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**Humor and Irony in the Postwar Writing of Carmen Martín
Gaité, Rosa Montero and Carme Riera: 1978-1988**

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by

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Dedication

To my parents, Mary E. and Richard C. Jasper

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Humor has often provided a means of articulating and resisting abuse and injustice throughout literary history, especially for those on the margin of society. From the picaresque novel of the seventeenth century to the esperpentos of Valle-Inclán in the twentieth century, satire, parody, caricature, and comic irony have served as weapons of protest for writers. Prose writing by women writers in postwar Spain offers examples of humor cultivated by those long-oppressed and voiceless in a dictatorship which was very restrictive to women and confined them almost exclusively to domestic life in postwar society. In Chapter One I present a brief history of humor theories, their current status, and humor in women's writing. In Chapter Two I discuss various examples of humor used by the principal male authors of the first part of the twentieth century who are known for their sense of humor. In Chapter Three I examine two works of Carmen

Martín Gaité, *Cuarto de atrás* (1978) and *Los usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (1987). Her humor is understated and ironic as she recalls the absurdities, inconsistencies, hypocrisies and intolerance during the Franco years. In Chapter Four, I analyze two works of Rosa Montero, a writer of the younger generation. She describes women's struggles and conflicts as they enter the corporate world in her satirical novels *Crónica del desamor* (1979) and *Amado amo* (1988). Her humor is less understated than Martín Gaité's as she caricatures the male managers who populate the business world. In Chapter Five, I explore the Catalán writer Carme Riera's novella, *Cuestión de amor propio* (1987), which continues to darken the humor. The feminist side to the humor in this work is revealed by the intensity with which the character attempts to strike back against injustice. With a framework of gender differences in humor that accounts for different tastes, means and ends to which humor can be applied, along with feminist contextual criticism, I analyze the humor that was not recognized in these Spanish women's postwar works, validating their perceptions and experiences and thus restoring their true perspective and reaction to past events.

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Chapter1 Introduction

I have had great difficulty in
determining what 'funny' is.

Lt. Comm. Data, Star Trek- The Next Generation

I. BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMOR THEORIES

As Salvatore Attardo reminds us in this quote with which he begins *Linguistic Theories of Humor* (1994), humor is funny yet serious and an often complicated business. A perusal of the literature on humor reveals an extensive range of theories, philosophies, definitions and contradictions that have occupied mankind since the times of the Greeks and the Latins. Though humor is considered to be a nearly universal human trait, writers and researchers acknowledge that it is hard to define. For Boskin, for instance, there is no easy way to define humor, “one of the most complex and ubiquitous of human expressions [. . .]. Its very breadth [. . .] presents formidable obstacles to comprehending the intricate mechanisms through which it operates on both individual and societal levels” (*Humor and Social Change in Twentieth-Century America* 1- 3). In addition, he says, the process of understanding humor is further compounded by the fact that “one person’s seriousness is another’s humor and that laughter can too easily be misconstrued” (3). This comment reflects a

characteristic that Freud has attributed to humor. "The affects, disposition and attitude of the individual in each particular case make it understandable that the comic emerges and vanishes according to the standpoint of each particular person" (*Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* 219-220).

Similarly, other critics have pointed out the complicating factors of the lack of absolutes as well as the individual perspective involved in the nature of humor. "Rien, absolument, n'échappe au rire. Ce n'est pas une question de matière, mais de manière, de contexte et de perspective," affirms Jean Emilina (*Le Comique. Essai d'interprétation générale*. 1991, 23).

So if we almost all feel that we possess a sense of humor, claiming that we know humor when we see it, why should something as common as humor be so challenging to define and analyze? Humor is not, as Alice Sheppard reminds us, just a judgment of funniness (*Women's Comic Visions* 38). It is a complex psychological-cognitive process involving perception and evaluation within a set of socio-cultural constraints.

The problem begins with the definition of the word humor. Over time, various words have become synonymous with it such as comical, laughter, amusement, and funny as well as many of its forms - satire, irony, wit, caricature, parody, and travesty. For instance, let us take a look at the way the Spanish words "humor" and "cómico" are defined. The *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española* (1992) defines "humor" as: "fig. Jovialidad, agudeza / Disposición en que uno se halla para hacer una cosa / Humorismo, manera graciosa o irónica de enjuiciar las cosas. **Humor negro:** Humorismo que se ejerce a propósito de cosas

que suscitarían, contempladas desde otra perspectiva, piedad, terror, lástima o emociones parecidas." "Cómico" is defined as: "Perteneiente o relativo a la comedia / Que divierte y hace reír."

The terminological problem, it seems, stems from the historic development of the word itself. Robert Escarpit, in his study entitled *L'Humour* (1960), explains that the English playwright Ben Jonson (1573?-1637) was the first to borrow the medical term "humour" and insert it into literary vocabulary. Originally, "humours" were the four liquid substances in the body that were thought to determine one's temperament. An excess of one of these was thought to cause an imbalance or illness. Generally reputed to be the creator of the English "comedy of humours," Jonson came up with the idea of applying the names of the four "humours" to the general disposition of his character-types. He declared ridiculous those who imitated eccentricity without actually possessing it. While Hamlet was a tragic "humour," Jonson presented deliberately comic ones. Jonson's contribution, then, was to link from then on the word "humour" with a comic sense, directly associated with laughter. Though the rest of Europe did not adopt the term "humor" however until a century and a half after Ben Jonson's use of it (Escarpit 14-16), there did of course exist humoristic works previous to Jonson's time in Spain as well as in the rest of Europe. One only has to be reminded of the Spaniard Arcipreste de Hita's *Libro de Buen Amor* (1330), the "primer ejemplo de técnica humorística modelo" according to Vilas, which appeared several years before Britain's own humorous *Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer in 1387 (Vilas 21-22).

Further complicating the definition and analysis of humor are its varied forms. It can be either casual (as in a joke) or sophisticated (as in a Shakespearean comedy). Some humor is intended only to amuse, while other forms such as political satire may have serious purposes. Humor may be found in light verse or in serious novels. It can be written or spoken, appearing in a song or in a comic strip (Walker, *What's so funny?: humor in American culture* 3-4), with each medium presenting a different set of issues and problems (Walker, *A Very Serious Thing* xi).

The comedian Steve Allen echoes the difficulty that the various forms of humor as well as its individual nature may pose in trying to construct a definition. “Dogmatism is out when analyzing humor because humor appears in such a variety of forms. Whatever we say about humor we are in trouble if we begin a sentence with ‘humor is’ or ‘all humor’ or ‘humor always.’ All humor isn’t anything. It isn’t even funny because what is funny is a matter of personal opinion” (Allen, “The Uses of Comedy” 19).

Another difficulty facing researchers is that humor is ephemeral and topical, often requiring context in order to be found amusing. Given that “humor is a reflection of its time--a product of and a comment on the society, politics, and customs of the day,” it assumes certain knowledge and values across the centuries in order to be understood (Shalit, *Laughing Matters* xxviii). Political satire, for example, based on events with which readers are not familiar would not be funny to them.

In addition, there are many purposes for and methods of defining and analyzing humor. Sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, linguists and literary critics all look at different aspects of how humor works, people's use of and response to it, and its various functions, with one group asking entirely different questions about humor than another (Walker, *What's so funny* 5). Some are concerned with the production of humor while others are concerned with its reception. Researchers of literature, for example, will draw upon a variety of disciplines for their analyses, making precise, fixed definitions impossible (Walker, *Serious* xii).

For these reasons, when analyzing humor, literary critics often prefer to sidestep the problematic issue of definition altogether, citing that they are in good company with the likes of E.B. White and Dorothy Parker. And while Nancy Walker includes herself in that group, she does admit that she finds a definition like the linguist Umberto Eco's helpful--in which he distinguishes humor from the comical by the latter's disregard for the rules and restrictions--in distinguishing between subtle and overt types of feminist humor (Walker, *Serious* xii).

Other critics warn us against attempts to define humor. "Although it is possible to categorize and characterize the diversity of humor, its nature and meaning remain elusive" (Boskin 1). Yet, there are some who urge a universal definition. Arthur Asa Berger, for one, has argued for the existence of certain standards that can be employed to judge humor irrespective of who or where one is ("What Makes People Laugh: Cracking the Culture Code" 428). There is a movement toward this direction in the linguistic camp with their script theory,

proposing a linguistic definition of funny texts and an individual humor competence, although it is not quite as ambitious as Berger's proposal. Berger represents a minority view, however, and many critics would be more inclined to agree with cartoonist Saul Steinberg: "Trying to define humor is one of the definitions of humor" (quoted in Levin, *Veins of Humor* 16).

Despite such warnings, there has been an increasing interest about the subject, resulting in considerable research into the properties and functions of humor. Students of the social sciences, particularly the psychologists, have been conducting experiments in the various properties of humor, mostly building on Freud's initial findings and suggestions regarding the psychological roots of humor. Still, there are those who disagree with Freud, revealing the variations and difficulties that exist in defining and comprehending humor. Complicating factors include not only humor's inherent psychological and cultural intricacies but also the prevailing attitude toward it as a subject for research and analysis. It is often viewed as a non-serious subject because it lacks what is regarded as a "proper intellectual focus." Because it is often a form of play, humor, considered less significant as a record of human aspirations and experience than is "serious" literature (Walker and Dresner, *Redressing the Balance* xv), until recently, was ignored by the social sciences as well as denied a relationship to art (Boskin 2).

While definitions of humor and its mechanisms and functions abound despite the difficulties presented above, there is a widespread feeling among critics that no single definition of humor can satisfactorily account for the diversity of concepts, closely-linked terms, forms and applications. We can,

however, draw some general conclusions about its nature and purposes. Humor, as a variety of the comical, presupposes a mental disposition. It encompasses the ironic and the comical without being one or the other. Humor as much as the comical seeks to provoke emotions, but their procedures are different (Arribas 36-37). Humor in general deals with discrepancies and the discrepancies that women's humor has found interesting have been those that have most directly touched their own lives (Walker, *What's so funny?* 10). Integral to many cultures, humorous expression has been influenced by geography and ethnic diversity. The resulting jokes have revealed anxieties about our differences, and those groups most affected by those differences have throughout history resorted to humor as a means of survival, group identification and protest against discrimination. Thus, even as Jean Emilina's comment leads us to believe that no material is beyond humor's reach, that nothing is sacred when it comes to humor, people have simultaneously used humor for centuries to press for those ideals of equality and freedom from oppression that they have held sacred (Walker 64).

II. CURRENT STATUS OF HUMOR THEORY

Just as there are many theorists who believe it is impossible to arrive at a simple and complete definition, there are also as many who feel that it is impossible to establish a general and comprehensive theory of humor and the comical capable of encompassing the complexity of these concepts' dimensions.

Nevertheless, despite the variety of proposals and the fact that the researchers have come from fields as varied as philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, aesthetics and literature, there has been an attempt to classify the major theories into three basic groups: hostility/ disparagement (superiority, aggression, derision) theories popular among Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes and to a certain degree Bergson, incongruity theories (contrast) upon which Bergson bases his theory, and release theories (sublimation, liberation) into which Freud's theory would fit (Gagnier, "Between women: status and anarchic humor" 135).

Humor's earliest origins in Western thought begin with Plato and Aristotle. Plato associated humor with laughing at vice in people who are relatively powerless, looking at it as a kind of malice toward such people, and therefore something of which we should be wary. In addition, it was seen as an emotion connected with losing rational control over ourselves and therefore something to be avoided (Morreall, *The Philosophy of Humor and Laughter* 10). Aristotle basically agreed with Plato, emphasizing the derisive character of laughter, which causes pain to those who are the butt of the jokes (Morreall 14).

This, then, was basically the beginning of the hostility/disparagement theories of humor, also commonly called superiority theories. Although Plato and Aristotle were the first to mention the causes, Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679) constructs their superiority theory with greater detail (Morreall 19). He concluded that "the passion of laughter is nothing else but the sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others [. . .]" (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, ch. 6). The basic notion of

humor, the apprehension of “some deformed thing” in others, the comparison of which caused them to suddenly applaud themselves as superior, was seen as basically laughter at the defects of others and therefore “pusillanimity.” Because this self-applause was seen as always being directed at someone as a kind of scorn, it was deemed to be not the “proper” work of great minds and therefore something that should be kept in check. Together with the Greek philosophers Hobbes helped entrench the notion that the activity of enjoying humor was unworthy and that therefore humor itself was somehow ethically suspect. The resulting long-standing prejudice has been attributed by Morreall as cause for a good deal of the philosophical neglect of the study of humor (Morreall 3).

One major problem with the Superiority Theory, however, was that it was built on too few instances, and it was later realized that there was no essential connection between laughter and scorn. Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) was one of the first to point out that since we do not always laugh at the failure of others and since much of what amuses us does not necessarily involve feelings of superiority, we must look elsewhere to find the essence of amusement. In his own theory of humor, which emphasized the comic’s ability to trigger ideas that clash, we see the beginnings of an incongruity theory. But the Superiority theory held sway for about two thousand years until Immanuel Kant (Morreall 3-6).

Kant (1724 - 1804) was one of the first authors generally associated with the second group of traditional theories of humor--the incongruity theories. He raised the notion of incongruity in his theory of joking when he declared that “In everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh there must be something

absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction).” In the listening of a joke, a sort of deception is set up for us and we build up an expectation, which is suddenly dissipated into nothing. Laughter then, for Kant, was “[. . .] an affection arising from sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 1790:177).

Whereas Kant located the essence of humor in the dissipation of an expectation, Schopenhauer saw it as being located in the contradiction of an expectation (Palmer, *Taking Laughter Seriously* 95). He is the first to mention "incongruity" explicitly in his definition: "The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity." The greater the contrast between the object and its concept, the more ludicrous it becomes (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, 1819, 76).

The French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), in his classic essay *Le Rire* (1901), concentrates on laughter, particularly that which is provoked by the comical. Bergson's theory is primarily an incongruity-based theory, having as its prime example the contrast between the natural and the mechanical: "the incongruity gives rise to laughter when the mechanical is encrusted upon the living" (84). This juxtaposition is brought on by the mobility of life which requires us to adapt to the situations around us. Man's vice, viewed as a departure from the norm or the expected, is a kind of automatism causing him to act as a machine, in a mechanically repetitious manner instead of in an alive, vital one.

This automatism is akin to absentmindedness which becomes comic: “The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine” (79). Bergson believed that laughter, by the fear it inspires, restrains eccentricity and separatist tendencies (Bergson 73), becoming a weapon with which society can criticize those departures from the norm, and punish and correct idiosyncrasies (Cameron 5). Humor, in his view, also requires an intellectual outlook from the participants rather than an emotional one (62- 63), because while comedy’s aim is to influence behavior, if the arousal of emotion that is provoked is excessive, some reaction other than humor is more likely to occur (Palmer 99).

Release or relief theories are the third group of traditional theories of humor. First carefully worked out by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) in his essay "On the Physiology of Laughter," the Relief Theory takes a more physiological approach to laughter than do the other theories, treating it as the venting of excess nervous energy. Using incongruity as a starting point, Spencer determined that the contraction of facial muscles when amused with certain unexpected contrasts of ideas was the result of nervous energy built up within our bodies which “discharges itself on the muscular system” (301-302).

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), like Spencer, saw laughter as an outlet for psychic or nervous energy, and his theory is classified as a Relief Theory. But Freud's theory is more complicated than the previous Relief Theories. In his book, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud distinguishes three kinds of laughter situations: joking or wit, the comic, and humor. In each case, according

to his hypothesis “laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge” (147). Built-up psychic energy, suddenly no longer needed for concentration upon some object or idea, is what is discharged during the physical process of laughing. The laughter in jokes, then, arises from the psychic energy no longer needed to repress hostile or sexual feelings and thoughts, while the laughter in the comic is derived from the release of energy no longer needed to concentrate upon some object or idea. The energy discharged in humor is that of built up emotions such as anger or pity that are suddenly checked (235).

These three theories, then, are at the base of everything that has followed. In addition to the traditional theories of laughter and humor, contemporary theories have emerged. Among them is Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humor, included in Incongruity theory. Based on Chomsky's concept of grammatical competence and an idealized speaker's humor competence, Raskin attempts to provide the "necessary and sufficient conditions" that a text must meet in order to be considered funny (*Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, 1985, 57).

Raskin uses this concept to establish his main hypothesis:

A text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying-text if both of the [following] conditions are satisfied: i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite [. . .]. (99)

Yet while Raskin's work is applied with an impressive effort of methodological rigor, thereby avoiding the “sloppy theorizing” that Morreall feels

has historically plagued the field of humor (4), it is common for researchers today to insist that no single formula will describe the complex set of factors and interactions involved in humor. While the previous theorists may have thought that they were formulating a single universal theory of humor, Paul Lewis asserts, they were in essence only describing certain aspects of humor. “Notions of superiority and repression are concerned with the psychological and social functions of humor, which can be distinguished from studies of the formal properties of humor, the nature of humor appreciation or the development of the comic personality” (Lewis, *Comic Effects* ix-4).

