supports the positions of his children, and hardly resembles the merciless, tyrannical paternal figure imagined by Blanca. Eduardo also represents a connection to the other spheres presented in the novel, and serves as the site of communication between the women and those worlds. Eduardo maintains a life-long relationship with don Atilano, connecting him to the world of Brétema, based on their shared rejection of the attitudes and behaviors assumed to befit their respective positions; no less important is his relationship with coronel-cum-general of the rebellious army’s cause Alonso de Andrade, connecting him to the world of the war, based on what Blanca, glossing the local housekeepers of her youth, pithily
identifies as the idea that “[. . .] los ricos son todas iguales” (195). Throughout the novel, then, Eduardo serves as both a focal point of the relationship between Blanca and Helena and a platform from which they adventure out and experience other atmospheres. When, in the final chapter of Recóndita armonía, the reader becomes aware that the novel itself only comes about at the behest of Helena before her death, the primary site and source of interlocution becomes evident.

The story of Blanca and Helena develops and crystallizes around the relationships they encounter, however brief they might be, but Blanca’s memoir relies singularly on the impetus of her friend for its existence. Blanca therefore serves as the site of communication for Helena’s tale, which cannot be disentangled from their shared experience in each of the aforementioned environments. This interdependence underscores again the primacy of relational reciprocity in the novel, and recalls the concepts of mutual support and encouragement cited by Mayoral as fixtures in a collection of nineteenth century female authors, noted earlier in this chapter. The fictive genesis of the novel, then, is nurtured in the safety of this refuge; moreover, in the execution of the tale, Mayoral privileges particular types of communication frequently present in fiction by women in Spain. Margaret Jones—in an article titled, “Different Wor(l)ds: Modes of Women’s Communication in Spain’s Narrativa Femenina”—has detailed the unconventional forms that women’s communication takes in much of Mayoral’s fiction, and Blanca and Helena are hardly anomalous in this regard (nor in the novel’s geographic orientation around Galicia):
The varied forms of women’s interchange include visits, chats, telephone conversations, or letter writing; in addition, the many cases of recounting history, tales, recollections and family anecdotes doubtless respond to the double influence of women’s communication patterns and the tradition of oral history associated with her native Galicia. (63)

In the particular case of *Recóndita armonía*, all of these modes of communication shine brightly, and the reproduction of those moments of communication—the retelling of their story—parts from the sharing of personal and familial histories and feasts on the meaningful exchange of looks and gestures and late-night conversations both in person and by telephone. In the most general of terms, *Recóndita armonía* is a novel-length “chat” between Blanca and Helena that occurs within the space of an entirely moveable “visit”; together or apart, in Brétema, Madrid or the United States, Blanca and Helena are invincibly linked, and each fulfills for the other—and the two together, for the reader—the necessary function of interlocution. Helena, in one of her final conversations with Blanca before her death, verbalizes this necessity with characteristic frankness: “La mayor compensación era contároslo a vosotros y ver que os alegrabais y hasta que os sentíais orgullosos de lo que yo hacía” (275).

In the narrative development of *El cuarto de atrás*, Martín Gaite relies on a tale from Pulgarcito from her childhood—the story itself a gloss on the Grimm Brothers’ fairytale of Hansel and Gretel—to underscore the necessity of interlocution in the writing of history. In the meandering course of the exchange with the Man in Black, the winding
recreation of the Spanish postwar experience and the narrator’s own literary career is woven and re woven into the conversation without losing the goal and purpose of the narration. The narrator always finds her way back despite any potential digression, as did Pulgarcito: “Cuando dejó un reguero de migas de pan para hallar el camino de vuelta, se las comieron los pájaros. A la vez siguiente, ya resabiado, dejó piedrecitas blancas, y así no se extravió, vamos, es lo que creyó Perrault, que no se extraviaba [. . .]” (93). This narrative thread, either tightly laid with care or spread across a wide-ranging field, is the key, for Martín Gaite, to the writing of recent Spanish history; even an introductory reading of El cuarto de atrás reveals that the laying of that path requires accompaniment, and even the most dedicated guide necessarily facilitates the occasional lapse, or interloping fragment, of memory that might lead the story farther afield than originally intended. Nada hews closely to its narrative track, but the narrating self of Laforet’s novel still selects in a somewhat capricious manner, from Martín Gaite’s golden box, the “píldoras minúsculas, como cabezas de alfileres, de colores” (93) that represent the distinct segments of memory that make up the novel. Recóndita armonía, on the other hand, fully embraces the fragmentary nature of the memory rendered in narrative form; though the novel as a whole advances on an identifiable chronological path, Blanca’s memoir liberally omits appreciable segments of chronological time, and teems with both analeptic and proleptic digressions within that path. Neither novel, however, commits the sin of leaving a trail of bread crumbs; both advocate the primacy of the narrative pathway and privilege the white stones that identify it.
Along the narrative course of *Recóndita armonía* Mayoral creates the world within which Blanca and Helena move and details the relationship between them. As shown in the preceding analysis, this particular iteration of female friendship is born of complementary identities and nurtured in shared experience. These experiences, in turn, draw their meaning from both the settings in which they occur and, more importantly, the characters Blanca and Helena encounter. Their relationship, accentuated with the commonplaces of popular literature like adventure, love, sex and jealousy, is the central focus of the novel, but it inescapably gathers form and generates meaning as a function of the circumstances within which it grows, and one of the primary circumstances in question—and the one that makes the novel pertinent to the present study—is the period of upheaval surrounding the civil war. In attempting to capture and communicate the particular histories of that period, Mayoral’s novel fulfills one of the central frustrations that Martín Gaite points up in *El cuarto de atrás* and finds a solution to the difficulty of writing a collection of memories on the postwar condition in Spain, as the narrator informs the Man in Black: “Ya, ahí está la cuestión, estoy esperando a ver si se me ocurre una forma divertida de enhebrar los recuerdos” (111).