III. HUMOR IN WOMEN’S WRITING

Humor has often provided a means of articulating protest against abuse and injustice throughout literary history, especially for those on the margin of society. It has often been the only weapon available to them with which to attack. From the picaresque novel of the seventeenth century to the esperpentos of Valle-Inclán in the twentieth century, satire, parody, caricature, and comic irony have served as weapons of protest for writers. Yet despite the fact that literary and periodical production of humor has been abundant in Spain--its many anthologies attesting to a rich humoristic tradition that dates back to Antiquity, with Marcial and his epigrams (Vilas 21)--the critical production on humor has been scarce. And if scarce attention has been given to the study of humor in general, the consideration of female humoristic works has been given even less (Barreca, *Last*

Laughs 4). Few women appear in the major anthologies and critical analyses of humor, fundamental in creating a canon and in establishing a tradition in humor (Dresner, *Humor in America* 137). Among the three hundred and twenty names of humorists mentioned in an anthology of Spanish humor from the first to the twentieth century published in 1957, only one woman appears: Emilia Pardo Bazán. Another anthology produces the names of two more women: Mercedes Ballesteros y Remedios Orad (Arribas 121). While the overall dearth of critical treatment may be related to the way the genre of humor itself is viewed, a closer examination reveals particular reasons for the absence of women humorists in critical accounts (Dresner, 137, Dudden 7).

The position of women in society has affected not only the lack of recognition of humor in women but also the kind of humor they have produced. Various legal, economic, political, social and cultural factors that have had a restrictive impact upon women's lives throughout history have recently been analyzed by feminist scholars. Occupying a subordinate position with respect to the dominant culture, women have at different periods in history been deprived of education, voting rights, and a public forum for their grievances. Legally and economically dependent upon men, they were relegated to the domestic sphere which necessarily excluded them from professions, careers and powerful positions in politics and the business world. In addition, their fear of retaliation for attempts to transgress what were traditionally viewed as feminine roles and ideals, their constant appearance as negative stereotypes in literature, and their secondary status as authors assigned to them by the male literary establishment have all

operated to limit women's participation in society and especially women's writing--affecting their subjects, manner of expression and reading audience (Dresner 137-38).

Moreover, women have faced particular obstacles in the area of humor. Anti-female bias in humor written by men has helped to perpetuate the belief that women lack a sense of humor. Their misogynist humor has created and reinforced over time a large stock of negative female stereotypes. Women have appeared as the nag or the gossip, but not as a humorous lead character, which has undoubtedly helped to contribute to the idea of women being devoid of humor (Walker and Dresner xvi).

More importantly, humor has come to be defined by what the dominant culture has promoted as funny--the male tradition of humor: their concerns, their language and their style (xvi). Consequently, a humorous tradition that varies from it, such as the case with women's humor, presents challenges to the existing critical methods. Unable to deal with it, literary criticism has tended to ignore or consider insignificant women's tradition of humor. Recently gains have been made in the area of female humor criticism, although in the beginning, even feminist criticism generally avoided the discussion of comedy, perhaps, Barreca suggests, out of a desire to be accepted by conservative critics "who found feminist theory comic in and of itself" (*Last Laughs* 4).

Furthermore, men have historically been the theorists of humor and they have seldom considered the role of gender in humor, particularly women's humor in a male public domain or in the context of their historical power relations

(Gagnier 136-7). When they do consider the role of gender, it is usually to deny a sense of humor in women or to denigrate women's competence in that area. The Spanish treatises on humor by Pío Baroja, Gómez de la Serna, and Santiago Vilas fail to mention any female humorists or recognize women as possessing a sense of humor, often openly declaring her incapable of it.

In the 1960s, the wide acceptance of the concept of social cognition, which encourages the recognition of belief systems as transitory, paved the way for a revision in social theory, including an emphasis on gender-based cognitions. Institutions and ideology came to be seen as constructs forged out of a past that exerted control on patterns of interaction and meaning. At the same time, social psychologists, interested in the influence of social values and beliefs on behavior, propelled in large part by the women's movement, revised their theoretical models which previously had over-generalized male models, bringing about a reconsideration of psychological theories of humor. Gender began to be considered as having an important effect on behavior, cognition, and language-language being an important constituent of humor (Sheppard 33-34).

Women's incompetence when it comes to the area of humor has been closely tied to the debate about her intellectual capabilities, a debate that became intense in the nineteenth century among educators, clergymen and scientists. The increasingly separate male and females "spheres" that existed at that time, provided an argument against nineteenth-century women's entry into business, higher education and politics (Sheppard 37). As a consequence, woman came to be traditionally associated with intuition, feeling and morality, while man was

thought to dominate in the area of reason, logic and intellect (Welter qtd. in Walker, *Serious* 80). The resulting cultural perception was one of women as intellectually inferior and lacking in humorous abilities (Walker, *Serious* 82). In literature, they became identified with the “angel” and “monster” images that male authors generated for them (Gilbert and Gubar 17).

Another way gender functions to exert psychological control on women’s humor is the characterization of women’s “proper role.” The binary nature inherent in gender discourse offered justification for a different upbringing. In Regina Barreca’s *They Used to Call Me Snow White... But I Drifted. Women’s Strategic Use of Humor* (1991) the author explains that women are brought up to be “good,” in other words to not show off intellectually, to not display a temper, and to know to laugh at a man’s joke even if it is insulting to them, providing, of course, that it is not a dirty joke, in which case laughing would be seen as evidence of their sexual awareness and therefore not so “nice” (Barreca 4-6). And although a lady may laugh discreetly at a joke she does not make them. Associated with masculine traits of power, control and aggression, humor came to be seen as “unfeminine” at odds with the ideology of the “lady,” which mandates from childhood a passive behavior in women that is the very opposite of the irreverent, aggressive attitude that a humorist may take (Walker, “Toward Solidarity” in *Comic Visions* 59). The resulting cultural expectations of women, then, were those of niceness and passivity, embodied in the image of the “Good Girl,” a product of the culturally constructed roles developed and supported by

society, church and government, institutions for the most part headed by males (Barreca, *Snow White*4).

This social perception of humor as a masculine prerogative and unfeminine mode is a major contributing factor in the social unacceptability of female humor (Walker and Dresner xvi). In his cross-cultural study of humor the anthropologist Mahadev L. Apte found that in virtually every culture constraints on women's humor in the public realm stem from the prevalent cultural values that emphasize male superiority and dominance together with female passivity, and the roles that those values reinforce (69). "By restricting the freedom of women to engage in and respond to humor in the public domain, men emphasize their need for superiority. Men justify such restrictions by creating ideal role models for women that emphasize modesty, virtue and passivity" (81). He also declared that the existence of a set of values that operated to constrain only female humor reflected inequality between the sexes. He concluded that man's capacity for humor was not superior to women's, attributing the differences to the prevalent cultural values that impose constraints on women's free expression of it. Indeed, studies today show that women may actually have a better sense of humor than men. In his new book *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, Robert Provine, a neuroscientist at the University of Maryland, discovered a gender disparity in laugh rates, with women far surpassing men (qtd. in the *New York Times*, Jan. 11, 2001). Other studies have shown that women can take a self-deprecating joke whereas men are known to not be able to (McGhee 206), hinting at the fact that being in the dominant position men perhaps find demeaning jokes made against

them by women threatening. It has been suggested that precisely because women are not in the dominant position they may not have to take themselves as seriously and can therefore afford to laugh at themselves. Feminist psychologist Lee Marlowe summarizes it this way: “men laugh at women; women must laugh at themselves” (Sheppard 35).

Apte’s claim of existing inequality between the sexes echoes Lakoff’s claim that linguistic imbalances point to real-world imbalances and inequities. Linguistic discrimination, she says, reflects bias against women as full status, rational creatures (*Language and Women’s Place* 4, 8). It is symptomatic of the fact that women and men are expected to have different roles, interests and conversation (62). Lakoff further suggests that those cultural values identified by Apte as imposing constraints on female humorous expression are constructed rather unilaterally by the dominant culture (*The Language War* 20). Since men have had power since recorded history, a fact she takes to be self-evident, they have been in control of discourse (*Talking Power* 199). Men, then, have been the ones who have had the power to define male and female roles, assigning the role of arbiter of morality and keeper of manners to women who, denied the means of strong expression, are forced to submerge their personality (*Language and Women’s Place* 7, 52). One of these restrictions on her expression is joking. “Women don’t tell jokes [. . .]. [I]t is axiomatic in middle-class American society that, first, women can’t tell jokes [. . .],” she reminds us. Deprived of strong expression, women are consequently not taken seriously and this in turn functions to keep them in their place, outside of positions of power (56).

And even though a lady is not supposed to make jokes, she is expected to laugh at a man's joke. This supposedly serves as a sign that she "gets" the joke and therefore has a sense of humor. Female critics, however, are quick to point out that there is a big difference between affirming that women do not have a sense of humor and observing that they do not "get" the joke or understand the humor. Grasping an incongruity or comic situation requires, among other things, sharing the same values, experiences, and moral and social codes. What male theorists of the past did not realize was that women, by not forming part of the dominant group, did not necessarily share the same codes, opinions, concerns, attitudes or perspectives as men (Arribas 126-27), affecting the extent to which men and women could share and enjoy each other's perceptions of the incongruities that made up their humor. While all in the culture are aware of the values of the dominant culture, not all are aware of those of the subculture (Walker and Dresner xxii). Coming from two different worlds, where women's angle of vision is "always a little apart" (Bruère and Beard viii), men represent an out-group when trying to understand the humor of women, the in-group, or in other words a group united by common beliefs, attitudes, and interests typically excluding outsiders. And humor, the experts say, is always the humor of the in-group (Boskin 5).

Humor requires not only the perception of an incongruity or comical situation but the enjoyment of it as well. Humor reception is a complicated process, involving the evoking of several cognitive frames such as the identity of the joke's target, the identity of the "aggressor" and the attitude of the recipient.

Accordingly, the notion of humor's universality is relative. Racist or sexist jokes, for instance, may not be funny when the audience is the butt of the joke (McGhee 203-04). And while some women may laugh because they actually enjoy jokes that demean them, Lakoff suggests that it may more often occur in order to avoid being labeled as having no sense of humor (*Language and Women's Place* 82). McGhee and others, citing laughter's use as a social lubricant by women, have noted that it may occur simply to present a "charming" personality (McGhee 209). They have also noted, however, that as feminist consciousness grows, women are less inclined to laugh at self-deprecating jokes (207).

The joke may also not be enjoyed if the comic touches upon a sensitive or painful topic, even though the incongruity is grasped (McGhee 204). This can occur with both men and women. Women's protest in her humor, for instance, requires that the reader at least not find objectionable the political ideas proposed in it in order to be enjoyed. On this basis, men might find it difficult to appreciate humor in which they appear as the oppressor (Walker, *Serious* 72).

Studies of social perception provide further theoretical constructs for the study of humor that help explain the lack of recognition of humor in women. Sheppard's use of attribution theory leads her to consider humor as a trait to be socially attributed. Acknowledging that the perception of incongruity is subjective, depending on the viewer's expectation and past experiences, in order to be accepted as funny she claims, "[. . .] an intention or configuration of humor must be attributed to the person or event. Adding to the complexity of

attributions, the audience predisposition to laugh depends on social factors as well as attitudinal and cognitive ones” (Hertzler 1-62 qtd. in Sheppard 37-38).

In examining the many factors that could suppress humor, Sheppard points to the inability or unwillingness to take an appropriate social perspective (38). Among the most basic social factors that reduce the probable attribution of humor to women’s productions, she claims, is the expectation that women are unlikely to use humor. “Given a social perception in which the definition of woman contradicts a belief in her deliberate efforts at humor, males (and females) espousing traditional stereotypes will not view the product as humorous” (Sheppard 39).

The low status of women in society also exerts psychological control on women’s humor. Both McGhee’s and Coser’s studies, even Apte’s, have observed that humor in a social setting is generally initiated by someone of higher status. Women, as we have seen, are recognized as being of lower status than males. When a person of low status initiates a joke, there is always the risk that doing so may be viewed as inappropriate and anything but amusing, consequently causing the person to suppress any impulse to do so (Sheppard 39).

Hence, a person’s perspective, their vision of and place in the world, as well as their mental disposition, in large part influenced by their gender, play an important role in determining not only the type of humor one will produce but also the manner in which it will be received (Arribas 127). Rather than lacking a sense of humor, it is the opportunity for the free expression of that sense that women have lacked. We have seen that a complex set of cultural assumptions,

values, and expectations have all worked to constrain and misconstrue women's humor. This invalidation of humor is an invalidation of women's perception and experiences, representing a loss of power and meaning that has yet to be rectified (Sheppard 48-49).

Despite the fact that males have not recognized a female humorous tradition, a long, rich tradition has existed nonetheless, documented in the "New World" since the seventeenth century (Walker and Dresner xv), a tradition that still needs to be uncovered in Spain (Brown 13). What these researchers have uncovered is a tradition of female humor which reflects the different world of women--a world always "a little apart." Equally affected by the pressures of the marketplace as men were, women tended to use many of the same devices and trends as men, but unlike male humorists, female humorists concentrated on the particular circumstances of women's lives in different periods of our history, reflecting their roles and positions as women in our culture. Prior to 1900, their subject matter focused both by choice and necessity on the domestic sphere of wife and mother and the social sphere to which they had been consigned. Centered on those activities which women in general found interesting and with which they were familiar (Walker and Dresner xv-xx), the themes of women's humor dealt with the incongruities between the realities of their lives and the illusions and ideals fostered by society's image and role for them, protesting the restrictions that narrowed their lives (Dresner 146) at a time when opportunity was opening up for men (Walker and Dresner xxvi). Consequently, women's

humor has been considered “less political, less iconoclastic, less dynamic and therefore less significant than the male variety” (Dresner 138).

Since many socio-cultural constraints operated to limit her free expression, her humor was realized in different ways and to different ends than that of men. Many of the common attributes of male humor are less evident or even absent in that of women. The humor they used--often lacking the aggressive and hostile quality of men’s humor as well as sexual subject matter and language which were taboo--was often described as gentle and genteel. The language and tone, particularly of American female humorists, reflected their different audience and setting as well as the cultural norms established by their gender role. Due to their subordinate position, women had to express frustration and anger at gender-based inequities obliquely (Walker and Dresner xxi-xxii). Forced to be covert and indirect, their humor tended to rely more on verbal devices such as understatement, irony, and self-deprecation, rather than on men’s typical way of engaging in humor- verbal duels, wordplay, wise-cracking, practical jokes and pranks (Dresner 151). Among the female humorists’ techniques were the use of realistic portrayal of women’s lives, contradicting the previously-existing weak and negative stereotypes, and the deflation of males’ notions of masculine superiority (Walker and Dresner xxvii).

Given that women are on the lower rung of the social hierarchy, their humor has had to be directed more at themselves or those below. In this context, self-deprecation--a “defensive reaction of those who feel themselves too weak or vulnerable to attack with impunity the forces that repress them”--can become an

offensive weapon in the hands of women--the out-group--as a way of diminishing the importance attributed to their “weaknesses” by the dominant culture (Walker and Dresner xxiii). Similarly, incongruity--used to target the behaviors prescribed for them by the dominant culture--can be political and therefore a major device for decoding the myths of the patriarchy. These linguistic devices, then, became tools with which women were able to mask the hostility of their attacks on the patriarchy. Therefore, the extent to which aggression and hostility are overt in her works is related to the degree of gender equality permitted in her society (Walker and Dresner xx-xxiii).

Consequently, because women’s humor was different it was often misread. A typical male complaint of female works, which often defied literary conventions, was that their novels seemed to be lacking closure, since their endings did not reproduce the established societal norms for their male and female characters. Males, the feminists claim, misread female humorous writing because they project sadness onto females’ happiness. The “happy” ending in female writings might be instead the refusal to support the male in his comfortable position or the women’s refusal to be married (Barreca, *Last Laughs* 16-17).

After 1900, some of these characteristics changed as humor in general began to reflect society’s move to the city where the audiences were more sophisticated and cosmopolitan. In Spain, however, this move would not occur until the 1950s (Davies, *Spanish Women’s Writing* 179). The greater freedom for women, which contributed to the battle between the sexes in their places of work during the first three decades, was reflected in their humor. The old assumptions

of the separate spheres, such as woman's presumed moral superiority, or in some cases inferiority, and physical and mental weakness, were challenged. Characters were portrayed more realistically. Women were shown to be just as morally and psychologically confused and as manipulative as men. And even though women's audiences were becoming less restricted, reflected in the diverse subject matter, the male humorists were setting a much more irreverent tone (Dresner 146).

In the 1950s, domestic humor, featuring the discontented housewife, became popular. It was later accompanied by feminist humor which arrived on the scene in the 1960s, ushering in a new phase in women's writing, influenced by the international women's movement (Dresner 149). Realism in literature in the twentieth century functioned within Freudian and Marxist contexts, rendering more authentically than before women's experiences and views of life into fiction. Taboo areas of female experience were described. Anger and sexuality were accepted as attributes of realistic characters as well as a source of female creative power. The writers were aware of their place in a political system and their connectedness to other women (Arribas 34).

In the nineteen seventies, women, tired of seeing themselves through men's eyes, struggled to find their own voice. They began to reclaim their rights, rejecting the position to which they were relegated saying that it was not justified by stupidity or Eve-like wickedness, but rather was an artificial construct developed as a result of male control of political and social power (Lakoff, *Talking* 200). Feminine realism, protest and self-analysis combined in the context

of twentieth century social and political concern (304), continuing the phase of female self-discovery and self-scrutiny that had begun in earlier decades.

In the seventies and eighties, humor became more overt and aggressive, influenced by the irreverent tones of male comedians both black and white. More confrontational on social and political issues, it identified more specific agents of oppression. It attacked the greater privilege and freedom of white males, derided patriarchal institutions, and ridiculed social, sexual and racial stereotyping (Walker and Dresner xxxi-xxxii).

The Feminist Movement arrived in Spain concurrently with the Women's Liberation Conference that took place in Barcelona in 1975 (Davies 183). Arriving about fifteen years later than in the U.S. and other European countries, the Feminist Movement was never as strong in Spain as it was in other countries, being quite divided from the beginning and remaining so (Folguera, *El feminismo en España* 129). Nevertheless, women writers occupied a privileged place in the Transition, as the post Franco democratic emergence was called, as vocal critics of a process with which they were disenchanted and from which they felt excluded. In the face of men's growing silence, women became more vociferous (Buckley, *La doble transición* xiv-xv). Consequently, feminist conscience grew in the eighties among women not linked directly to the movement who fought for social change in private life. And while the Feminist Movement did manage to bring about reform, achieving the right to share in decisions and domestic tasks, abortion, divorce and contraception (Folguera 129), there still remained the feeling that society was "machista," with dubious flexibility in the face of all the

radical changes. Female writers' disenchantment was expressed through their biting irony, revealing a deep feeling of frustration, discontent and conflict with the male world and the new image of the democratic women. Their humor inclined towards issues that affected them and that had not changed with the arrival of democracy, such as discrimination in the workplace, paternalism, and fear of feminism (Arribas 132-33).

Today's women are humorous without timidity and the numerous humoristic works written by women certainly disproves the absurd idea of women's incapacity for humor. They indicate a clear change in Spanish women's socio-cultural customs as well, with the greatest changes in their role in society, education level, financial independence and legal equality occurring after Franco's death in November of 1975 (128).

The themes in postwar women's popular humoristic literature are diverse. They satirize the Spanish upper class, especially the pseudo-vanguard groups, and criticize ostentation and the cult of consumerism. Their works reveal a desire to recollect social events in a time and country hostile to change in the face of any alternative. They look back in time, using the past as a way to understand the present. Their analyses and sketches focus on societal structures with its codes, classes and other "pigeonholes." They also reflect on mental problems and obsessions of those who dwell in the modern world. This thematic diversity of women's humor reflects a humor not solely centered on the controversy between the sexes. Instead, it is comprised of a wide range of interests, reflections, and preoccupations. However, a common theme emerges among many of the

contemporary Spanish women humorists: that of heterosexual relationships in the environment of the family, the home, free unions and the workplace. The texts reveal a questioning of Spanish society's firmly established ideas about women's roles and confront directly the changes generated by the arrival of democracy (128-29).

This more assertive feminine humor, spaces where social hierarchies are broken and "se cruza una diversidad de fronteras de orden social y estético," is a way in which a minority group can find its direction of self-expression relative to a dominant society (131). Throughout history, women's novels, whether feminine or feminist, have had to struggle against cultural and historical forces that relegated women's experience to the second rank (Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* 36). Whole spheres of observation were closed to women writers but nobody would open them (81). Consequently, much went unexpressed about the type of female experience that resembled men's. Few women told the truth about their body or mind (318), but this would change with the arrival of feminist theories.

Feminist humor, as defined by Nancy Walker, makes plain the absurdities of culture's views of women and expectations while making it clear that it is the culture that has subjugated them (Walker, *Serious* 143). It tackles stereotypes and highlights the sources of discrimination, granting women new power and entrance into the game. It recognizes its existence as source of dialog, while at the same time breaking barriers of misogynist humor (Arribas 130). It reveals a preference for weakening the dominant ideology by presenting its contradictions and its

absurdities (138). In exhibiting hostility against those social structures that have favored men's oppression of women (151), feminist humor becomes a political act as well as a source of pleasure.

In this study I will look at some of Spain's postwar women writers whose humor is an attempt to voice the years of oppression in a dictatorship which was very restrictive to women and confined them almost exclusively to domestic life in postwar society. Though democracy opened the door wide for women's humor, it was still not without difficulties, especially in the early years of the transition when censorship still operated, albeit on a less intrusive level. This process of the gradual easing of censure we will see reflected in the change of tone in women's humor over the years. Beginning with Carmen Martín Gaité's critique of Francoist society written in the early years of democracy, in which the author admits to censoring herself to avoid formal censure, we will see irony and understatement so subtle that it seems defensive. In her *Cuarto de atrás* (1978) and *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (1987) Martín Gaité recalls the absurdities, inconsistencies, hypocrisies and intolerance during the Franco years as she relates the experience of growing up female during and after the Spanish Civil War. In the writings of members of the younger generation, Rosa Montero in *Crónica del desamor* (1979) and *Amado amo* (1988) and Carme Riera in *Cuestión de amor propio* (1987), we see a more direct humor which, in their use of burlesque and parody, becomes so egregious at points that it tends towards caricature and grotesquerie, finally turning dark. Montero caricatures the male managers who populate the business world while Riera continues to darken the

humor in her first-person account of a sardonic joke she plays on her mentor, a former lover who has betrayed her.

Studying humor, and particularly women's humor in the postwar years, permits us to observe how through its use, the authors have established a voice that reflects their values, talents, desires, complaints, and commentaries, allowing us glimpses of what it was like to be a woman in post Franco Spain. We shall see how through the use of humor women can satirize and publish criticism, broaching topics that might otherwise be difficult or offensive to express in another way or remain condemned to silence. "For the very reason that humor officially does not 'count,' persons are induced to risk messages that might be unacceptable if stated seriously," Joan Emerson affirms ("Negotiating the Serious Import of Humor." *Sociometry* 169-70).

We shall see how humor, by giving a voice to women writers' own feelings and thoughts in a fundamentally still phalocentric society, provides a release valve for their frustration as well as access to a discursive authority that gives them power (Arribas 158). We shall see how these women authors, even as they use humor's power to "desacralizar y relativizar hasta lo 'intocable,'" argue for those values that they hold sacred (53). We shall also perceive, in the words of Patricia Spacks, "a special female self-awareness" that emerges through literature in every period (*The Female Imagination* 3), which, as it lifts off the cover of the patriarchy, uncovers the beginnings of a tradition of humor in Spanish women's writing.

Chapter 2

Humor in twentieth century Spanish literature by male writers

Throughout the first seventy years of the twentieth century, the Spanish humorous tradition continues to be dominated by male writers as it has been previously throughout literary history. It is not until the seventies that female writers begin to avail themselves of this tradition, although in different ways and to different purposes than males, as I will document in later chapters. In this chapter, I will discuss the various examples used by the principal male authors of the first part of the twentieth century who are known for their sense of humor. Whether representative of the sublimation of humor or its antithesis, whether used for serious social commentary or not, their humor ranges from intranscendental and frivolous to sarcastic, satirical and dark, often with violent or grotesque overtones.

If there is one constant that stands out in Spanish literature it is humor. It seems to abound in times of crisis, of searching and of questioning and it is perhaps for this reason that it is seen by critics like Vilas as a synthesis or voice of its time. It has often been used as a vehicle for articulating social, political and ideological criticism of the moment, especially for those on the margin of society, for whom it has served as a weapon of protest. Throughout Spanish literary history, starting with *El libro de buen amor* in the Middle Ages and the picaresque novel of the seventeenth century, until the humorists of our day,

passing through *El Quijote* and Quevedo's *La vida del buscón*, the satire of Larra and *La Codorniz*, the *esperpentos* of Valle-Inclán and Garcia Lorca's farces, "se ha querido poner en tela de juicio, mediante los recursos del humor, tanto las hipocresías del mundo como sus aspectos absurdos, las injusticias y la validez de los valores morales" (Arribas 67).

In Spain, Cervantes' *El Quijote* is considered humoristic literature's most accomplished model. It serves as a synthesis and guide of all that can be found in humor: poetization and intellectualization, irony, satire, parody, aestheticism and moralizing criticism, comicality (jokes, plays on words, exaggeration, comic situations, etc.) and "humoridad," laughs and smiles, and a message of deep human dimensions (Vilas 105-06). Judged by Luigi Pirandello to be one of the most exemplary works of humor, the novel instills in the sensitive reader the "feeling of the opposite," defined by Pirandello as an inclination to laugh which simultaneously occurs in us along with a feeling "of pity, of sorrow, and of admiration" which troubles our laughter and "makes it bitter," a feeling without which true humor is not achieved (Introduction, Antonio Illiano and Daniel P. Testa, xi). Using the tools of humor as its most powerful weapons, *El Quijote* criticized the society of its time, and with it, humor became not only a defense against adversity, but also a means of revealing human weaknesses and capacity for goodness. Its compassion, which humanized the cynical picaresque humor,

greatly increased the range of the Spanish humorous response (Higginbotham xiv) and has profoundly influenced the Spanish humoristic tradition.

Among the many "abuelos" of the post-francoist humorists in Spain is Quevedo. Quevedo's humor, loaded with satire and irony, is full of impatience, attacks on his country's representatives, and bitterness in the face of that country's contradictions (Arribas 68). His humor is perceived by some critics to be the antithesis of the sublimation of humor found in Cervantes. Instead of the understanding and goodness seen in Cervantes, Quevedo presents us with sadness, a forced laugh, a grimace, as if he were angry. What is perceived by some as often turning into caricature and reprimand (Vilas 106), is seen by others as "un toque de atención, un grito de alarma, una larga serie de denuncias con las que quiere prevenir a sus compatriotas del porvenir que les espera" (Acevedo 186).

The force of these two great authors' styles is evident in the range of humor techniques used by twentieth century writers as they incorporate the sublime of Cervantes as well as the bitter sarcasm of Quevedo, and include whimsy, surprise, word play, caricature, parody, irony, grotesquerie and dark humor.

WHIMSY, SURPRISE, WORD PLAY

Today, Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Ramón as he is often called by many, is most known for his *greguerías*, epigrams ranging from whimsical to playful to

lyrical into which he condensed his universe viewed from his original, different, abnormal, excentric and humoristic angle. Thought of as the originator of Spain's vanguardist literature, he was of great importance in the revitalization of Spanish letters in the twentieth century (Vilas 124-26). The varied and surprising construction of his images led the way in the vanguard's rediscovery of the metaphor, enriching its communicative power more than had any Spanish writer since Góngora (Gardiol 126).

Gómez de la Serna wrote thousands of *greguerías*, a name originally meaning gibberish or irritating noise which he applied to his creations. Ramón himself defined the *greguería* as "humorismo + metáfora" (1972:15). For him, the *greguería*, to which he dedicated himself since 1910, was the essence of things, "lo que gritan los seres confusamente desde su inconsciencia, lo que gritan las cosas" (1972:8).

Ramón used his humor to critically examine social institutions and taken as a whole the *greguerías* constitute an attack on the immovable laws that surround the society of his time. He denounced the absurdity of false appearances and presumptuous aspirations (Saavedra 135), irritating at times the bourgeoisie (Prieto-Delgado 16). Rejecting the claim that Ramón is merely a clever verbal gymnast, Cardona credits the author with seeing that humor "is the perception by the intellect of the grim absurdities of life [. . .]" and that there is "something

comic and dolorous at the same time in the ‘nothingness’ of which he speaks” (69).

Metaphoric transgression and different linguistic processes generate the humor provoked by the *greguerías*. Carlos Bousoño distinguishes between two types of metaphors--those created by a poet, the traditional metaphor, and those created by a humorist. The traditional metaphor is based on a physical similarity between two terms while the metaphor created by a humorist provokes humor in the degree of dissimilarity of the simile. The greater the difference between the two terms of comparison, the greater the humoristic impact it will produce, within certain limits (1970:18). Following Bergson’s theory of the comic, Bousoño points out that we laugh at the apparent error committed by the author of the comic metaphor, led to view as equal two objects of impossible equivalency, caused by only looking at a slight, insignificant link and not taking into account the rest of the relationship that seems to remain invisible to the subject. However, there must be a link between the two, however slight, in order for us to find it funny, otherwise it would just be absurd (19).

The most surprising of Ramón’s aesthetics is his capacity to discover humanity in things, to fantasize about the little, inoffensive, everyday objects that the author personalizes, investing them with an imaginative life. In the *greguerías*, the object is liberated from its ordinary category and included in another order in which by nature it does not belong, taking on life and appearing

personified or animated. The personification or humanization of objects extends to animals, plants, trees, flowers, fruit, elements, natural phenomén and spaces, and abstract realities (Serrano Vásquez 178-182): *La luna necesita gafas porque se ha cansado la vista de trabajar sólo de noche. Si la luna estuviera debajo de las nubes en vez de encima, gastaría paraguas.*

Just as objects, plants and animals are personified, people, in turn, are objectified, vegetablized, or animalized. Examples of animalization include: *Hay quienes ordeñándose la barbilla tienen grandes pensamientos. Las arpistas están metidas en jaula de oro. Las sandalias son los bozales de los pies. Viajeros; peces pescados en redes de tren. Ciclistas: hormigas en bicicletas. Greguerías* in which man is vegetablized: *Patillas: musgo en la cara.* Examples of objectification: *Los túneles nos embalan en algodones de humo caliente. Las narices son los enchufes de las personas* (183-85).

WORD GAMES

Language is seen by Ramón as something imposed, as a set of expressions whose meaning has been imposed on us. Rebeling against the set, traditional meanings of words, he gives them new meanings: *los “ostrogodos” son ‘grandes comedores de ostras’; “apóstata”, ‘uno que apuesta en falso’; “panacea”, ‘la cesta del pan’.* Sounds may suggest to him a strange association as in *Agripina era una gran griposa* or he may attribute meanings to words that they do not

have: *Monólogo quiere decir mono que habla solo*. This breakdown between what the word appears to mean and what it means in reality produces a shock in the reader who knows the true meaning of the term (Serrano Vásquez 79-80).

Bringing together paronyms is another one of the games that Ramón plays with language in his *greguerías*. By employing words that are different in meaning but very similar in sound a very effective contrast is produced, in which the strange associations produce a surprise effect that provoke our laughter (83-84): *Solo tenía la visión del visón. Qué fácil es que el adulto pase a ser adúltero. Todo contrato tarda un rato*.

His lexical creations, the production of new lexical units or neology, in which he plays with form and meaning at the same time, suppose both the use of the language code and the subversion of it at the same time (Fernández-Sevilla 1983:11-14). Ramón's lexical creations in the *greguerías* fall into two categories: individual creations and neologisms by borrowing. The combining of previously-existing elements in the language, has the greatest productive power in Ramón's individual lexical creations in the *greguerías*, after the metaphor (Serrano Vásquez 119). An example of a phonological neologism is the use of the word "crac": *Si todas las palabras fuesen como crac, chirriar y quiquiriquí, podría existir el lenguaje universal*. Other creations are derived from combining a base word with a prefix or suffix. Acordeonadas: *Hay unas botas de montar*

acordeonadas con las que se podría tocar un tango. Avestrucentes: *La noche se puso las vestrucentes plumas lunimosas de los fuegos artificiales* (124).

This particular type of humoristic literature is thought to have begun with Gómez de la Serna, and many have proposed that it ended with him. Vilas, however, believes that the humorist's *ramonismo* has filtered into practically all the following generations of writers, and particularly the humorists, evidenced not only in contemporary literature and the periodical humorous essay but also in works by later vanguardist poets such as Guillén, Lorca and Alberti (Vilas 133). However, Ramón's type of word games is an example of a form of humor used by males that is absent in the humor of the women writers analyzed in this study.