The fictionalization of a memoir—a collection of stories that both entertain the reading public and underscore certain historical realities, like the strict limitations faced by women in Spain as a result of Franco’s victory and the imposition of the regime’s avowed mission—requires only the placement of protagonists in recognizable spaces and times, and does not suffer the obligation to obey the restrictions placed on the writing of objective history, a discipline not only more demanding in the veracity and exactitude of
its execution, but also mildly unsatisfying in its discourse and capacity for revelation, or so Martín Gaite argues in the introduction to *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*:

Siempre que el hombre ha dirigido su interés hacia cualquier época del pasado y ha tratado de orientarse en ella, como quien se abre camino a tientas por una habitación oscura, se ha sentido un tanto insatisfecho en su curiosidad con los datos que le proporcionan las reseñas de batallas, contiendas religiosas, gestiones diplomáticas, motines, precios del trigo o cambios de dinastía, por muy convincente y bien ordenada que se le ofrezca la crónica de estos acontecimientos fluctuantes. (11)

Taken as complementary texts, *El cuarto de atrás* and *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* merge to identify the central aspect of Mayoral’s novel and many others like it during the Democratic period. In approaching the recent history of Spain, memory and anecdote inevitably mix with fact and document; moreover, Martín Gaite’s written record demonstrates that in order for a justifiable version of those events to emerge, memory, fictionalized or not, becomes most meaningful in the light of document and evidence, while, simultaneously, document often must rely on fiction as a vehicle for its communication. Mayoral avoids any over-reliance on the documentary, the technocratic and the prosaic in her rendering, but nonetheless engages the historical material in an unabashed manner. *Recóndita armonía* is free to imagine and invent a world for Blanca and Helena, and for them to function as the protagonists and narrative motors of their story; the novel does not, however, escape into pure fantasy, and its relative fidelity to the
historical circumstances of the period allows the novel to participate in a project much more impactful in contemporary Spain than simple page-turning fiction: the writing of the civil war.

Participation in this endeavor, of course, is undertaken neither alone nor in a historical vacuum. Martín Gaite’s white stones are again instructive, as they were in illustrating the way that occasional deviation from a narrow narrative track can deepen and enrich the expressive capacity of the text, with the caveat that the initial trail not be lost in the wandering. Outside the narrative framework of *Recóndita armonía*, it is important to note that Mayoral’s novel places one more stone on the path of literature written, in this case by women, that attempts to grapple with both the events and consequences of the civil war in Spain. This is not to say that Carmen Laforet, Carmen Martín Gaite and Marina Mayoral are the only female authors in this trajectory, clearly, and the growing numbers of critical studies on both the writing of the civil war and female authorship generally provide ample evidence to support this perhaps overly apparent claim. This expansion of the critical canon is the third and final trail in which *Recóndita armonía* and Mayoral herself constitute a step. In occupying an increasing segment of both the market for narrative fiction and the scholarly work on that fiction, the development, noted at this chapter’s outset, advocated in the work of Joan Brown, Janet Pérez, Kathleen Glenn, and many others—in the presence and visibility of female authorship in Spain—continues and shows little possibility of abating. In effect, the scholarly work being carried out, though perhaps not in the precise field indicated, fulfills
in a general sense Martín Gaite’s concluding hope and petition in *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*:

Pero ésa es otra historia, también bastante enredosa y compleja: la de los usos amorosos de los años sesenta y setenta. Esperemos que alguien tenga la paciencia de reunir los materiales de archivo y de memoria suficientes para contárnosla bien algún día. (218)
Endnotes

1 Gullón’s anecdote may not offer as complete a picture as necessary, but it is demonstrative of the attitude often taken. Despite this generalized asseveration, numerous volumes have been dedicated in the past two decades to the presence and importance of female authors during both the Franco era and the years following his death. Women Writers of Contemporary Spain (1991) edited by Joan L. Brown, Janet Pérez’s Contemporary Women Writers of Spain (1988), and Feminine Concerns in Contemporary Spanish Fiction by Women (1988), edited by Roberto Manteiga, Carolyn Galerstein, and Kathleen McNerney are but three of the number of collections that consider the segment of narrative production presented here, and among the first in the American academy to address the topic. Other critics, of course, have participated in this project, as the tables of contents and bibliographies of those tomes indicate.

2 Lucía Extebarría is the standard bearer of female author who refuses to demur in exploiting the more bankable aspects of the female body in today’s literary marketplace, as Henseler notes in her chapter titled “Extebarría Ecstasy: The Publishing Industry Exposed”:

She [Extebarría] uses her work and her body to increase media attention, promote herself and her feminist messages, decrease the distance between authors and readers, and expose the (discriminatory) practices and politics of the publishing industry. (109)

In this way—the unabashed employment of overt sexuality in the publishing of the literary—Extebarría serves additionally as a precise example of Henseler’s attitude toward women in the publishing industry; women should, she argues, participate fully and without exception in the aggressive marketing of their works and thereby increase the visibility and role of women generally.

3 In the first volume of his encyclopedic undertaking, Feijoo’s Sixteenth Discourse, titled “Defensa de las mujeres,” traces conceptions of the feminine from the classical tradition through the first third of the eighteenth century. He confronts the common contemporary prejudice against the gender and its inherent character flaws in the hope of disseminating a more exhaustive and well-reasoned study of women’s intellectual capacity and contributions. He is particularly struck by the lack of credit given to the intellectual prowess of women throughout history:

A tanto se ha extendido la opinión común en vilipendio de las mujeres que apenas admite en ellas cosa buena. [. . .] Por esta razón, después de defenderlas con alguna brevedad sobre otros capítulos, discurriré más largamente sobre su aptitud para todo género de ciencias, y conocimientos sublimes. (Theatro crítico I, XVI)
As with the other varied topics studied in the *Theatro*, the issue of the quality of women is exhaustively rendered, establishing a case for the recognition and even respect of women in all endeavors physical, intellectual, and spiritual.

4 This reference constitutes the first to a concept perhaps most important as a focus for this chapter. It is imperative to underscore the presence and importance of the heritage of female authors in Spain—in our particular case Carmen Laforet and Carmen Martín Gaite—whose works are seminal in the formation of contemporary female authorship.

5 Pérez identifies the Second Republic as an intense period of renovation for questions regarding female authorship in Spain. Paradoxically, she does so by recounting the number of professional literary connections that one female author—Carmen Conde—shares with the prominent male authors of the time: Miguel Hernández, Ramón Sijé, and Juan Ramón Jiménez.

6 The editors cite with some pessimism the statistics provided by Janet Pérez—that during the 1970s, for example, less than two percent of doctoral dissertations in the U.S. dealt with the works of female authors—but also point to a list of works that have begun to address this discrepancy. Among these volumes are *Women in Hispanic Literature* by Beth Miller, *Feminismo ante el franquismo*, edited by Gloria Waldman and Linda Gould Levine, and Lucía Fox-Lockhart’s *Women Novelists in Spain and Spanish America*. To these volumes, Manteiga, Galerstein, and McNerney add bibliographic references like *Women Writers in Transition: An Annotated Bibliography, 1945-1980* by Isabelle de Courtivron and Diane Marting’s *Toward a Bibliography of Women Writers in Spain*. (Manteiga 2-3).

7 Brown claims that a clear bias toward female authorship can be traced as far back as the tenth century, based on the voice and thematics of the kharjas: “Nearly all of the verses are composed in the voice of a woman. One prevailing theme is the longing of a young girl for her lover, another is a girl’s lament for her lover’s infidelity” (17). The first prominent recognition of the probability of female authorship of these poems did not occur until 1985:

Despite the female protagonists and themes of these verses, historians of Spanish literature have not only denied the possibility of female authorship, but they have invented explanations for how these important verses must have been created by men. The kharjas were seen as tropes, as representations of the male artist and his patron. (17)

This consistent circumvention of the obvious, for Brown, is the indisputable proof that an identifiable bias against women has been in place for nearly a thousand years.

8 Ordóñez recalls the story of Armineste, who is reputed to have scrutinized her image and found, “either nothing or images that neither approximated the men she was supposed to resemble nor the woman she was supposed to transcend” (13). Her own position in the academy, Ordóñez offers, is very similar: “Until quite recently to combine
the roles of North American Hispanist, student of feminist theory, and woman writing about Spanish women writers, it was necessary to occupy a position not unlike that of Aristotle’s putative sister, Arimneste. [..] To be a feminist scholar of Spanish women’s writing was to inhabit, like Arimneste, a cultural space in which those writing women were ‘assumed to be a subspecies of men’ and most ‘poetics’ or literary theory was not necessarily ‘contemptuous but oblivious of women.’” (13)

9 The Catholic church and the inordinate control it exercised until the death of Franco in 1975, Davies argues, are the root causes of much of the gender inequality in Spain, and have been, during the time analyzed in her study, the primary impediment to the possibility of meaningful redefinition of women’s roles, and of a new understanding of the presence and significance of women in the country’s history.

10 The project noted springs from an earlier volume written by Martín Gaite called Usos amorosos del dieciocho en España (1972) in which she examines the social, political, economic, and sexual mores of the eighteenth century in Spain. Her research into those topics, along with the encouragement of the book’s success, led her to perform a similar analysis on the post-war period. The end result of that research is presented in the essays of Usos amorosos de la postguerra española, whose content will elucidate Mayoral’s novel in this chapter.

11 In Joan Brown’s Women Writers of Contemporary Spain, Gustavo Pérez Firma asserts, if obliquely, that Nada is an example of a Bildungsroman, and the general critical understanding of the novel as such is fairly widespread. Barry Jordan, however, has defied this prevailing logic in an article titled, “Laforet’s Nada as Female Bildung?” Jordan shows that the superficial reading of the novel allows such a reading, but beyond that, the analysis crumbles like the house on Aribau:

On the surface, Andrea appears to follow a gradual path of development from immaturity to maturity, along which she overcomes certain obstacles. However, below that surface, she changes very little and does almost nothing [. . .]. (110)

Jordan claims that the progress of the Bildung, linear and purposeful, generally concludes in hard-gained growth and change that result from that learning process. To the contrary, Jordan argues in the case of Nada,

it is a cautionary tale of how not to behave and how not to trust in childish notions of romance. Moreover, Andrea’s escape from Aribau and her independence are achieved through absolutely no effort on her own part. Her salvation is the product of a dues ex machina, an external agent, a providential, fairy godmother figure [. . .]. (108)

12 The operatic leitmotiv is omnipresent in Recóndita armonía; in fact, the novel’s title is taken from an aria in Puccini’s 1900 work Tosca, which compares the different beauties possible in different female forms. The title resonates on two levels; first, Blanca and her best friend Helena represent in the novel the avatars of distinct beauty, and second,
Blanca’s constant search in the novel is for precisely this detached, obscure harmony. Only in her return to Brétema, and in the writing of her memories at Helena’s behest, is she able to find this tranquility, as the novel’s closing paragraph shows. In the final conversation before her death, Helena asks Blanca, who has established a pharmacy in her native town, whether or not their adventures were worth it, and Blanca, in response, closes the novel: “Y yo le dije que sí, que había valido la pena…Y que, bien mirado, había, sí, en el fondo de este caos, una recóndita armonía” (277).