IRONY

Irony, according to the first meaning of the word given by The Oxford English Dictionary is "a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used." Irony in which the words say one thing but mean another is called verbal irony. There also exists situational irony--when things turn out the opposite of what one thinks or expects (Labanyi 123). Ranging from gentle to scornful, irony includes sarcasm, "a cruel form of irony, taunting, spiteful and bitter, a form of verbal revenge" (Nimetz 78-81). Unlike humor, where the "frame"--a model of encyclopedic sememic representation or "rules for practical life" (Eco, 1979, 20-21)--is obvious, irony involves a covert

conspiracy as to what is being mocked at the same time as it relies on shared values. The use of appropriate cues and signals is particularly important to the reader's awareness of entry into this humorous mode, since it is by their use alone that the speaker or writer implies the need for an opposing script (Schmid 25). Irony is usually recognizable in the awareness of contrast, for example, between text and context, between the "level appropriate to the ironist's subject and his/her ostensible meaning" (Recker 3). Devices such as the use of a weighty vocabulary, Latinisms, the use of words which are slightly out of place, repetition, parody, burlesque, and travesty are some ways in which divergence between text and context can be signalled. The resulting incongruity usually produces an effect of surprise (Recker 3).

Irony is frequently used by Wenceslao Fernández Flórez to express a deep preoccupation with social reform (Vilas 154). After its defeat in 1898, Spain was plagued by poverty, underdevelopment, social injustice, regional separatism, inadequate education, lack of investment and an urgent need to change the political structure of power. While the Generation of '98 was seeking spiritual solutions to these concrete practical problems and the old political groups could not be counted upon for help, nothing was being done to transform the situation and the country gradually slipped into the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in 1923 (Shaw 24-28). Impelled to unmask corruption and hypocrisy (Echevarría Pazos 363-64), Wenceslao's use of irony as a weapon to bring about a positive

transformation of the society of his time, echoes Bergson's belief in humor as a social corrective.

His compilation of humorous anecdotes, *Las gafas del diablo* (1918), presents us with the trials and tribulation of daily life with a humor and irony that make us smile. In "Psicología de los banquetes," the narrator's observations serve as vehicles that allow us to laugh at and criticize the prevailing political system. In pointing out the plight of the hungry, he paradoxically mentions that the hungry have studied the situation so thoroughly that they are close to coming up with a solution, despite being without organization or influence, while the "Poderes públicas" ironically remain perplexed (28). By this point, we have encountered enough divergence or incongruity between text and context to realize that what follows is to be taken ironically.

The narrative's irony turns sarcastic and even semi-esperpentic when relating how a hungry person, wanting to take revenge on society, would die in the middle of the street:

Positivamente esto era molestísimo. La gente se acumulaba en torno del cadáver para ver la mueca horrible y la miseria del rígido cuerpo [. . .]. Más de una digestión se perturbó ante un espectáculo parecido. Sesudos gobernantes estudiaron la manera de impedir que los pobres diablos trastornasen de esta manera afrentosa el orden social falleciendo en la vía pública con un absoluto desprecio de lo estatuído por la costumbre y casi por la ley. Las calles no se han hecho para que las gentes mueran en ellas. Las gentes deben morir en una cama. (28-29)

The narrator, however, assures us that he is always willing to help the government and has come up with a plan--convert entrance for the few positions available in jails into "verdaderas oposiciones." A simple crime would not suffice. He ironically suggests "apedrear un ministro, incendiar el Senado [. . .]; en fin, algo que no esté al alcance de un hambriento vulgar" (30). He doubts, however, the program's success due to rampant favoritism and influence that control all matters in his country: "Y en un país así, ¿qué quieren ustedes que haga para prosperar la numerosa y respetable clase de los hambrientos? [. . .]" (31).

CARICATURE

Derision, which can range from soft and gentle, to hard and caustic, has a variety of forms. Falling under ridicule and satire are caricature and parody (MacHovec 140-41). Caricature is "a representation, especially pictorial, in which the subject's distinctive features or peculiarities are deliberately exaggerated or distorted to produce a comic or grotesque effect" (Morris 204). The caricaturist distorts by exaggeration as well as by oversimplification, in which any features that might lend perspective to a characterization are left out (MacHovec 141). Leonard Feinberg describes its function in this way: "Caricature in literature operates by choosing an objectionable quality, attributing it to an individual or a group, then describing the victim only in terms of that disagreeable characteristic. In carrying out this process, over-simplification is the basic requirement"

(Feinberg 116-17).

In what has been described by Nimetz as the best introduction to literary caricature, Henri Bergson captures, without specifically aiming to do so, the essence of caricature: “The comic is that side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, of automatism, of movement without life” (1956:117). Caricature, a form of character creation, isolates those moments in which we are most ourselves, in which our eccentricities and quirks emerge (Santayana qtd. in Nimetz 29). As soon as those moments are selected, they are distorted by magnifying, isolating, or minimizing those specific elements to the exclusion of others of a more general nature (Nimetz 30). Those eccentricities and quirks become the physical traits, gestures, mannerisms and speech tags that are studied for their own sake, as are obsessions and the “ruling passions” (27). The various elements of caricature are closely interrelated and often difficult to separate out from one another: “Repetition (speech mannerisms, the ruling passion), mechanization (autonomy of parts of the body, children mimicking adults), elevation of the nonhuman (objects and animals), and certain kinds of physical description frequently reside on each other’s property” (Nimetz 147).

Though Federico García Lorca is not thought of as a humorist in the strict sense of the word, most of his dramatic production consists of comedies and

farces. Among the various devices of humor that the playwright employs in his dramatic works is dramatic caricature which he uses to mock and draw attention to that which he wants to censure. In *Doña Rosita la soltera*, Lorca creates a series of humorous caricatures that serve to indict Granadine bourgeois society at the turn of the century and its absurd social attitudes that resulted in the severely limited choices of women's lives. Much of the humor in the play stems from his satirization of *lo cursi*, bad taste, achieved by the dramatization of ridiculous caricatures. Best understood as a social phenomenon, *lo cursi* is at once a public vice and folly (ripe for satire) and personal self-deception (lending easily to the observer's distant and superior perspective needed for irony) (Nimetz 14).

The caricatures, mostly appearing in Act Two as they pay a visit to Rosita, embody *lo cursi*, a trait which is isolated and magnified to the exclusion of more general ones. First there is the vulgar and ostentatious Señor X. Vaunting his own "good taste," he presents a gift of a mother-of-pearl pendant of the Eiffel Tower resting on doves that carry in their beaks the wheels of industry. Next, the three *solteronas*, or unmarried sisters, arrive with their mother, overdressed and appearing with fans, feathers and ribbons. They present a gift that seems to "rival" the "good taste" of Señor X--a barometer that raises the rose-colored skirts on the figure of a young girl. But the most preposterous gift of all comes from the maid, confident that she has imitated the "refined" taste of her superiors. It is a thermometer surrounded by a fountain constructed of real shells, decorated with

green roses, blue sequins, and a nightingale embroidered with gold thread. Her desire to respect the ornate conventions of the day, evidenced by her pride in giving this as a gift, renders her comical since she is always mocking the pretentiousness of others. An outward manifestation of their eccentricity or quirky mannerism, the visitors' and maid's comical choice of gifts symbolizes a society concerned with moral and material trivia.

The sisters are soon joined by another set of visitors, the Ayola girls, who are also lavishly overdressed. Here, Lorca satirizes by using caricature to voice the prevailing social attitude that marriage is the only alternative in life for women. Urging Rosita to marry soon, one of the girls reminds her that “si soy amiga de Rosita es porque sé que tiene novio! ¡Las mujeres sin novio están pochadas, recocidas y todas... están rabiadas!”

The lame and aging don Martín is another caricature--a hapless and bumbling school teacher who thinks of himself as possessing poetic talent. Ironically described in the stage directions as a “tipo noble, de gran dignidad,” he is soon revealed to be a caricature of quite the opposite. As he recites from a play he has written, his lack of poetic talent becomes obvious. Later, his recounting of the pranks that his mischievous students have played on him continues to diminish his dignity. He finally becomes pathetic as he is called back to school because the students have played yet another prank, this time leaving the school flooded. He sadly reflects: “soñé con el Parnaso y tengo que hacer de albañil y

fontanero. Con tal que no me empujen o resbale.” His caricature along with those of the other visitors combines to produce a vivid portrayal of an empty, self-seeking and ludicrous society.

In *La casa de Bernarda Alba* (1935), caricature darkens with Lorca’s creation of Bernarda Alba, an exaggerated and distorted reflection of the society of her time. Devoid of personality traits that would have rounded out her characterization, she is compared to a lizard and a snake as she firmly and mechanically upholds the strict morality code of Spanish rural society (Higginbotham 132). A deformation of the heroic figure, she is fierce, often shouting or speaking forcefully in her communication with those around her. This “ruling passion” places Bernarda well within the domain of caricature, as she ruthlessly dominates her mother and her daughters and abuses the maids and the neighbors. Her first word with which she opens and with which she also ends the play is “Silence!” Typical of flat, unrounded characters, there is no development of her personality throughout the play and she learns no lessons from her mistakes. Remaining a bully until the end, with her club, her “bastón” by her side, Bernarda Alba, the caricature, evokes no pity from us.

Caricature also appears among the secondary characters in this play as well, where it is used for symbolic purposes. Martirio’s physically exaggerated humpbacked character embodies the morally distorted tradition of a stultifying society. The dementia of María Josefa, the grandmother, manifests the frustrated

desire for freedom and fulfillment of normal human needs that can only be expressed in a childish and buffoon-like manner. All these caricatures serve to indict the hypocrisy and cruelty of established morality.

In Lorca's farce *El amor de don Perlimplín*, the laughingstock of traditional comic theatre that was originally intended merely for amusement is adapted to achieve a complex, even tragic, portrayal of character and situation (Higginbotham 28). Lorca's don Perlimplín represents the typical aging husband deceived by his wife. Fifty years old, timid and inexperienced, he is puppetlike and easily manipulated by others. In this version of the honor theme, Lorca combines tragedy with farce, while delving into the psychological nature of the central character (Higginbotham 32). The conventional cuckold is presented to us with greater complexity than seen in its popular origins (Anderson 57). From the beginning there is a pathos in the old man's fears that takes us beyond the realm of caricature (Edwards 45). He is revealed to possess a complex mind, appearing absurd yet also pathetic. The movement from farce to grotesque pathos occurs rather swiftly as the puppetlike laughingstock of the early play, invested with complex human dimensions, is transformed ultimately into a comic martyr (Higginbotham 38-39), producing, in the end, a work whose tragic dramatic quality overshadows its farsical nature. Taking his own path against the conventional wisdom for the sake of love, with his suicide the defender of honor

in Lorca becomes a pathetic clown, subverting the typical vindication of the honor code, with the husband instead of the wife becoming its victim.

GROTESQUERIE, SATIRE

Evolving from the specific meaning as a piece of ornamental art, the term “grotesque” became, by the end of the eighteenth century, synonymous with “odd, unnatural, bizarre, strange, funny, ridiculous, caricatural, etc.” (Petro 14). Boris Eichenbaum considers the distinguishing feature of the grotesque style to be the setting forth of “minutiae while pushing into the background things that would seem to warrant greater attention” (288). For Mikhail Bakhtin the realist grotesque in literature grows directly out of carnival’s emphasis on the lower “bodily principle” or on degradation, “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract” (1968), associating itself with the earth, the body, and the animal-like.

Wolfgang Kayser tells us that caricature, as well as satire, has “much in common with the grotesque and may even help to pave the way for it” (37). Alvin B. Kernan affirms this connection when he states that “We never find characters in satire, only caricature” (174).

In literature, caricature can be classified in terms of the degree of distortion present, underscoring its link with the grotesque. For instance, “true caricature” consists of merely reproducing the natural distortion; “exaggerated

caricature” is the enhancement of the monstrosity, in which the original model is still recognizable: and “purely fantastic caricature, or grotesques in the proper sense” is where the imagination is unchecked (Kayser 30). Linking satire and caricature, Arthur Koestler, in his *The Act of Creation* (1964), defines satire as a “verbal caricature which distorts characteristic features of an individual or society by exaggeration and simplicity” (72). He goes on to compare carnival mirrors that distort “in one spatial direction” with the caricaturist that distorts “by exaggerating features which he considers characteristic of his victim’s appearance or personality,” (70) reminiscent of the concave mirrors that produce Valle-Inclán’s esperpentic deformations.

Contemporary with Spain's first military dictatorship in the twentieth century, that of General Primo de Rivera (1923-1930), Ramón del Valle Inclán’s expressionistic works are a social and moral vision, with political overtones, of the Hispanic world in which the critical sense of the Generación del 98 is reflected (González López 27-29). In the same year as the Soviet revolution in 1917, the August revolutionary general strike in Spain occurred against a backdrop of protests, repression, anarchistic unionism and employer gangsterism—the historical context of *Lucas de Bohemia*. Valle-Inclán’s growing sensitivity to injustice helped determine a new esthetic vision of the world that led to the *esperpento*, his dramatization of the oxymoronic condition of life and death, the tragedy of modern society in contemporary history (Aznar Soler 26-30).

In the *esperpento* *Luces de Bohemia* (1920), Valle-Inclán explains his theory of the *esperpento*: “el esperpento lo ha inventado Goya. Los héroes clásicos han ido a pasearse por el callejón del Gato [. . .]. Los héroes clásicos reflejados en los espejos cóncavos dan el Esperpento. El sentido trágico de la vida española sólo puede darse con una estética sistemáticamente deformada” (Scene 12). For the author, from his new vision, modern history is pure amoral roguery, and all, from the politicians, the military, and the king, to the rich and the poor, are scoundrels (Aznar Soler 28-29).

Despite Feinberg’s comment that “modern satire is permeated with the grotesque,” (68) the grotesque character of the *esperpentos*, which places them closer to tragedy than to farce, have led some to describe the works as eminently tragic. However, one cannot doubt the satirical, ironic and at times humorous treatment of Spanish contemporary reality by Valle-Inclán:

Uno de los medios de su abultamiento es su humorismo, más dramático, más trágico que entretenido, cargado de ironía y en muchos casos de sarcasmo, proyectado sobre la vida. Las muecas del humorismo, con sus visajes extraños, son como una carcajada trágica, como las risotadas del trago burlón y comprensivo, que se ríe en el fondo del escenario del gran drama humano. (González López 183)

The “carcajada trágica” is essential to the *esperpentos*. To achieve the ridiculous effect, Valle-Inclán degrades the context and the characters which, even though taken from contemporary Spanish social reality, are not realistic presentations (184). The stylization of the characters--a type of mechanization or automatization process that turns them into grotesque, at times comical,

“fantoques” or puppets--is an important technique in the degradation of his characters.

By 1920 Valle-Inclán was not only anti-war but also antimilitary, and the Spanish military men in his *esperpentos* are the inheritors of all the vices of their nineteenth-century predecessors. In them, he denounces not only the tragedy of war but also the tragedy of the dehumanization and the debasement that war produces in the survivors, their moral destruction (Aznar Soler 21-24). In *Los cuernos de don Friolera* (1921), a parody of the traditional Calderonian portrayal of the honor theme, Valle-Inclán uses costume to signal a visual process of degradation, thereby stylizing his characters in order to make them appear as ridiculous puppets, grotesque or degraded. Don Friolera is described as “aquel adefesio con gorrilla de cuartel, babuchas moras, bragas azules de un uniforme viejo y rayado chaleco de Bayona.” At times, the playwright simply tells us that the characters are ridiculous: “El Teniente, con gestos de maniaco,” “llorando, ridículo y viejo” (scene 4).

In *Las galas del difunto* (1926), a burlesque of the traditional don Juan myth, where even the name don Juan is degraded into “Juanito” Ventolera, Juanito is described as “alto, flaco, macilento, los ojos de fiebre,” and the madam of the brothel is “obesa, grandota, con muchos peines y rizos: un erisipel le repela las cejas.” Here, Valle-Inclán uses clothing to represent Juanito Ventolera’s physical and moral degradation from soldier “con el rayadillo y las cruces en el

pecho” into bourgeois: “transfigurado con las galas del difunto. Camisa planchada, terno negro, botas nuevas con canto de grillos” which he has sacrilegiously plundered from the dead Boticario’s grave.

In addition to stylizing his characters, Valle-Inclán also resorts to dehumanization and animalization techniques. He portrays his characters as “bultos,” “sombras” and “corneja” or “zorrera”, in order to evoke in us the feeling of surprise, horror, and fear characteristic of the grotesque (Kayser 31). In *Los Cuernos*, women characters are grouped together as “bultos negros de mujerucas.” Doña Tadea is described in terms such as “el garabato de su silueta,” “el garabato de su sombra,” “su perfil de lechuza” or her “perfil de bruja.” In *Galas*, there is reference as well to several characters as “bultos,” “siluetas” and “fantoche aplastado.” Even the Boticario’s death becomes a grotesque show (“El boticario se dobla como un fantoche”), wresting from him the nobility and therefore the identification and catharsis on the audience’s behalf that are required for tragedy (73). To Valle-Inclán’s way of thinking, moral greatness cannot exist in a vilified society (Aznar Soler 16). And without noble characters, you cannot have tragedy. By making the characters ridiculous yet tragic at the same time, the synthesis of tragedy and farce is achieved--without which it would be only a grotesque farce.

As was mentioned, Valle-Inclán caricatured not only contemporary personages of his day, but also literary themes and ideas. In Valle-Inclán’s *Las*

galas del difunto (1926) we see a parodic schematization or a degraded vision of the don Juan Tenorio literary myth. The esperpentization of this new and grotesque don Juan Tenorio that Juanito Ventolera embodies is achieved, apart from the caricaturization, by the degradation of the context into which the dramatic action is inserted (Aznar Soler 43-44). The traditional setting of a convent is replaced with that of a brothel situated “en un enredo de callejones, cerca del muelle viejo,” symbolic of the degradation of the historical scene. At the dinner, rather than being the one who extends the invitation, Juanito is the invited guest and in place of the dead Boticario/Comendador, Juanito is the one who appears wearing the dead man’s clothes. Here, Juanito’s cynical irreverence, unlike Tenorio’s, is seen in the context of a moral protest against the degradation of values in the bourgeois society (55). In addition, just as doña Inés faints upon reading Tenorio’s letter, the Daifa also faints, although in a puppet show-like manner: “Enseña las ligas, se le suelta el moño, suspira con espasmo histérico,” thereby removing any dignity from the scene.

Bergson distinguishes between the comic that language expresses and the comic created by language. For Bergson, the comic in speech is basically obtained by the same methods as comical actions and situations, one of the three types of the comic acknowledged by Bergson, along with the comic of forms and movements and the comic of character. One of the basic sources of the comic for Bergson is absentmindedness, seen in language as a phrase which is uttered

automatically, evidenced by some palpable error or contradiction in terms that it contains. He finds fertile ground for such errors in rigidly observed set formulas and stereotypical sentences. The general rule he derives is: “A comic meaning is invariably obtained when an absurd idea is fitted into a well-established phrase-form” (1956:127-133).

In addition, the law of transposition, one of three fundamental laws of the comic transformation of sentences, along with inversion and interference, states that: “A comic effect is always obtainable by transposing the natural expression of an idea into another key.” There are two keys or tones that are at opposite ends: the solemn and the familiar. Thus, merely transposing one into the other will provoke the most obvious comical effects. The transposition of the solemn into the familiar results in parody, as when lofty, noble or poetic ideas that would normally be expressed in solemn tones are expressed in familiar terms instead. Describing something that was formerly dignified as degraded, another form of transposition, is also a means of obtaining laughter. And while the transposition from solemn to trivial, from better to worse, is comic, the inverse transposition may be even more so. Just as common as its counterpart, it can be classified according to the physical dimensions of its object or to its moral value. Exaggeration--speaking of small things as if they were large, especially when prolonged or systematic--or the expression in respectable terms of some disreputable or scandalous idea generally result in humor (1956:140-142).

In many situations, verbal contrast is used to achieve degraded portrayals of characters. The “finústico” speech is related to the parody of the classic and neoromantic melodramatic theater traditions stretching from Calderón to Echegaray, traditions which Valle-Inclán puts before a concave mirror. In *Los cuernos*, the most literary of the esperpentos (Aznar Soler 127-28), don Friolera is a grotesque deformation of many Calderonian and neoromantic heroes, such as don Gutierre of *El médico de su honra*, who make honor their rule of conduct. Don Friolera tells his daughter, “Tu padre, el que te dio el ser, no tiene honra, monina. La prenda más estimada, más que la hacienda, más que la vida! [. . .],” an allusion to the famous lines of Calderón in scene eighteen of the first day of *El alcalde de Zalamea*, when Pedro Crespo says: “Al Rey, la hacienda y la vida / se ha de dar; pero el honor / es patrimonio del alma / y el alma sólo es de Dios” (129).

In *Las galas*, the farsical parody of the romantic don Juan that Juanito interprets implies a continual verbal contrast between popular expression and “finústica” or rhetoric found specifically in literature. Thus, alongside Juanito’s cultured expressions we find all sorts of slang and popular expressions (“¡Una pringue!” “Menda se hospeda en los mejores hoteles,” “Ya lo discutiremos, si usted se obceca,” “Sepa usted que el llorado cadáver se ha conducido con un servidor para no olvidarlo en la vida,” “Si usted me otorgase alguna de sus dulces miradas, tendría el comprobante”). This constant verbal contrast between polished

rhetoric (“se obceca,” “llorado cadáver,” “dulces miradas”) and the popular (“pringue,” “menda”) is a technical procedure used by Valle-Inclán to deform and degrade the character (Aznar Soler 77-78).

Postwar

HUMOUR NOIR, SCATOLOGICAL HUMOR

Cela’s works presented a new type of humor in the Spanish contemporary novel (Vilas 193), one in which cruelty and humor appear joined together frequently (Ortega 27). This *tremendista* humor, a dark or morbid humor that André Breton called *humour noir* to call attention to its disturbing qualities (Bilger 189), tries to caricature the tragic reality of its epoch and people, accentuating that which it wants to censure. The hallmark of black humor, according to Mathew Winston, is a disparity between content and form: “The contents provide the blackness, and the style mitigates that blackness with humor” (133).

Like Quevedo, Cela uses exaggeration and grotesquerie as an expression of his sense and philosophy of life in his novels. Cela, who shares Quevedo’s liking for the unpleasant in physical description, has throughout his work depicted a gallery of deformed beings and physical anomalies. Cela’s *tremendismo*, “un realismo que acentuaba las tintas negras, la violencia y el crimen truculento, episodios crudos y a veces repulsivos, zonas sombrías de la existencia” (Del Río

365), is not Cela's discovery but has in him its most notable representative (Ponte Far 33). It is based in part on a postwar public eager to absorb bloody tales and in part on the writer's character and is used, at times, with a purely sensationalistic aim. Piling up ugly, unpleasant and repugnant terms, he simply tries to produce sensations of horror and disgust in the reader, in which any motivation of an ethical nature is lacking, only seeking pure amusement in the horrendous (Ortega 16-27).

La colmena (1951), in which irony, sarcasm and bitter laughs are plentiful, offers a large thematic variety and diverse interpretation as it portrays the dislocation of the social structure of postwar Spain and denounces the social condition of the era without formulating a prescription for the ills exposed (Ortega 40-42). In this work, black humor abounds, at times mixing cruelty with humor to censure the insensitivity and impiety of certain people (Ortega 27). This disparity between content and form is seen in the episode where Doña Asunción, the owner of a dairy (which in reality is a house of prostitution), is celebrating because the wife of her daughter's lover has died. In a humoristic way, the author attacks human cruelty. Doña Asunción gives her daughter's letter to her friend Ramona to read.

Doña Ramona se caló los lentes y leyó:

-“La esposa de mi novio ha fallecido de unas anemias perniciosas”.

¡Caray, doña Asunción, así ya se puede!

-Siga, siga.

-Y mi novio dice que ya no usemos nada y que si quedo en estado pues él se casa. ¡Pero hija, si es usted la mujer de la suerte!

-Sí, gracias a Dios tengo bastante suerte con mi hija.
-¿Y el novio es el catedrático?
-Sí, don José María de Samas, catedrático de Psicología, Lógica y Ética.
(140)

When asked by Vilas if he agreed with the many humorists who thought that death was the one topic that should not be joked about, Cela responded:

“Estoy en desacuerdo: la muerte fue el substrato del humor de Goya, del humor de Solana, del humor de Baroja” (181). We see this blackness of contents mixed with the comical in the situation of Dorita who “dio tres hijos a su marido, pero los tres nacieron muertos. La pobre paría al revés: echaba los hijos de pie, y, claro, se le ahogaban al salir.” Black humor is used to express the inhumanity of Cela’s character seen here (Ortega 25): “A Fidel Hernández, que mató a la Eudisia, su mujer, con una lezna de zapatero, lo condenaron a muerte y lo agarrotó Gregorio Mayoral en el año 1909. Lo que él decía; Si la mato a sopas con sulfato no se entera ni dios” (*La colmena*, 1957, 42).

The description of the tables in doña Rosa’s café reveal her stingy character, while revealing at the same time a surprise: “Muchos de los mármoles de los veladores han sido antes lápidas en las Sacramentales; en algunos, que todavía guardan las letras, un ciego podría leer, pasando las yemas de los dedos por debajo de la mesa: ‘Aquí yacen los restos mortales de la señorita Esperanza Redondo, muerta en la flor de la juventud’, o bien ‘R.I.P. El Excmo. Sr. D. Ramiro López Puente Subsecretario de Fomento’” (17-18).

The mixing of the crude and inhuman with humoristic traits is often carried out by focusing on silly details (Ortega 46): “[. . .] se le murió un hijo, aún no hace un mes. El joven se llamaba Paco y estaba preparándose para Correos. [. . .] lo que le dió fué la meningitis. Duró poco y además perdió el sentido en seguida. Se sabía ya todos los pueblos de León, Castilla la Vieja, Castilla la Nueva y parte de Valencia (Castellón y la mitad, sobre poco más o menos, de Alicante); fué una pena grande que se muriese” (20). On other occasions, the violent humor only seeks to make the reader laugh. For example:

Al guardia Julio García Morrazo se le mejoró algo la salud. . . No volvió, bien es cierto, a lo que había sido, pero tampoco se quejaba; otros, al lado suyo, se habían quedado en el campo, tumbados panza arriba. Su primo Santiaguíño, sin ir más lejos, que le dieron un tiro en el macuto donde llevaba las bombas de mano y del que el pedazo más grande que se encontró no llegaba a los cuatro dedos. (198)

Linked to this type of humor is also ribald humor and scatological humor from which Cela did not shy away. This is the type of humor that Bakhtin talks about in his Carnival theory of humor. The scatological in description is a technique that appears as early as the fifteenth century in the Arcipreste de Talavera’s *Corbacho* (Ortega 14): “Díxole la madre al amigo, e amos determinaron que muriese el niño de dies años; e asy lo mató el amigo, e la madre e él lo soterraron en un establo. Fue descubierto por un puerco después, e asy so sopo” (92). This incident reminds us of similar ones in Valle-Inclán’s *Divinas*

palabras--in which the monstrous face of the deformed child is eaten--and in Cela's *La familia de Pascual Duarte*--in which his son is eaten by a pig.

Scatalogical humor, a preoccupation with obscenity often termed bathroom or locker room humor, appears in *La Colmena* with social and ethical implications. In the scene in which a poverty-stricken man stands dazzled in front of a store window full of toilets in every color, the criticism centers on the country's economic disproportion that permits the co-existence of those who need luxurious items for their "basic necessities" and those who make little use of such items, since they have little to eat (Ortega 44-45). After describing in minute detail the luxury of the store and the items it displays using repetition to enhance the contrast he later makes, Cela writes: "La vida--piensa--es esto. Con lo que unos se gastan para hacer sus necesidades a gusto, otros tendríamos para comer un año. ¡Está bueno! Las guerras deberían hacerse para que haya menos gentes que hagan sus necesidades a gusto y pueda comer el resto un poco mejor" (84).

Scatalogical humor seeks at times to ridicule certain human attitudes, as in the scene where the author pokes fun at the futile pomposity of the gentleman who rehearses a confused and involved speech alone in front of a mirror in his apartment. Imagining his speech interrupted by applause--"(Quizás me interrumpen los aplausos. Conviene estar preparado.)"--don Ibrahim--"sonaba solemne como la de un fagot"--is met with an interruption, but it is not the sort he

imagines. It is due to the shouts of the neighbor returning home from work and asking, “¿Ha hecho su caquita la nena?”(117).

With his *tremendismo*, Cela brought a new dimension to the humoristic novel: “y si se dudaba de que en las escenas más crudas, en los temas más escabrosos, pudiera ponerse humor, ahí tenemos los libros de Cela” (Vilas 193). For Vilas, more than *tremendista*, Cela was “humorista,” because, in his opinion, his *tremendismo* was “en su esencia y fines, una combinación de humor e ingenio con violencia de expresión lingüística y conceptual--efectismo--para exteriorizar un descontento vital” (194).

PARODY, SARDONIC HUMOR

Martín-Santos’ *Tiempo de silencio* , published in postwar Spain in 1962, was original not for its plot, but rather for its new treatment of the same material of an isolated Spain in the hunger years centered around 1949, years of “los transportes de prisioneros, la rutina burocrática, el estraperlo, las privaciones, la sevicia de la policía, la enseñanza y la cultura censuradas, el desengaño de la Falange primitiva, el opio del fútbol, el intervencionismo americano, el paro, la miseria, la enfermedad [. . .]” (Sobejano, 76, 62). That new treatment was a parodic narrative style, the novelty of which lay not so much in the use of parody or sarcasm, which other novelists had used, but rather in the “abrumadora asiduidad” with which he used it (Suárez Granda 85). It consists basically of the

use of an elevated language--scientific or one with epic resonances--to refer to terrible realities (Suárez Granda 86). In his novel for example, Martín-Santos refers to shanties as “soberbios alcázares de la miseria” [p. 55] deliberately naming a miserable reality with euphonic epithets. The distortions between theme and language, generating the ironic, the sarcastic, the comical and the burlesque, suppose a break with the classic theory of the three styles that group subjects into elevated, middle and low, and require a language more or less of the same elevation (Suárez Granda 86). Juan Carlos Curuchet characterizes his style this way:

Su más curiosa innovación consiste en la adopción de un estilo paródico falsamente celebratorio que se aplica a la descripción de la realidad más abyecta. Como en Cortázar, como en Valle-Inclán, hay aquí una sátira de las grandes frases, de las grandes palabras [...] un lenguaje heroico ambiguamente celebratorio que otorga al estilo su tono paródico y a la novela su condición inimitable de epopeya burlesca. (“Luis Martín-Santos: el fundador” in *Cuatro ensayos sobre la nueva novela española* 52)

As was previously mentioned, in *Tiempo de silencio* two different languages are used- scientific and epic (Suárez Granda 87). Epic examples are found in passages like the following: “Pero estas actividades encubiertas quedaron suspendidas aquella tarde todo a lo largo del sarao con que las nobles damas festejaron el regreso del doncel” [p.264]. These “nobles damas” are the same women who are also called “vulgares y derrotadas mujeres” [p.46] and at other times--mixing exotic (denoting the Brahmanian trinity of goddesses) and

demythifying language--, “trimurti de desaparejas diosas” to ironically refer to the women in the boarding house [p.43](Suárez Granda 87).

Another example of parodic intention of the use of biological terminology is found in the description of “el Muecas”:

Alegres transcurrían los días en aquella casa. Sólo pequeños nubarrones sin importancia obstruían parcialmente un cielo por lo general rosado. Gentleman-farmer Muecasthorne visitaba sus criaderos por la mañana, donde sus yeguas de vientre de raza selecta, refinada por sapientísimos cruces endogámicos, daban el codiciado fruto purasangre [p. 67].

There are also cases in which both languages, epic and scientific appear mixed together. This combination is found in the false panegyric that the author makes of science at the beginning of sequence 56 [pp.253-255]. Here the parody reaches bitterness. Martín-Santos, evoking his protagonist for whom science has failed, writes:

Que la ciencia más que ninguna de las otras actividades de la humanidad ha modificado la vida del hombre sobre la tierra es tenido por verdad indubitable. Que la ciencia es una palanca liberadora de las infinitas alienaciones que le impiden adecuar su existencia concreta a su esencia libre, tampoco es dudado por nadie [. . .] [p. 253].

For three pages the author spews bitterness as he sarcastically expresses the painful reality of Pedro’s wretched situation with educated words (“indubitable,” “palimpsestos,” “vectoriales,” “macroproteínas”) and lofty-sounding rhetorical devices (“¡Cuántas patentes industriales [. . .]! ¡Cuántas drogas inéditas y eficaces [. . .]! ¡Cuántos teóricos desarrollos [. . .]! ¡Cuántos ingeniosos prodigios de las

ciencias aplicadas no sorprenden al visitante de cualquiera de nuestras Exposiciones de Inventores!”--p. 255--) (Suárez Granda 88-89).

Martín-Santos’ bitter laughter was an indirect way of expressing his criticism, the principal objects of which ranged from Spanish science and the inert middle class to the highest social spheres and philosophical circles (Sobejano 74). So encompassing was his criticism that the novel’s narrations almost never go unaccompanied by one form or another of the author’s subjective and distorsioning vision (Suárez Granda 89). This description-interpretation or focus-story dislocation, not exclusive to *Tiempo de silencio*, constitutes a large part of the humorous manifestations that are generated not by an object itself but by the slant the narrator puts on it. For example, the well-known conference sequence is preceded by a series of descriptive epithets directed towards the conference speaker: “el gran Maestro,” [p.162] “inventor de un nuevo estilo de metáfora,” [p.163] “el-que-lo-había-dicho-ya-antes-que-Heidegger,” [p.163] and we are then given the details of the conference [“Señoras (pausa), señores (pausa)[. . .],” p.163], which turns out to be a string of platitudes, so as to build an expectation of the conference and then burst the bubble with the emptiness of its contents.