One of the best examples of the manner in which Andrea handles the attention of her gentlemen callers is the afternoon she spends with Gerardo, whom she calls unexpectedly after witnessing the happiness of Ena and Jaime together. Excited and anxious, alternately attracted and repulsed by him, she spends the afternoon with him strolling through Barcelona; when he unexpectedly kisses her, her rejection of his advance becomes a point of serious contention between the two. His paternalistic and dismissive attitude toward her supports the description of the Franco era presented by Martín Gaite in her Usos amorosos de la postguerra, the details of which are examined below. As Andrea—not the protagonist at 18 but rather the narrator, whose sarcasm and wry humor betray her—remembers, Gerardo “[. . .] me fue dando paternales consejos sobre mi conducta en lo sucesivo y sobre la conveniencia de no andar suelta y loca y de no salir sola con los muchachos. [. . .] Le prometí que no volvería a salir con él [. . .]” (137).

Kroník’s conclusion, applicable to many more cases than just to Nada, is worth citing here, in that it backs the main proposal of this study in its entirety: “El texto que se precipita hacia el suicidio pierde la voz, su sustancia de palabra y ahoga al lector. Pero la ficción no es mortal. El hombre que se ahoga se muere. Una ficción sigue viviendo. La gran ironía de los textos desde Tiempo de silencio a Makbara es que nos hablan; perdiendo su propia voz, quitándose la voz a los lectores, comunican.” (202)

The authors presented in this study and their contemporaries do not belong to the generation(s) to which Kroník refers, but their charge is the same; they don’t carry the personal scars of the war’s carnage or the fear of retribution for their writings, but the need to create connections across generations and pass on the particularities of Spanish history—even in exceedingly personalized ways—remains a vital labor.

Alfonso XIII was the last king of Spain before the imposition of the Franco regime. He was proclaimed king at birth, but did not ascend to the throne officially until his sixteenth birthday in 1902. Upon the declaration of the Second Republic in 1931, he fled the country—but did not abdicate the throne—and despite supporting the military uprising in July of 1936, was neither welcomed nor supported by the Nationalist side. The Carlist faction of the Nationalist forces, disavowing the legitimacy of his succession, prevented Alfonso from returning. He died in Rome in 1941, and despite his ostracism by the regime, he successfully lobbied Franco to have his grandson return to Spain to be educated and complete his military service, and he was crowned king, as Juan Carlos I, in 1975. (Carr 474-77, 592-602)
Thanatos, a daemon—a de-materialized spirit, distinct from demon—is the representation of death in Greek mythology. In the case of Mayoral—a literary critic well-versed in a wide array of cultural theory—it doesn’t seem beyond feasibility that she would, knowingly and intentionally, use the Freudian term for the death drive to define this particular state of being for her protagonist.

Martín Gaite’s essays amply demonstrate the sanctity of the traditional family structure under Franco, and the vehemence with which its maintenance was exhorted by the regime.

Among the authors noted by Ferrán and Glenn, the cases on which the essays in Women’s Narrative and Film in Twentieth-Century Spain (2002) are based, are Lidia Falcón, Mayoral, Cristina Fernández Cubas, Montserrat Roig, Lucía Exteberria, Víctor Català (Caterina Albert), and Mercè Rodoreda. The directors examined are Icíar Bollaín, Ana Díez, Helena Taberna, Pilar Miró, Josefina Molina, and Cecilia Bartolomé.

In the fifth chapter of Voices of Their Own, Ordóñez argues that this fictional reinscription of women into accepted narrative pathways of history is a characteristic that connects the fiction of Carme Riera, Carmen Gómez Ojea and Lourdes Ortiz. This revision of history allows Mayoral, to cite one example from Recóndita armonía, to place two unprepared neophytes as laboratory technicians in a project never undertaken in Spain, and squares with Ordóñez’s reading of Riera, Gómez Ojea, and Ortiz, and female authors’ version of historical fiction at the end of the twentieth century in Spain:

As woman inserts herself into the aforementioned process of historical revision, she, too, is able to bring back to memory those aspects of historical experience—her historical experience—that culture has asked her to forget. Becoming her own historian, she performs these acts of retrieval by dismantling the narrative of forgetfulness with that of remembering—and within the gaps of her own ineluctable forgetfulness, she locates a new narrative of transgressive reinvention. (128-29)

In her article “The (US)es of (I)dentity: A Response to Abel on ‘(E)Merging Identities,’” Judith Gardiner considers female relationships as a fluid matrix of “commonality” and “complementarity” in which both similarity and difference define the relationship, producing what Olazagasti-Segovia terms a set of relationships in which, “[. . .] lo que prevalence es el intercambio” (436).

The application of endless self-referential elements is one of the basic tenets of a number of iterations of postmodernism. The most apropos in this study is that of Linda Hutcheon, a detailed analysis of which can be found in the chapter on Muñoz Molina’s Beatus Ille.
Herzberger places these tensions foremost in *Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Postwar Spain*. The epigraph to the introductory chapter, taken from Brackenridge’s 1792 novel *Modern Chivalry*, the characters of which apply a broad satiric sense—claiming that the primary characteristic of history is fiction, and that of fiction, truth—in order to invert the traditionally-understood relations between fiction and history.

The parallels between the two novels—the consideration of temporal pacing within the novel, the fragmentation and dispersal of past experience, and the open contemplation of the intersections of memory and narration—make further study a strong possibility; the aegis of the current study, however, focuses most directly on the function of the novel as expression of historical memory, and for that purpose, Martín Gaite’s collection of essays makes a more compelling case.

Martín Gaite does admit, in the introduction to *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*, that her earlier historical monograph, *Usos amorosos del dieciocho en España*, had initiated her thinking about the connection between the novel and the essay, to wit: Poco después, y alentada por la buena acogida que tuvo aquella monografía, que algunos amigos me comentaron haber leído ‘como una novela,’ empecé a reflexionar sobre la relación que tiene la historia con las historias y a pensar que, si había conseguido dar un tratamiento de novela a aquel material extraído de los archivos, también podia intentar un experimento al revés: es decir, aplicar un criterio de monografía histórica al material que, por proceder del archivo de mi propia memoria, otras veces había elaborado en forma de novela. (11-12)

The result of these considerations, and the focus of the remaining pages of this study, is the aforementioned *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*, published by Anagrama in 1987 and winner of the Anagrama Essay Prize that same year.