It is parodies like the one Martín-Santos does of Ortega that give the novel’s humor its reputation of bitterness. Parody becomes cruel sarcasm in his passages on Ortega, in which the description of the painting *Escena de brujas* (1795-1798) by Francisco de Goya, a copy of which just happens to be on Matías’

wall, is used to parody the philosopher. After referring to it as a “gran reproducción a todo color pinchada con chinches en la pared,” he begins a minutious description of the painting, slipping out references to the “gran matón de la metafísica,” [p.157] to the “cónclave de Barceló,” [p.158] etc., all allusions to Ortega who was known to have given a series of conferences in the Barceló cinema, in the fall of 1949 (Suárez Granda 99).

In the painting, the Goya’s Buco, pleased with himself, is speaking, surrounded by frightened women who are holding up fetuses or emaciated children. The Buco-Ortega parallel is bolstered by the idea that Matín-Santos had of the philosopher, theoretician on the misery of Spain, made vain by the reverential attitude of the female public that attended his conferences (Suárez Granda 99). According to Morán, “el Gran Buco de Goya representa el pretendido vitalismo español” [1971, p.387]. To drive home the parallel, in the description of the painting an allusion to an apple is made: “Y mostrando la manzana a la concurrencia selectísima, hablará durante una hora sobre las propiedades esenciales y existenciales de la manzana” [p. 156]. Since el Buco actually does not have an apple, this invented reference cements the connection between the “macho cabrío” and the philosopher, who does use an apple in his conference (Suárez Granda 99): “Señoras (pausa), señores (pausa), esto (pausa), que yo tengo en mi mano (pausa) es una manzana (gran pausa). [...]” [p.163].

Besides the comment on the conference “vacío de todo contenido” [p.71], the philosopher “un señor calvo” (as Ortega was) delivers it “de espaldas a la miseria del pueblo español (¿no son esos fetos aupados por las madres-brujas los representantes de la ‘sangre visigótica enmohecida’, es, decir, el pueblo español?)” (Suárez Granda 100). The scene ends with a sarcastic reproach, in which the novelist says to the philosopher: “Te perdonarán los niños muertos que no dijeras de qué estaban muriendo” [p.159].

Conclusion

In this group of male writers that spans the first part of the twentieth century until the 1960’s, there is a line starting with Gómez de la Serna that continues on to Fernández-Flórez, Valle-Inclán, Lorca, and Cela, finally reaching Martín-Santos in which there is a descending order of what Vilas calls pure humor--an intranscendent humor lacking in bitterness. The line starts with the light, witty humor of Ramón and arrives at the opposite pole of the dark and sardonic humor of Cela and Martín-Santos. However, even for authors at the extreme end of the humor spectrum, cruelty and complete harshness, devoid of compassion, would be a difficult and unpalatable tone to sustain throughout an entire work. Perhaps it is for that reason that these authors decided that by adding humor, they could raise their voices while rendering the tone for their readers more palatable. Together, their collective voices represent an abundance of types and styles of humor, varying in themes and differing in messages and purposes.

In the next chapter, I will show how important women authors of the post-Franco years, previously excluded from the literary and humorous traditions, also find in humor an ally as they raise their voices from the margin. Lacking a tradition of their own, it will be upon this tradition of male humor that they call. Yet while the male authors of the early postwar were using a bitter, parodic, dark and scatological type of humor, postwar women writers' entrance into the humor field is marked by a less aggressive style and tone. And while some overlap between male and female humor is naturally to be expected, I will discuss the different uses that women make of humor, in their style, selection of humorous devices, themes and messages that reflect their own world, a world always a little apart from the dominant culture.

Chapter 3

The humor and irony of Carmen Martín Gaité

The censorship that was imposed at the end of the civil war in 1939 prohibited the publication of opinions contrary to or critical of the civil or religious authorities of Spain or its allies, or of the “principios del Movimiento Nacional” (Soldevilla 245). However, in the years after the United States’ entrance into World War II, which appeared to announce the defeat of the forces of the Axis, Spain underwent a superficial transformation from “nationalsindicalista” totalitarian state into a self-proclaimed “social, católico y representativo” state, a “democracia orgánica,” strongly anticommunist (250). By offering to participate in NATO, the sanctions that had been imposed against Spain at the end of the war in 1946 were ended. At the same time, an expression of a critical conscience arose from those viewing the subhuman conditions caused by the exodus from the countryside into the city (496). In a desire to hide the stigmas of “nationalsindicalismo” in order to maintain the respect of the international community, a certain tolerance was permitted towards “los que no querían ser instrumentalizados por el franquismo” (Tuñón de Lara 477). This new tolerance did not end repression, however; rather more subtle procedures had to be used against the “delitos de opinión” (Soldevilla 496).

Beginning in 1968 with the French May revolt and student and racial protests in the U.S., an entire generation of writers previously united by their commitment to Marxism disbanded, as Marxism as an ideology began to

disintegrate. Upon abandoning Marxism, these writers took refuge in their own personal “historia,” their own memory (Buckley xv). As early as the seventies, Spain's literary scene, more a process of evolution than of revolution, began to change with publications by authors such as Carmen Martín Gaité and Juan Goytisolo. These authors, members of the “Generation of 1950,” announced a new direction for Spanish letters (Arribas 64), as historical narration entered a demythifying stage. This demythification--or the triumph of fiction over Franco’s mythification of his official version of history--achieved by Benet, Goytisolo, Martín Gaité and others led critics to conclude that there was not a great difference in the degree of fictionalization that occurred between the official history of the triumphant years of *franquismo* and the mythoclastic and ironic fiction of these writers (Soldevilla 256).

Writers of the early 1970’s, or the “pre-transition” era, initiated a series of successful narrative strategies such as the “narrativa de la memoria” and the “novela negra” favored by Vázquez Montalbán. But the common denominator of narrative formulas was escapism, the desire to evade the reality of the moment, thought to be caused by a sort of “agotamiento prematuro” of Spain’s still young writers who realized they could delegate the function of seeing life to others. The writers’ commitment to reality, so evident in the 60’s, had disappeared. Hence the sensation of silence, of an intellectual void, that was produced on November 20, 1975, the day Franco died (Buckley xv-xvi).

A. POST-FRANCO: POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

Franco's death marks the beginning of a political and cultural transition period that evolves towards the establishment of a democracy in 1981 and a freer political environment for literary production. The transition period was characterized by a break with the Franco regime that was neither rapid nor formal nor violent. And despite the first post-Franco elections in 1977, there still persisted an atmosphere of suspense, worry and fear. The citizens were dealing with Basque separatist terrorism, the establishment and legalization of various political parties, an economic crisis, the decentralization of power and its distribution among the separate autonomous regions, and a population divided in its attitude towards the rest of the world--those with conservative attitudes who wanted to remain isolated from Europe and those who desired to catch up with the rest of the western world (Arribas 56-57).

The changing socio-political climate also provided a surge of expectations, in which Spaniards thought that democracy would solve their problems. As those expectations were not met, the transition became a time of disenchantment. The early politicians were viewed as Francoists in Democrats' clothing. There was not sufficient impulse to initiate a new cultural policy. As liberalization and freedom of expression came to increasingly mean pornography, striptease and mediocre literary productions, intellectuals' feeling of disappointment grew (58).

In 1977, the Pacto de la Moncloa was signed, bringing back austerity measures to help the ailing economy and adding scarcity to the already existing

political and cultural disenchantment. Thus arose a nihilistic attitude called "pasotismo," an attitude that mixed indifference and cynicism towards the newly created democratic institutions. It did not help that the Europe Spain encountered when it finally joined the European Economic Community in 1986 was "la de la crisis económica y ética, la de la violencia y la xenofobia. Una Eurpoa de ideales rotos [. . .]" (Fajardo qtd. in Arribas 59). It was felt by some that Spain had simply passed from illusion to disillusion (Arribas 59).

The Post-Franco disenchantment was most strongly felt by intellectuals. Corruption, ideological disarmament, and international policy became recurrent targets of their criticism. The values that dominated the socialist decade "resultaban pertenecer a una ideología muy poco socialista, los cuales se manifestaban--y siguen así--por un individualismo desenfrenado, el culto al poder adquisitivo y la ostentación desmesurada" (Arribas 60).

New democracies create spaces for voices previously silenced (Witte 11) and in times of political transition, "there is a general willingness to rethink the bases of social consensus" (Jaquette 13). Ironically, it was out of the silence of the male intellectuals and Franco's repression of women that the feminine and feminist discourse of the Spanish transition was born. At the time of transition, Spain lacked the "quinto poder"--the moral authority that intellectuals needed to exercise in order to serve as a counterbalance to prevent politicians from making the transition exclusively theirs. Spanish women writers, inheritors of the revolutionary spirit of the 60's, stepped in to fill the void. Arising as referees of the transition which fell under their scrutiny, their criticism was "implacable."

Although they cannot be said to have inherited a Spanish tradition of women's writing, being part of a culture that for so long had repressed their self-expression and assertion motivated them to take up the word, the critical voice in proportion to men's silence. What their feminine voices revealed was the repressive character of the patriarchy's transition that continued after the patriarch had died. Women's writing questioned not only the myths of the transition but also the ideology on which it rested (Buckley xiv). They brought up matters that affected them and that had not changed with the arrival of democracy such as discrimination in the work place, paternalism and fear of feminism (Arribas 128). Together with the feminist movement they toppled the bases of patriarchy and satisfied their most urgent demands, improving the condition of women in many aspects.

While it appeared that the dark years for Feminism had ended with Franco's death, Spain was still *machista*. The lifting of censorship in 1978 did not signal important changes for women writers in general as a covert censorship still existed in an area that had been almost exclusively male for most of its history (Witte 11). However, the women's movement had fostered the sense that their problems were not unique and personal, but rather shared and political. They suggested that there was a group of readers who would be sympathetic not only to the circumstances of their lives but also to the fact that women could laugh about them without trivializing either the circumstances or the women themselves (Walker, *Serious* 172). So as the socio-cultural customs of Spanish women continued to change, despite lacking a female tradition of literary humor, women

writers took increasing control of the humor terrain as well, without timidity and even with virulence (Arribas 128).

It has long been the task of the humorist to call the official rhetoric of one's country into question and women's humor does this. But the official messages of concern to women have been different from those that men have called into question. The patriarchy has seen as its right to dictate her private life: the manner in which she talks to her husband, how she cleans her house, how she raises her children, how she conducts herself socially, and her economic dependence. But as long as humor was primarily a male-defined activity, and male humor identified with Spanish humor, women's humor had been seen as reflecting the experience of a small minority, rather than that of the public sphere. But I shall show that Spanish women in their writing have revealed themselves to be alert to the absurdities that affect not only their lives but the lives of others as well (Walker, *Serious* 182-83). By pointing out incongruities with humor, they have uncovered many absurdities, finding something ridiculous in all aspects of life.

B. CARMEN MARTÍN GAITE'S LITERARY HUMOR

i. *El cuarto de atrás* (a novel)

For Carmen Martín Gaité, the exact beginning of the transition, Franco's death, spurred the unlocking of her memory. Seeming to echo the line from Bruère and Beard in which, due to men and women coming from two different worlds, women's angle of vision is "always a little apart" from that of men's

(viii), Martín Gaité tells us that she creates literature “according to my own way of seeing life” (Brown 19). Her “own way of seeing” or her reflections on what it was like growing up in the war and post-war years became the subject of the two works that I will analyze in this chapter: *El cuarto de atrás* (1978) and *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (1987). Presented from a woman’s point of view with humor and irony, she tells the truth of how Franco’s legacy affected the lives of those who grew to adulthood during the Franco regime. An author whose “propia transición coincide, [. . .] con la transición política [. . .]” (Buckley 154), Martín Gaité achieves her transition into an author of fantastic literature by incorporating techniques suggested by Tzvetan Todorov’s *Introducción a la literatura fantástica* (1974) into the first of these works, *El cuarto de atrás*, with her mysterious man in black, reflections, and dream sequences interwoven with childhood memories.

El cuarto de atrás has been defined as a “novela de la memoria” combined with the techniques of the mystery novel and reflections on the task of literature. The “novela de la memoria” consisted of the rescuing of memory from its own paralysis, a paralysis imposed as much by Franco as by those who opposed him. This new history was constructed not by one camp or the other, nor by a particular ideology, but rather by the very writer or narrator. It was both an individual and collective history, in the sense that one’s personal memory, the memory of lived experiences, would necessarily reflect a collective memory, experiences common to the rest of Spaniards, but would reflect it in a fragmented,

divided way lacking any chronological and therefore rational order (Buckley 150).

For women, “the anti-feminist climate of the postwar was particularly damaging” (Brown 156). Though women were marginalized and without weapons to protest, one tool at their disposal was humor. For Bergson, “Laughter is, above all, a corrective” (1956, 187). Boskin agrees saying that laughter “is a powerful corrective, for humor permits the offended person an opportunity to create both a space and an opportunity to retaliate” (Boskin qtd. in Morreall 259). In this novel we will see how Martín Gaité uses humor, expressed principally through irony, to confront, uncover and criticize the myths and ideology of the early postwar patriarchy as she unfreezes history. Throughout this study it is essential to keep in mind the difficulty in handling the subject of humor. Humor is highly subjective, especially where satire is concerned. As R.L. Busch says “if it is ‘your ox’ that is being gored, you are not likely to be amused” (14). With female humor, gender difference is an added factor affecting humor perception and reception. In addition, humor can be aggressive, destructive and black. As such, it is apt not to appear funny to some. Laughter can also be at times derisive, crazed or sadistic, devoid of merriment.

In the opening scene from the novel, the narrator/author uses irony to imply the limited lives of women during the thirties and forties. She begins with a description of her childhood bedroom, lingering on the description of the bedspread: “empiezo a percibir el tacto de la colcha, una tela rugosa de tonos azules” (12). The word “tela” sparks an incursion into a past convention of

Spanish women: “Tenía un nombre aquella tela, no me acuerdo, todas las telas lo tenían, y era de rigor saber diferenciar un shantung de un piqué, de un moaré o de una organza, no reconocer las telas por sus nombres era tan escandaloso como equivocar el apellido de los vecinos” (12). There are several clues presented to us in these sentences that suggest that we cannot take these comments at face value. The reconstruction of ironies, as Saavedra reminds us in *El humor de Siverio Lanza y Ramón Gómez de la Serna*, depends on the adequate deductions about the author and her environment in order to discover the ironic intention (105).

Since the narrator/author herself reveals to us later on in the novel that her family was “anti-franquista” and since a large part of the Franco’s propaganda and rhetoric was harshly repressive of women, we can expect that she would be critical of the postwar conventions for females determined by the Franco regime as well. In addition, we also learn in the novel that her uncle was killed by the *franquistas*, and that she was instructed not to speak about anything while in the street--an imposed silence which she ironically breaks by writing this book. Her fear and hesitancy to speak directly about political themes help us understand irony’s appeal to her as a means of covertly criticizing postwar society. In the novel, right after making the simple phrase that her parents “no eran franquistas” we witness her trepidation as she verbalizes her thoughts upon seeing the “interviewer” reach into his pocket for something: “Le veo echarse mano al bolsillo y suspiro, arrepentida de haber hecho esa alusión política; seguramente va a sacar bloc y bolígrafo para tomar notas sobre la ideología que presidió mi formación, vaya por Dios, se fastidiaron las divagaciones” (68). Another

deduction we can make about the author and her environment that aids us in discovering ironic intention is her possession of a sense of humor. In an autobiographical sketch she tells us that both her parents “possessed an individual and very keen sense of humor” (Brown 20), a sense of humor that, it is clear, she inherited.

Therefore, when the author tells us that “no reconocer las telas por sus nombres era tan escandaloso,” the obvious incongruence presented to us between knowing the names of cloth and the exaggerated degree of importance accorded to the possession of its knowledge, established by her choice of the word “escandaloso,” alerts us to the irony in her statement. Moreover, we know that she does not really think that “no reconocer las telas por sus nombres era tan escandaloso,” due to her disdain of Francoist propaganda which supported and exalted domesticity, in large part through the activities of the “Sección Femenina” and its “Servicio Social,” particularly odious to Martín Gaité, a fact which the text makes clear.