Martín Gaite briefly describes, in a fashion well-suited for the general purpose of her book, the declining state of relations between the caudillo and Rome: Los altibajos posteriores de aquella comunidad de intereses entre Franco y el Vaticano podrían compararse a las sordas desavenencias conyugales de tantos matrimonios de la época, condenados a aguantarse mutuamente y cuyas relaciones, nacidas al calor de un entusiasmo retórico y fugaz, estaban basadas en el desconocimiento del aliado. (18)

With respect to the importance of that particular magazine, Martín Gaite exalts, Adelantemos, ya que viene a cuento, que la aparición de *La Cordoniz*—subtitulada “la revista más audaz para el lector más inteligente”—merece ser destacada como uno de los pocos acontecimientos culturales de cuño propio con la repercusión suficiente para empezar a demoler los tópicos que amenazaban con asfixiarnos y para ayudarnos a poner los dogmas oficiales en tela de juicio. Por la ventana de *La Cordoniz* entró el aire...
saludable y desmitificador que poco a poco fue limpiando de telarañas transcendentales la mente de los jóvenes de postguerra. (74)

27 The lexical richness of Martín Gaite’s essays deserves a study apart from the present one. The dozens of colloquialisms of the era presented in the essays—some of which are marked in quotes in the sentences preceding this note—offer a particular perspective on the norms of social interaction of those years. Martín Gaite shows how several of these expressions, the meanings of which have both persisted and changed over time, serve the purpose of prizing appearance over sincerity; most specifically, they define the coding of female behavior in that superficial intimation and insinuation should always supersede real, meaningful social interaction between young men and women.

28 All of the cited words in the preceding paragraph appear in the fourth chapter of Usos amorosos, and appear on multiple occasions throughout the chapter. This difficulty in citation, trying to capture the quantity of vocabulary applied by Martín Gaite without citing dozens of single sentences, led to the process employed in this and the previous note, whereby I insert the terms within my text and identify them in endnotes.

29 Martín Gaite reproduces several texts from Pilar Primo de Rivera, and her acceptance and support of the regime’s position on the education of women is more than a little unsettling, given her position as leader of the Sección Femenina. Ms. Primo de Rivera claimed, for example, in 1944: “Las mujeres nunca descubren nada: les falta desde luego el talento creador, reservado por Dios para inteligencias varoniles; nosotras no podemos hacer nada más que interpretar mejor o peor lo que los hombres han hecho” (68).

30 A significant portion of Mayoral’s fiction explores the frequently chaotic dynamics of Galician families. In Recóndita armonía this detail holds a more pointed meaning; Mayoral presents an atheist and a progressive as a nobleman and a Galician, despite the received—and largely factual—image of both that social class and that geographic region being loyal to the Francoist uprising.

31 Martín Gaite here refers to the division in education between young men and young women. While young men were expected to learn by doing—in academic, professional, and interpersonal settings—and were applauded for doing so, young women, in keeping with the regime’s desire to banalize women’s identities and roles, were best distanced from any experience considered distasteful; to wit:

El papel de explorador de lo desconocido y de incitador a la transgresión se le había asignado al varón desde la infancia; y con la prohibición de la enseñanza mixta lo que se pretendía era velar por la inocencia de las niñas, en quienes se veía sobre todo una cantera de futuras madres destinadas a dar ejemplo. Continuamente se fomentaba en ellas la noción de que había cosas de las que no tenían por qué enterarse. Y mucho más si se estaban educando en un colegio de monjas. (97)
The isolation of young women from potentially questionable environments and activities has as its example par excellence the convent school, like the Damas Negras in Mayoral’s novel. In another inversion of the typical woman’s experience, Mayoral presents two women who wholly disallow this distancing and dive headlong into every “anárquica y variopinta” (97) atmosphere they encounter.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Ignacio Arozamena is the physicist with whom Blanca and Helena work as assistants, and for whose attention and romantic interest they briefly vie.

The confusion and contradiction regarding women and their roles of the sources presented by Martín Gaite is striking. Women were encouraged to be valiant and strong, though never in such a way that might threaten the eminence and dominance of the men surrounding them. Martín Gaite highlights one central contradiction:

El pueblo español estaba, naturalmente, muy orgulloso de contar con figuras como Santa Teresa de Jesús, Mariana Piñeda, Isabel la Católica o Agustina de Aragón, por citar cuatro de las que más salían a relucir a todas horas. Pero su ejemplo había sido más bien un ejemplo para los hombres. (150)

And, in effect, magazines like Medina often carried commentaries on topics of that nature, the authors of which expressed precisely this sentiment: “Los cañonazos de Agustina de Aragón es casi seguro que se perdieron inútilmente… Ella sin embargo [. . .] fue el ejemplo vivo del deber de todos los hombres de nuestro pueblo” (150).

Gonzalo Alonso de Andrade, at this point in the novel a coronel—later promoted to general—shares a number of social connections with the Resende family, and his intercession on behalf of Blanca and Helena prevents denunciations about them from advancing. In exchange, they become his unofficial translators of the reporting of the civil war in the outside world:

Así nos convertimos en intérpretes del ejército nacional [. . .]. Aquello aumentó nuestra fama, pero nos dio algunos quebraderos de cabeza.

Estaba en primer lugar el asunto de las traducciones. Aunque Inglaterra simpatizaba con el levantamiento, el locutor de la BBC llamaba rebeldes o sublevados a los partidarios de Franco y fuerzas leales a los republicanos y además, prácticamente desmentía todas las buenas noticias de la radio nacional. [. . .] Cada una de nosotras traducía una parrafada mientras al otra seguía escuchando y cuando nos quedábamos calladas con cara de no entender, el coronel ya sabía que era un pasaje censurado [. . .]. (196-97)

Mayoral thus presents a generous officer in Franco’s army, and one who understands both the implicit falsity of reporting within the army, and the geopolitical implications of the conflict.
In placing Blanca in the role of the town atheist who refuses to abandon the local institution of the tertulia, Mayoral expresses in a single act the resistance to and dismissiveness of religious, political, and social norms. Helena, for her part, defies standard expectations by working on behalf of the underrepresented and the forgotten. Mayoral, despite recognizing the extant limitations and prejudices of the time, presents protagonists whose academic and professional preparation allows them to hurdle these obstacles, and whose mutual support facilitates their doing so.

Cristina González Moral offers an apt reading of the use of the angel figure in an article titled “Estereotipos del personaje femenino en Marina Mayoral”: “Por eso para ella [Mayoral] la concepción del ‘ángel’ implica el dualismo [. . .] entre ‘mujer angelical’ y ‘mujer fatal’” (164). Neither Blanca nor Helena fits the figure of femme fatale, but both women seek independence and reject prescribed roles for women in direct contravention of patriarchal expectation, a position by which Mayoral, according to González Moral, “[. . .] quiere dejar claro el hecho de que la ‘mujer’ ha roto con muchas de las estructuras impuestas por el patriarcado y avanza ferozmente para ocupar su lugar en la sociedad” (164).
CHAPTER 5

Equilibrium from Instability: The Necessary Provisionality

of History and Memory in Contemporary Spanish Fiction

“Recuérdalo tú y recuérdalo a otros.”

—Luis Cernuda, “1936”

In a 2005 essay titled “Cómo acabar de una vez por todas con el franquismo,” Javier Cercas marks the thirtieth anniversary of the general’s death by presenting a plea to the decency and common sense of the readership of El país and the Spanish population. He seeks to confront and rectify the historical excisions, with respect to the civil war and the Francoist dictatorship, performed by Spanish political establishment during the Transition. Cercas accepts the political exigencies that necessitated those steps and even justifies them—the well-known pactos de olvido to which the population acquiesced, in greater and lesser degrees—but believes that, three decades on, a reckoning is not beyond the capacity of the Spanish public:

Salvo nuestros irredimibles talibanes, nadie busca ya revancha, nadie busca ya juzgar a nadie; se trata simplemente de abordar por fin un problema aparcado durante treinta años por imperativos de la realidad, de empezar a administrar la memoria pública del franquismo de una forma razonable, pedagógica y consensuada, y de reparar de todas las formas posibles las injusticias infligidas a sus humillados y ofendidos. (145)
The most remarkable void during the Transition and the subsequent Democratic era, for Cercas, is the inability to generate a coherent narrative of the middle decades of the twentieth century that adequately confronts the political and military facts of the case. His initial, earnest proposal, requiring by his own admission some level of nuance as Spanish students advance in their studies, is spare and direct; from childhood, he argues, the following could easily be implemented in the standard curriculum:

Había una vez en España una República democrática mejorable, como todas, contra la que un militar llamado Franco dio un golpe de Estado. Como algunos ciudadanos no aceptaron el golpe y decidieron defender el estado de derecho, hubo una guerra de tres años. La ganó Franco, quien impuso un régimen sin libertades, injusto e ilegítimo, que fue una prolongación de la guerra por otros medios y duró cuarenta años. (142)

Placing aside the difficulties attending such simplified textualizations history, Cercas’s suggestion faces a more pragmatic opposition from the war’s survivors and the descendants of the more militant participants of every ideological stripe. The promotion of such an evaluation, even 35 years after the death of Franco, clashes directly, and would compete for viability, with both the lingering narrative of conquest and salvation proffered by the regime throughout its decades of control, and the discourses of illegitimacy and resistance from the opposite end of the ideological spectrum. Cercas’s plea—for a rational, shared resolution to the gaps in collective memory sacrificed repeatedly for the establishment and maintenance of a new republic after Franco’s
death—seems unlikely to be implemented directly by any government concerned for its electoral life; until very recently, in fact, every iteration of the Spanish government in the Democratic era has, with respect to the outstanding injustices of the war and the regime, preferred silence and willful disregard to effacement and direct action. The primary aim of this study, however, has been to demonstrate that, irrespective of explicit public action on the part of any institution, this process of mediation and resolution, to the degree that it has been possible during different moments since 1939, has been occurring steadily since the end of the conflict.

The necessary task of recuperating and reconstituting both memory and history during the three decades of restored democratic governance, lacking bureaucratic will or support, has fallen to a number of media in Spanish society—notably, and fitting for study in their own right, in the visual arts, film, television and journalism—and a strong argument can be made that the most broadly impactful among these sectors is the literary. It is hardly surprising, considering the fully saturated media marketplace in Spain since Franco’s death, that many authors—including the four whose works have been the direct focus of this study—have fulfilled multiple roles in sectors related to arts and mass communication during this period; to cite only two of the cases, Antonio Muñoz Molina has supplemented his fiction with non-fiction collections on wide-ranging topics and with positions as a journalist both in Spain and abroad, and Julio Llamazares—in addition to fiction, essays, and travel writing—has written and adapted a number of screenplays and worked frequently with Televisión Española. This professional flexibility assures the insistent distribution and repetition of the central message crystallized in Cercas’s essay.¹
Participation in the literary life of Spain during the Democratic era has very frequently meant, for these and many other authors, unearthing and confronting the recent past; there is hardly a single approach to this task, however, and the innumerable salvoes toward the civil war, Franco, the regime, and the Transition take as many shapes as there are authors to pen them. This combination—of a fully-functioning media environment bent on exercising freedom of expression and a collection of literary professionals willing to do so—can occasionally appear haphazard or lacking in “literary” quality, but it is exactly the unpredictability of this expression freely wielded, its characteristic instability, that ensures a continued visibility for the necessary public conversation on understanding the events and consequences of the civil war.