Verbal irony is also enlisted to help one sentence drive home the irony of the other. The first affirmation, “Tenía un nombre aquella tela, no me acuerdo”-- in which she coolly admits her lack of knowledge in this area--wrests importance from the second affirmation, “era de rigor saber diferenciar” (12). Her unconcerned attitude in the first affirmation underscores the irony of the second. How important could that knowledge have really been? After all, this lack of knowledge appears not to have done her, prize-winning author and historian with a doctorate, any harm. The narrator/author proudly states in her novel that she

“acababa de aprobar primero en Filosofía y Letras” (49). Furthermore, the irony is reinforced in this second affirmation by the use of the word “de rigor” which serves to exaggerate the importance attached to possessing such trivial knowledge, revealing a disdain of this societal convention for females, hinting at perhaps another possible purpose for women’s lives. However, she does not make all-encompassing condemnatory statements about women’s nature as many male humorists in the past have done but rather focuses on the social conditions that lead to weaknesses and faults, preferring instead to mock the conventions that limit women’s lives. This tendency of a more positive treatment of the nature of women characters portrayed by female authors as opposed to that by male authors is one that Bilger has noted in humorous female writers outside of Spain as early as the eighteenth century (149). Martín Gaité carefully counters the sarcasm towards the importance given the knowledge of cloth names with a rather tender description of the care and energy her mother spent in picking out and making the curtains, bedspreads and pillow covers for daughters’ bedroom (12-13). Rather than attributing the mother’s actions to a defect in her nature, the author acknowledges the positive trait of directing energy towards helping her children.

Martín Gaité’s criticism of the conventions that affected young women’s lives becomes more pointed when she talks about her trip to Portugal. Though she had received a scholarship to go abroad, she first had to straighten out her “situación anómala” with the “Servicio Social.” A young girl could not go abroad without having finished her “Servicio Social” or “por lo menos, haber dejado suponer, a lo largo de los cursillos iniciados, que tenía madera de futura madre y

esposa, digna descendiente de Isabel la Católica,” (42) qualities which she admits, with self-deprecatory humor, she did not possess: “Se ve que no. Por lo menos los informes no fueron muy satisfactorios. Tuve que firmar un papel comprometiéndome a pagar una especie de multa, que consistía en el cumplimiento, a mi regreso, de algunos meses más de prestación” (43). In order to make her feelings clear on all this she states: “Si supiera lo horrible que se me hacía cumplir el Servicio Social, entendería mejor la significación que tuvo para mí llevar a cabo aquellos papeleos” (43). This statement helps to make obvious the irony of “digna descendiente,” underscoring the absurdity and injustice behind the thinking that not only were these courses the true measure of the quality of future wives and mothers but also that there was no other way for a woman to be “digna.”

The parody in *El cuarto de atrás* of the “novela rosa” shows just how much a part of their upbringing this type of literature was in the lives of young Spanish girls of the postwar era. Parody, we are told, belongs to “the genus *satire* and thus performs the double-edged task of reform and ridicule” (Falk and Breare 600). Thus, while parody is imitation which strives toward a comical effect, it can also “be seen as stylization with a hostile tendency, a vehicle for reinterpretation and re-evaluation, and as a catalyst of literary change” (Petro 12). Ridiculing the effects of the sentimental novel, the narrator recalls growing up wishing she had had another more exotic first name like that of the novelist Elisabeth Mulder. The penetration of the sentimental novel into the minds of young girls was profound as this stylized scene reveals:

tirarme en ella [the “diván”], cuando estaba sola, imitando la postura de aquellas mujeres, inexistentes de puro lejanas, que aparecían en las ilustraciones de la revista ‘Lecturas’, creadas por Emilio Freixas para novelas cortas de Elizabeth Mulder, a quien yo envidiaba por llamarse así y por escribir novelas cortas, mujeres de mirada soñadora, pelo a lo *garçon* y piernas estilizadas, que hablaban por teléfono, sostenían entre los dedos un vaso largo o fumaban cigarillos turcos sobre la cama turca de su *garçonière*, lo turco era modernidad; otras veces aparecían en pajama, con perneras de amplio vuelo, pero aunque fuera de noche, siempre estaban despiertas, esperando algo, probablemente una llamada telefónica, y detrás de los labios amargos y de los ojos entornados se escondía la historia secreta que estaban recordando en soledad. (13)

The depth and detail of the description in this presentation help to render ridiculous the ideal image touted by the “novelas rosa” for young girls.

Another example of the now comic melodrama of sentimental literature appears in a scene with the narrator that occurs in the middle of the storm while the mysterious man in black is visiting her. The narrator closes her eyes and imagines a scene taken from a *novela rosa*, in which social dependence on a man, inculcated by society, is humorously highlighted in this melodramatic insertion from the novel: “Oh, Raimundo--exclamó Esperanza, mientras brotaban las lágrimas de sus párpados cerrados--, contigo nunca tengo miedo. No te vuelvas a ir nunca”. “Esperanza y Raimundo se miraban con melancólico asombro” (38).

Parody can serve as a vehicle for re-evaluation and literary change. In parody, Bakhtin reminds us, “the deliberate palpability of the other’s discourse must be particularly sharp and clearly marked” (Morris 106). Martín Gaité achieves this by introducing characters (Esperanza and Raimundo) and a style that we know are not typical of her. Parody in its narrow sense degrades, brings down

to earth: “Degradation here means coming down to earth [. . .]. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better [. . .]. It has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence [. . .] but to hurl it down [. . .] and a new birth take place” (Morris 206). Additionally, parodistic discourse “can be extremely diverse. One can parody another person’s style as a style: one can parody another’s socially typical or individually characterological manner of seeing, thinking, and speaking [. . .]. One can also parody the very deepest principles governing another’s discourse” (Morris 106). Although the narrator/author admits that as a young reader she loved these sentimental works--“Cuánto me gustaban las novelas rosa” (39)--, she now pokes fun at them for being melodramatic and promoting unhealthy and unhelpful stereotypes and attitudes. She appears to be asking us to take a second look at not only the language of these novels but also the attitudes toward women that produced the stereotypes.

The spa provides another scene for the presentation of narrator’s views on the conventional behavior required of young girls and romantic literature’s influence. While visiting the spa with her father, the narrator/author as a young girl develops a crush on an older boy, who, we are told sarcastically, “pocas veces se dignaba bajar de su olimpo” (51). She writes him “una carta de despedida bastante disparatada” (53). With the letter in her pocket, she feels a sort of “condescendencia olímpica” knowing that she is in possession of a secret “capaz de hacer algo que nadie haría, porque ninguna chica modosa y decente de aquel

tiempo tendría la audacia de escribir una carta así” (53). This is ironic of course, because she is a decent and demure young lady as well as outstanding student and can barely look the recipient of the secret letter in the eyes: “Recuerdo el momento en que me atreví a alzar con desafío la cara y sorprendí su mirada fija en la mía” (51). She clarifies: “Era la primera vez que me atrevía a mantenerle descaradamente la mirada a un hombre, sólo porque sí, porque me gustaba” (52). As for her boldness, she is hardly able to slip the letter into his pocket: “todo consistía en sacar la carta del bolsillo y pasarla al suyo, podía hacerlo casi sin que se diera cuenta, si era capaz de hacerlo [. . .] los dedos me temblaban” (53-54).

Conscious of the effect that sentimental literature exerted on her, she remarks: “aquello fue el éxtasis, la culminación de todas las novelas que habían alimentado mi pubertad” (51). The language she uses to describe the emotion the affair’s potential has caused is humorous for its melodramatic quality, especially coming from a young girl whose high point was an exchange of glances: “en aquellos instantes se concentraron todos los sueños, aventuras y zozobras del amor imposible, tuvo que notar lo que significaba para mí, no pestañeó, todo él destilaba una luz oscura de complicidad, de deseo compartido, me estaba arrastrando a los infiernos y yo sabía que lo sabía” (52). The irony, of course, is that this literature perpetuating questionable values was written and propagated by adults for consumption by adolescent girls.

In opposition to the dream of the “modern” woman of the “novela rosa,” the comment about an unnamed *señora* from the narrator’s past who, “en paz esté, y que vivió en lucha contra la anarquía de los objetos” is a criticism of the type of

female lifestyle and rhetoric common in the forties (16). It was a time when much emphasis was put on the ordered domesticity exalted by Franco and the “Sección Femenina” into a patriotic duty. First, the innocent, harmless world of books and objects is comically portrayed as something that the “señora” sees as sinister, as something to be reckoned with: “desde todos los estantes y superficies, al acecho, como animales disecados, esa caterva de objetos cuya historia, inherente a su silueta, resuena apagadamente en el recuerdo [. . .]. ¡Qué aglomeración [. . .] de libros ...! ; [. . .] docenas de libros [. . .] proliferando como la mala yerba” (16). The disarray is viewed as anarchic, a chaos against which we have to fight. The pairing of the words “en paz” and “en lucha” humorously highlights that fact that this poor woman is at peace now only because she’s dead, but also because if she were alive she would have been compelled to tirelessly fight a harmless enemy. The expression “en paz esté” is ambiguous, though, because it can be seen as also condemning a society in which life for a woman was only a struggle against disorder, with death as the only release or escape from suffering the tiresome, boring and empty career of housekeeping.

Defying the conventional ideas of womanhood, the narrator/author proudly declares: “Me horrorizan las cocinas de ahora, asépticas, lujosas e impersonales, donde nadie se sentaría a conversar.” She laments the loss of the kitchens of the past: “No hay que tenerle tanto miedo a la huella del tiempo” (74). For her they served as a place which encouraged great conversations, a view that subverts the traditional, normal use of kitchens. She expresses her disdain for “esos ámbitos presididos por el culto a los quita-humos, a los trituradora-basuras, a los

lavaplatos, por la sonrisa estereotipada del ama de casa, elaborada con esfuerzo y pericia sobre modelos televisivos, esa mujer a quien la propaganda obliga a hacer una meta y un triunfo del mero ‘organizarse bien’, incapaz de relación alguna con los utensilios y máquinas continuamente renovados que manejan sus manos sin mácula” (74). Her ironic use of the word “culto” indicates the exaggerated reverence for modern kitchen equipment held by the women of her decade, a reverence which she does not share. The negative aspect of the modern kitchen is emphasized by the enumeration of the objects and the repetitive use of compound, scientific-sounding words, devoid of warmth. They are kitchens that are unable to serve as a “recordatorio de su edad infantil” (74). She criticizes the propaganda which has created the woman who makes a goal and triumph “del mero ‘organizarse bien.’” The use of quotation marks indicates that what she is mocking is Sección Femenina’s propaganda and not goals established by the women themselves. Her use of the adjective “mero” leaves no doubt as to her estimation of it as a goal.

The emphasis on cleaning gives rise to an occasion to laugh at herself: “La sonrisa se tiñe de una leve burla al darse cuenta de que llevo una bayeta en la mano” (74). In a good-natured self-deprecatory tone she remarks to the double of herself she sees in the mirror: “Anda que también tú limpiando, vivir para ver” (74-75). Then, reassuring herself she says: “Gracias, mujer, pero no te preocupes, de verdad, que sigo siendo la de siempre, que en esa retórica no caigo.” After informing us of her “rebeldías frente al orden y la limpieza,” she constructs a sacreligious metaphor to mock the over-importance given to those two notions.

The thin line separating referential irony from metaphor is seen here in this comparison between an ordinary and extraordinary subject, so-called the irony of reference. The comparison is so outrageous that it emphasizes the banality of the ordinary subject (Nimetz 105): “dos nociones distintas y un solo dios verdadero al que había que rendir culto, entronizado invisiblemente junto a las imágenes de san José y la Virgen del Perpetuo Socorro” (75). The rebellion the author envisions as a child against the regime’s campaign against disorder is comical. She imagines very unladylike and therefore humorous--for being so unladylike and going against what we expect--behavior that she would like to perpetrate against that “templo de orden sostenido por invisibles columnas de ropa limpia, planchada y guardada dentro de las cómodas.” She confesses mischievously that she fought back a compulsion to “abrir cajones y baúles y salpicar de manchas de tinta aquella pesada herencia de hacendosas bisabuelas” (78).

Her grandmother’s “manía” provides shrift for humor, or rather the “manía” society has imposed upon her: “¿No ves que dejas la marca de los dedos y de las narices en el cristal? ¡Dios mío, los cristales recién limpios!” The rhetorical question that the narrator sarcastically poses uses the repetition of the word “recién” to stress the extent of her grandmother’s “manía”: “Pero, qué cosa no estaba recién limpia, recién doblada, recién guardada en su sitio?” (87). The narrator makes us look at dusting from the amusingly perplexed perspective of a child, not unlike the unusual perspective of Gómez de la Serna: “por qué castigarlos con aquella continua y sañuda purga de quitarles el polvo, como se arracan las costras de una enfermedad?” The maids’ response to dust is couched

in humorous terms as well, aided by an enumeration of all the “weapons” brought to bear on the “attack” against the dust:

Desde muy temprano, con el primer rayo de luz que traía hasta mi cama una lluvia menuda de motas de polvo, coincidían las diligencias para su captura, las órdenes fanáticas a toque de diana, el despliegue de aparejos escondidos en un cuartito oscuro del pasillo, y en seguida aquel arrastrar, frotar y sacudir de escobas, escobillas, plumero, zorros, cogedor, paño de gamuza, bayeta, cepillo para el luster. (88)

Another “manía” was to feed the children well. The maid’s duty was to

consultarnos, antes de arreglarse para ir al mercado, lo que nos apetecería comer y cenar, cuestión que, a aquellas horas y delante de un desayuno copioso, era casi imposible dilucidar con un mínimo de interés. Pero resultaba aún más imposible zafarse de su tenaz encuesta, precedida de la enumeración de las diferentes viandas y respectivas posibilidades de aderezo, sobre las cuales había de versar nuestra elección gastronómica; le parecía ofensivo que la gula no se encendiera con gratitud y alborozo ante aquellas meticulosas descripciones sembradas de diminutives. (88-89)

The careful buildup of the routine surrounding meal planning functions to make the offense that the maid would take appear ridiculous. The sarcastic use of the words “gula” and “se encendiera con gratitud y alborozo,” juxtaposed against the mental (“casi imposible dilucidar con un mínimo de interés”) and physical condition of the children (“delante de un desayuno copioso”), highlights the absurdity of the maid’s expectations by exaggerating the incongruence between the condition that would be required for one to welcome the maid’s efforts and the impossibility of anyone, and in particular a child, being able to do so on a full stomach.

The humor of her refuting the norm of the ideal woman is based on exaggeration as she calmly admits: “He quemado tantas cosas, cartas, diarios, poesías. A veces me entra la piromanía, me agobian los papeles viejos” (45). Her matter-of-fact way of saying “me entra la piromanía” is humorous since it is not something we expect to hear. However, she blames Machado, not herself: “La última gran quema la organicé una tarde de febrero, estaba leyendo a Machado en esta misma habitación y me dio un arrebató” (45). The “culpa” of her “auto de fe de febrero”

la tuvo don Antonio Machado. [. . .] Estaba leyendo poemas suyos en este mismo cuarto. . . bueno, [. . .] de pronto llegué a un poema [. . .] me vi disparada a la vejez, condenada al vicio de repasar para siempre cartas sin perfume, con la tinta borrosa de tanto manosearlas y llorar sobre ellas y me entró un furor por destruir papeles como no recuerdo en mi vida. (46)

The expression “me entró un furor por destruir papeles” opposes the social norm of the woman as passive and ladylike. Her unexpected behavior amuses because it surprises the reader. It is also funny because in essence she dares to blame her “emotional” state on, and by so doing deflates, a famous male poet, hinting that his poetry was responsible for filling her head with such desperate notions that she was obliged to act that way. She implies that if it were not for men purposely provoking that state with their literature, women would perhaps not be so “emotional.” This challenge to conventional wisdom in which she dares to blame women’s emotional state on men’s “emotional” literature reverses the conventional attack on women’s nature as emotional.

In discussing models of behavior for young girls, she mentions Carmencita Franco and the American film star Deanna Durbin. In this affirmation the author suggests some causes of her misplaced compassion for the two: “influida por la lectura de las novelas rosa, que solían poner un énfasis lacrimoso en las insatisfacciones de las ricas herederas, pensaba en la niña de Franco como en un ser prisionero y sujeto a maleficio, y me inspiraba tanta compasión que hasta hubiera querido conocerla para poderla consolar” (64). Other literature also fomented sympathy for the rich with such lines as those from Rubén Darío’s poetry: “La princesa está triste, ¿qué tendrá la princesa?” (64). This is a fact that troubles the author as she mentions the reticence of the country to look at its gaping wounds of poverty and disease, which we will see more directly stated in *Los usos amorosos*.

Deanna Durbin’s propaganda, on the other hand, was converted by Hollywood into the almost incredible movie image of a young girl who would roller skate to school with a backpack on her shoulder while eating lemon ice cream. The narrator admits that “Aquella escena se me antojó fascinante, no paré hasta que me compraron unos patines, pero nunca pasé de una mediocridad patosa, sembrada de tropezones y caídas.” Hinting at Hollywood’s absurdity and responsibility for inspiring in young girls “esa aventura” that “significaba para mí la alegoría de la libertad” she asks innocently, yet ambiguously, “¿quién iba a soñar con ir en patines al Instituto?” (65).