The authors and novels selected for study occupy something of a middle ground the in the maelstrom of writings on the civil war and represent cogent, thoughtful perspectives of that context. They are neither highly experimental nor obstinately doctrinaire—that is, they occupy fairly unspectacular ground both stylistically and ideologically. This is not to say, of course, that the authors and texts are somehow anodyne exercises in literary idling on an immediately identifiable—and therefore bankable—topic, rather only that, despite lacking a histrionic mood or ideologically charged stance, each author parts from a distinct personal and professional circumstance that informs the particular narrative tack pursued. While it is true that Beatus Ille presents the case of a politically compromised protagonist, the central thrust of the novel is the interplay of a particular history and a highly personalized memory in constructing a fictional present; Muñoz Molina employs unmarked but recognizable shifts in narrative
voice to blend entirely distinct historical moments. The resulting narration underscores the similarity of experience lived by generations of Spaniards during and after the civil war and posits that geographic or political happenstance—Solana experiences the reality of the civil war in Mágina firsthand, while Minaya can only reconstruct those experiences narratively—hardly, if ever, alters the fundamental aspects of human interaction. Luna de lobos parts from a more directly compromised, and hunted, set of subjects during the war and its wake, and the four maquis in the mountains of León, despite being the motor of the novel’s action, fulfill a secondary role; the primary point of focus is the grandeur of the landscape itself, its capacity to both protect and destroy. Llamazares constructs the novel around the movement of the weather and the seasons in rural León, and the only remaining protagonist in the novel’s fourth part assumes the roles of both the brutalized and the brutal before dissolving into the snow-covered countryside, concluding the deterioration of his humanity.

Both Muñoz Molina’s and Llamazares’s novels represent, within and beyond the historical context of the war, the recuperation of forgotten beings who bear more than a superficial resemblance to actual historical figures; the remaining two authors, Marina Mayoral and Luis Mateo Díez, place protagonists less empirically identifiable in a broader temporal context, but one that nonetheless conforms to Cercas’s assertion that the dictatorship represents a continuation of the war by different means. Recóndita armonía juxtaposes three distinct moments in the twentieth century: the period of relative personal freedom for women during the Second Republic, the chaotic years of the war itself, and the hardship and limitation imposed under Franco. The expansion of the temporal frame,
however, does not dilute the examination of either the conflict or its consequences.

Following the path of Blanca and Helena through the 1930s and witnessing the elimination of the panorama of personal and professional possibilities only heightens the recognition of the position of inferiority to which Spanish women were subjected.

Through the individual characters and their relationships, Mayoral reveals the inability of customary tropes—of valiant, defeated Republicans or crusading, overzealous Francoists, to cite only two possibilities—to define the role of women in Spain or to express the totality of the conflict. Luis Mateo Díez eschews the war entirely, directing narrative attention toward the decades following the conflict. Again, however, Cercas’s observation is instructive; the policies and procedures of the dictatorship do function in many ways as a surrogate for the hostilities that nominally ended in 1939, and, as noted in both Herzberger’s analysis and Martín Gaite’s, the rhetorical commonplaces of the regime were transparent in the bellicose expression of a renewed Conquest. In Las estaciones provinciales and La fuente de la edad, Díez makes a circus of the entirety of the world defined by those policies; the sanctity of every sector of officialdom—the elite: local government, the wealthy, and the clergy—is inverted and caricatured as ridiculous, while those unlucky enough to exist outside the spheres of power—Díez’s protagonists, hailing from the lower end of the economic spectrum—trudge through the grotesque reality imposed from above.

Taken as a point of departure, the problematics of postmemory become immediately evident with the four authors in question; both Mayoral and Díez were born in 1942, and Llamazares and Muñoz Molina, in 1955 and 1956, respectively. These birth
dates identify and define each of their relationships to the war as narrative in nature, that is, the only contact any of the four could have is necessarily mediated and indirect. This difficulty is inherent in the roster of authors prevalent in contemporary fiction in Spain today, and while these four represent only a minimal cross-section of that group, each foray into the examination of the war—from whichever point along the ideological spectrum—strengthens the broader project of rendering an ever more complete vision of the conflict. The accumulation of these sources over time has reenergized the public and critical conversations on the topic during the last decade, a fact to which Cercas’s work in particular attests; nevertheless, the expanding bibliography of works produced since each of two definitive historical markers—the end of the war in 1939 and Franco’s death in 1975—informs and helps condition the relationship of each author to the war. For this reason, a secondary concern of this study has been to trace a potential lineage for each text between its forbears—in both the critical and literary arenas—in order to underscore again the presence of the concept of postmemory, and to draw out the manners in which it functions beyond the relatively facile identification of certain authors as chronologically apt. Ian Gibson, in advocating the continued historical and critical work on the period, echoes Cercas: “ Esto no es revanchismo es justicia. Aquí ha habido una descontinuidad histórica y un país sin biografías anda un poco cojo” (“Ian Gibson afirma”).

The dearth of discrete biographies concerns Gibson, and though works of this type on particular personages of the era can certainly clarify some questions, evaluations of virtually aspect of the war—its maneuvers and players, its atrocities and politics—has
been a fertile field of inquiry since 1939. Within Spain, evidently, the expressive possibilities were, in Gibson’s terms, hobbled, and the expression made possible by exile only became available inside Spain with considerable risk and difficulty; nevertheless, work on the topic continued and increased as the dictatorship aged, and this body of historical, literary and critical work serves as source material for both scholars and authors during the Democratic era. Each of the novels studied here, therefore, is not merely the product of the dynamics of the personal postmemory experienced by the author; each text counts on extant stylistic and ideological models—Spanish and otherwise—to inform its perspective. These forbears and their relationship to the novels examined in this study are noteworthy but by no means conclusive, however, and this malleability contributes again to the provisionality of both the assessment of the war’s writing and any conclusion that might be drawn in realizing that task. That the writings of Pío Baroja or Carmen Martín Gaite, or the aesthetic and philosophical conventions proposed by Lukacs or Hutcheon, might illuminate in some way the writing of the civil war does not mitigate their applicability to other contemporary narratives, nor does it preclude the utility of a virtually limitless number of other historians, authors, or critics in the examination of these particular novels. It follows, in turn, that all five novels studied here will become either primary sources or points of departure for future study.

In the final chapter of Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Postwar Spain, Herzberger examines the diverging opinions among theorists of contemporary Spanish fiction regarding the relationship between history and the novel, concluding, among other ideas, that “novelists scrutinize the past primarily through reference to life
as they believe or imagine it to have been, rather than through a historiographic discourse whose truth and value they often opposed” (155). The absence of the looming arbiter of historical discourse permits, “the liberating admixture of fact and imagination, free now of censorship and myth” (155), a luxury disallowed the writers—from Cela and Delibes through Martín Gaite and the Goytisolos—whose careers began or continued under the censorial practices of the regime. Although Cercas—whose novel Soldados de Salamina (2001) is precisely the examination of history by means of imagination to which Herzberger refers—would doubtless concur on the liberation experienced by authors of the Democratic era, his concern is less literary or academic and much more public. He bemoans the unforgivable lack of knowledge of the period of the civil war and Francoism, despite the unquestionably profound effect it exercises on what he calls, “la conciencia colectiva, el conocimiento que el ciudadano de a pie posee del pasado inmediato de su país” (125); the abridgement of history, he argues in a 2002 article titled “El pasado imposible,” is a logical consequence of the Transition, during which the expression of historical accuracy was sacrificed for the greater good of political stability.

Accepting such a sacrifice, he argues, entails suffering a certain self-imposed blindness:

Pero entonces habrá que aceptar también el precio que hubo que pagar por ello [the success of the Transition], y parte nada desdénable de ese precio es el olvido; o, si se prefiere, esa neblina de equívocos, malentendidos, verdades a medias y simples mentiras que envuelve los años de la guerra y
la inmediata posguerra y que impide un conocimiento cabal del
significado de ese período. (125)

Collective ignorance imposed by an unchanging public discourse of history, for Cercas, is
the acknowledged and permissible preference on the part of a population satisfied by the
material progress and wellbeing of Spain’s current integration into Western Europe. He
finalizes his denunciation, punctuating the almost farcical chasm in knowledge about the
war, with a knowing wink to students of literature: “es muy probable que un estudiante de
bachillerato tenga una idea más exacta de la batalla de Lepanto que de la rebelión militar
del 18 de julio—si es que sabe que fue una rebelión militar‖ (125). While historians and
other professional academics, whose work Cercas praises, have continued researching
and bringing contentious topics—the exhumation of mass graves, the fate of extensive
archival resources, many aspects of the legislative mandates of the 2006 Historical
Memory Law—into the public forum, Cercas holds that every sector of the population,
from journalists to filmmakers, authors to television producers, and schoolteachers to
shopkeepers, must address this historical deformity if any real understanding of modern
Spanish history is to be achieved: “ésta no es un discusión ‘académica ni teórica’. No lo
es porque el pasado es el presente: está amasado con él; somos, también, lo que hemos
sido” (150).

Cercas directly identifies the primary difficulty faced by Spaniards in wrangling
with the historical distortions that prevail in the public domain with regard to the civil
war and the dictatorship, and veiled within his complaint emerges the manner in which to
combat such indifference. Active reliance on the past—that is, not simply viewing the contemporary context as an invariable consequence of a completed, unalterable past—furthers the permanently shifting project of defining the present. The circumstances surrounding the last seven decades in Spain do indeed present challenges, but the contemporary moment, availed of the work of preceding generations, holds nothing but opportunity for those who would take it. Among those is Cercas, who, on another occasion and with pointed lexical ire regarding the Francoist co-opting of history for political exigency, noted that the Democratic era, for all of its shortcomings, “no es un regalo de la Providencia, sino una conquista del coraje y la lucidez de mucha gente a la que le tocó vivir tiempos mucho más difíciles que el nuestro” (138). This continuing work, and both the dramatic shift in public consciousness and the relative public drowsiness that it can provoke, is and will continue to be unstable. Its results will be irregular, imperfect and malleable, but its execution, made possible only by the aforementioned courage and insight of those who wrote before and those who continue writing now, can bring to light that which ought be known. “Todo saldrá en la colada,” Sancho announces in Chapter 20 of Part I of the Quijote, and the clever turn of phrase is more than just the anodyne idiomatic expression it has become during the intervening four centuries. The one certainty in the necessary housework of sorting, rinsing, and cleansing the historical, literary, and critical works confronting the civil war and the dictatorship that have appeared in the Democratic era, is that many hands, pardoning the aphoristic expression, make light work.
Endnotes

1 It bears noting here that Cercas himself is another of the many authors whose careers defy standard, singular definition, and he is among the equally sizeable collection of authors whose thematics draw heavily on the civil war. In addition to publishing fiction and non-fiction, Cercas, like Marina Mayoral, is a professor and literary critic, he at the University of Girona and she at the Complutense in Madrid.

2 As Janet Pérez avers in the introduction to Contemporary Women Writers of Spain: “Abolition of the last vestiges of the Franco regime’s censorship on 31 December 1978 did not produce the great literary outpouring expected by some (in fact, the level of literary quality dropped considerably)” (11). Pérez’s aim is to mark the difference between works produced under a censorial regime and those produced in an environment endowed with freedom of literary and artistic expression. In one regard, Pérez’s point is well taken; women, even after the regime’s end, suffer another level of gender-bias at the commercial and literary level. The parenthetical judgment of quality, however, seems to stray further afield than is critically feasible.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Auerbach, Erich. Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature.


Brown, Joan L., ed. Women Writers of Contemporary Spain. Newark, DE: U of


---. *La verdad de Agamenón*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 2006


“Ian Gibson afirma que recuperar la memoria histórica ‘no es revanchismo, es justicia.’”


Pardo Pastor, Jordi. “Significación metafórica en La lluvia amarilla de Julio