The reason for her personal envy towards Carmencita Franco and Deanna Durbin strikes a comic note as she confesses that she did harbor a little jealousy

towards them; not for their wealthy status but rather for their naturally curly hair, or what she thought was naturally curly hair. Of the importance attached to having curly hair she remarks sarcastically, “Era algo indispensable saberse poner los chifles, no se podía ir por la vida con el pelo tan liso,” once again mocking society’s perceptions of women’s appearance. Her remark upon seeing a picture of Carmen Laforet is sadly funny: “Recuerdo que cuando le dieron el primer premio Nadal a una mujer, lo que más revolucionario me pareció, aparte del tono desesperanzado y nihilista que inauguraba con su novela, fue verla retratada a ella en la portada del libro, con aquellas greñas cortas y lisas. Sentí envidia pero también un conato de esperanza” (66). Trying to remedy her own straight hair situation with a permanent, the narrator tells us that “[. . .] mi madre me aconsejó que me hiciera una permanente ligerita; [. . .] acabé cediendo, pero es la primera y la última permanente que me he hecho en mi vida, les juré odio eterno a las peluquerías” (67). While the words “odio eterno” appear to be comical for their exaggeration, for those of us who have had such an experience, the response seems more realistic than exaggerated.

Comic self-mockery is evoked when the man in black succeeds in stopping her cold, suggesting that perhaps Carmencita’s hair was not naturally curly, that perhaps she too had to use “chifles” (a type of hair curler made out of paper). The narrator admits: “Le miro, me ha dejado dudando, pero supone una duda demasiado turbadora.” She “recovers,” responding just a little too emphatically: “--No, no --digo, al cabo, ahuyentándola--, era rizado natural,” sadly humorous for implying that the acknowledgement of that thought would

have been too painful for her, reminding us of the overimportant role that something as trivial as hairstyle still plays in women's lives (68).

The conventional wisdom that “Mujer que sabe latín no puede tener buen fin” uttered by a neighbor also comes under attack. The narrator reveals that: “por aquel tiempo, ya tenía yo el criterio suficiente para entender que el ‘mal fin’ contra el que ponía en guardia aquel refrán aludía a la negra amenaza de quedarse soltera, implícita en todos los quehaceres, enseñanzas y prédicas de la Sección Femenina” (93). Her ironic intention is apparent in the use of quotation marks, used to point out her lack of agreement with them, and in the words “negra amenaza,” which serve to highlight the exaggerated importance society placed on marriage.

However, she suggests that one place where you could perhaps find a “mal fin”—a “mal fin” not part of the rhetoric of the romance novels—would paradoxically be in marriage itself. She uses the typical marriage plot of a novel as a case in point:

el final me defraudó un poco, no me quedé muy convencida de que la chica esa hubiera acertado casándose con un hombre mucho más viejo que ella y maniático por añadidura, aparte de que pensé: ‘para ese viaje no necesitábamos alforjas’, tanto ilusionarse con los estudios y desafiar a la sociedad que le impedía a una mujer realizarlos, para luego salir por ahí, en plan *happy end*, que a saber si sería o no tan *happy*, porque aquella chica se tuvo que sentir decepcionada tarde o temprano; además por qué tenían que acabar todas las novelas cuando se casa la gente?, [. . .] como si la vida se hubiera terminado. (92)

Alluding to the inconsistency and perhaps deceitfulness of a policy that stresses marriage yet fails to educate or illuminate its future participants on what

they may be getting into she writes: “pocas novelas o películas se atrevían a ir más allá y a decirnos en qué se convertía aquel amor después de que los novios se juraban ante el altar amor eterno, y eso, la verdad, me daba mala espina” (92-93).

Though not a declared feminist, the author/narrator nevertheless voiced views that advanced and defended women’s rights. Equating the more interesting roles women were allowed to take on during the Republic with “los conatos de feminismo” we get a glimpse of where she stood on feminist issues when she points out that: “La retórica de la postguerra se aplicaba a desprestigiar los conatos de feminismo que tomaron auge en los años de la República y volvía a poner el acento en el heroísmo abnegado de madres y esposas, en la importancia de su silenciosa y oscura labor como pilares del hogar cristiano” (93). Her irony is evident in the choice of vocabulary used in her expressions detailing that rhetoric. She informs us that all the “arengas” that “nos lanzaban” were designed “a que aceptásemos con alegría y orgullo, con una constancia a prueba de desalientos, mediante una conducta sobria que ni la más mínima sombra de maledicencia fuera capaz de enturbiar, nuestra condición de mujeres fuertes” (93-94). Words like “constancia” transmits her feelings about the absurdity that one did not have the right to get tired or to falter. Expressions such as “a prueba de desalientos” and “la más mínima” hint at the excessive, demanding, unrealistic and therefore ridiculous standards for real women.

The Francoist rhetoric and ideals often come under attack, due to the power they had to affect lives. The two most important virtues touted for women by that rhetoric were “la laboriosidad y la alegría.” These “ingredients,” that the

ideal woman was supposed to possess, “mixed in” with the practical advice she was given, in the narrator’s opinion, “tenían mucho de infalible receta casera.” The domestic metaphor she creates by comparing their recipe for creating the ideal Spanish wife to a recipe for baking sponge cake mocks the simplistic approach of the Sección Femenina, ridiculing and degrading it:

De la misma manera que un bizcocho no podía dejar de esponjar en el horno, si se batían los huevos con la harina y el azúcar en la proporción recomendada, tampoco podía haber duda sobre el fraguado idóneo de aquellos dos elementos--alegría y actividad--, inexcusables para modelar la mujer de una pieza, la esposa española. (94)

Falling under the wrath of a domestic metaphor is the equally simplistic and dismissive disdain of pain and sadness: “el dolor era una cucaracha despreciable y ridícula, bastaba con tener limpios todos los rincones de la casa para que huyera avergonzada de su banal existencia, no había que dignarse mirar los bultos inquietantes ni las sombras de la noche” (94-95). The author cleverly seizes upon one of the domestic activities so highly-prized for women and uses it to portray the propagandistic assumption as superficial and deficient. The poetic attitude achieved by the metaphorical language used to describe the world of pain and sadness (“bultos inquietantes” and “sombras de la noche”) placed ironically side-by-side with the haughty attitude evoked by the rhetorical language and simplistic approach used to deal with those problems (“bastaba con tener limpios todos los rincones de la casa” and “no había que dignarse mirar”) serves to underscore the incongruity between the real and the ideal.

Dismissive, paternalistic attitudes were also evident in sentimental advice columns: “e igualmente, en el consultorio sentimental de la revista ‘Y’ quedaban desterrados, de un plumazo, todos los problemas que pudieran hacer presa en el alma de los seres inadaptados o irresolutos, todos se arreglaban no quedándose mano sobre mano, llenando el tiempo” (96). The use of the words “inadaptados” and “irresolutos” to label those who have problems is not typical of the narrator/author’s style or her attitude, and, along with the ease, speed and simplicity with which the advice columnists scornfully “cured” problems (“de un plumazo”), signal the narrator’s disdainful attitude.

Carmen de Icaza, an especially successful author of “novelas rosa,” is one of Martín Gaité’s favorite targets. Her heroines were “activas y prácticas, se sorbían las lágrimas, afrontaban cualquier calamidad sin una queja, mirando hacia un futuro orlado de nubes rosadas, inasequibles al pernicioso desaliento que solo puede colarse por las rendijas de la inactividad” (94). The irony of the description of Spain’s future and the author’s attitude toward discouragement or loss of heart is signaled by the overly rosy expression used to describe the future. Use of the strong adjective “pernicioso” is not typical or representative of the narrator’s vocabulary or attitude.

Since one of the purposes of satire is to criticize, it should be obvious to the reader what is being criticized. Edward Rosenheim, Jr. claims that “all satire is not only an attack; it is an attack upon discernible, historically authentic particulars” (317-318). In Martín Gaité’s satire of the period, the historically authentic particulars that she attacks are easily discernible. The use of Spain’s

queen Isabela la Católica as model extraordinaire, bolstered by the Sección Femenina, provides a rich source of Martín Gaité's humor. Based on the narrator/author's feelings about using the queen as a model, revealed in this text and in others, we know her reference to a "cierta reina gloriosa," --"glorioso" being a word overused and out of place in this context (as when her father received notice that his requisitioned car had "servido gloriosamente a la Cruzada, estaba destrozado en Burgos" (110))--, is thus ironic. The ubiquitous use by the Franco regime of the queen as a model of behavior for young girls is also targeted in this demonstration of the rhetoric drummed into children's heads, and therefore hard to escape. This humorous, for seeming childish and simplistic, riddle reminds the children that: "adivina adivinanza, la fatiga no la alcanza, siempre en danza, desde el Pisuerga al Arlanza, con su caballo y su lanza" (95). There is much talk about the queen's "voluntad férrea" and her "espíritu de sacrificio," obliging the narrator to point to the inconsistency between the real and the ideal, at the end of which she add a humorous disclaimer to her falsely innocent incomprehension: "Yo miraba aquel rostro severo, aprisionado por el casquete, que venía en los libros de texto, y lo único que no entendía era lo de la alegría, tal vez es que hubiera salido mal en aquel retrato." She mentions the lack of appeal that image held for young girls: "desde luego, no daban muchas ganas de tener aquella imagen como espejo" and points out irreverently the curious inconsistency that "algunas de las monitoras que nos instaban a imitarla también tenían aquel rictus seco en la boca y aquella luz fría en los ojos, aunque hablaran continuamente de la alegría" (95-96). Of this "propaganda ñoña" of the forties she

expects that generations will be brought up the same way and predicts that “la alabaran por los siglos de los siglos,” using a religious line to refer to the misplaced reverence given the queen.

Another discernible, historically authentic particular satirized in this work is General Francisco Franco. One of the important bases of the patriarchy is attacked in this demythifying description of Franco, in which Martín Gaité ridicules him by concentrating on his defects: “saludando con la mano y tratando de mostrarse arrogante, aunque siempre tuvo un poco de barriga” (63). The use of the word “tratando,” indicating that he was not successful in the effect he was trying to achieve, makes him look ineffectual and foolish, while “barriga” produces a slightly comical image, at odds with someone trying to look arrogant.

The hypocrisy of adults comes under attack in the scene with the narrator’s childhood friend, the “hijo del comandante,” who helps her feel safe in the bomb shelter during the bombings: “me protegía más que mis padres, ni comparación” (62). He invites her: “Tienes que subir a casa, papá ha traído ayer santos nuevos, uno precioso, grande, con túnica de oro, se llama san Froilán, casi no cabe en el pasillo” (62). The details with which the narrator provides us reveal the hypocrisy and distorted values behind her friend’s father’s actions:

Su padre salía algunas noches en un camión a requisar riquezas que iban quedando, a merced del primero que llegara, dentro de las iglesias abandonadas en pueblos que tomaban las tropas nacionales, volvía también de noche y descargaba su botín, iba y venía al frente siempre para lo mismo; a mí me fascinaba aquel pasillo del piso de arriba que parecía un museo, pero les gustaba poco que subiera gente a su casa. (62)

The ingenuous and unusual expression that “papá ha traído ayer santos nuevos” takes us by surprise. This expression coming innocently from the mouth of a child juxtaposed with words like “botín” and “a merced del primero que llegara” helps to reinforce the incongruence and the dubious nature of the process. The phrase “Iba y venía al frente siempre para lo mismo” causes us to mentally juxtapose the image of those who went to the front for more serious purposes against that of the “comandante” who went for personal “requisitioning” purposes, and indirectly questions the patriotic and religious values of a man who paradoxically steals from churches to enrich himself (“les gustaba poco que subiera gente a su casa”).

One of Martín Gaité’s hopes as a writer that she expresses in *El cuarto de atrás* is to find “una forma divertida de enhebrar los recuerdos.” The proliferation of “libros de memorias” that occurred after Franco’s death in her eyes “ya es una peste” and she fears that, since “a mí me aburren las memorias de los demás,” her own memoirs would bore others (128). Her solution to this problem which she voices in this book is her decision to combine memoirs with essays, which she does in her next book *Los usos amorosos de la postguerra española*.

ii. *Los usos amorosos de la postguerra española* (a social history)

As an essay on social history, *Los usos amorosos de la postguerra española* attacks much more directly the postwar years as well as traditional positions of power and authority. It is interesting to note that we see the author’s worry about whether it will be published or not right from the start, in the introduction: “El presente trabajo, para el que llevo tomando notas desde 1975, como queda dicho, verá la luz--si es que llega a verla--gracias a una ayuda de la

Fundación March” (15). We see evidence of a sense of community as the book is dedicated to “todas las mujeres españolas, entre cincuenta y sesenta años, que no entienden a sus hijos. Y para sus hijos, que no las entienden a ellas.” In this we see a strong desire to not only communicate and to connect with other women and strengthen the bonds that exists with their children by promoting understanding, but also to educate the future generations of Spain, particularly evident in her call to them at the end of the book to write the history of their own “usos amorosos.”

Martín Gaité foregrounds her own narrative voice in the introduction, and emphasizes the importance of her perspective: “Y sin embargo, nadie que emprende un trabajo, a despecho de tales reflexiones, puede dejar de pensar que lo que él va a decir no está dicho todavía, simplemente porque nadie lo ha dicho de esa manera, desde ese punto de vista.” Self-conscious, she uses irony and modesty in her disclosure: “reconozco que es una arrogancia y una tozudez, pero el vicio de escribir siempre se alimenta, en última instancia, de esos dos defectos” (15).

Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of carnivalized literature as found in his *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* perceives carnivalization as the presence in an individual work of the essential categories or attitudes of the carnival: free, familiar contact; the carnival *mésalliances*; profanation; making light of the symbols of authority (102). According to Bakhtin, the carnival inheritance came down to us from the late Middle Ages and Renaissance via works such as Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and the plays of Shakespeare. Throughout time, the quality of the laughter has changed from the “full-throated laughter” that

characterized the height of the carnival tradition to a *reduced laughter* based on irony and other forms of humor (Busch 15).

Carnivalization can occur in works in differing degrees. In Martín Gaité's work, Bakhtin's first criterion--that the present be the starting point of understanding reality--is fulfilled in that she writes about an era that still dominated the consciousness of Spaniards emerging from dictatorship (Petro 29). Another of the requirements of Bakhtin's theory--that the seriocomic genre be based on experience--is fulfilled by Martín Gaité's documentary description of the life and conditions that she personally lived through as well as the experiences of other people that crossed her path in one way or another (Petro 29). Martín Gaité also demolishes *legend*, that is, the official picture of events, by exposing the corruption, cruelty, deception and other sins which she ascribes to the Franco regime and Spanish society (Petro 29). Third, we find in the work a variety, a mixture of high and low: letters, documents, papal quotations, popular refrains, stories, magazine advice columns, and political speeches. *Profanation* is achieved by her attacks on the Catholic Church and its representatives. Authority is denigrated and carnival *mésalliances* are created metaphorically between the Pope and Franco (Petro 30). As we see, Bakhtin's theory can provide a systematic perspective for the work. However, irony, sarcasm and ridicule are the methods by which she achieves the carnivalization.

Narration in this text begins with the author's quarrel with the severe censorship imposed by Franco's regime: "Prohibido mirar hacia atrás. La guerra había terminado. Se censuraba cualquier comentario que pusiera de manifiesto su

huella, de por sí bien evidente, en tantas familias mutiladas, tantos suburbios miserables, pueblos arrasados, prisioneros abarrotando las cárceles, exilio, represalias y economía maltrecha” (13). In her “de por sí bien evidente,” she highlights the absurdity of a government that prohibits speaking about something that was obvious for all to see. The propagandistic rhetoric, “empeñada en minimizar las secuelas de aquella catastrophe, entonaba himnos al porvenir” (13), is sarcastically classified as “himnos” and as one that encourages one to blindly sing optimistic hymns to the future with one’s head held high, high enough to ignore the ubiquitous problems.

In her research, Bilger points out that eighteenth-century female writers used the technique of parodic stylization, in which they brought antifeminist voices in their texts in order to expose their self-interest and to “drown their authoritative pronouncements in female laughter” (44). In paraphrasing the official rhetoric of the Franco regime, Martín Gaité also appears to be letting the rhetoric speak for itself, confident that its absurdity will be self-evident. For instance, in the comment: “Habían vencido los buenos. Había quedado redimido el país,” quotations are not needed to signal her irony, because we know from her negative stance on Franco and the execution of Martín Gaité’s uncle that she cannot possibly believe that all those who won were “los buenos.” In addition, the ambiguity of the identity of the narrative voice provides her a measure of safety, because while she appears to be simply paraphrasing the rhetoric of the party from their perspective, she is ironically mocking the official discourse. As Rachel Brownstein points out, irony is an efficient mode, questioning a statement as it is

made, so that one sentence becomes two (Brownstein qtd. in Barreca, *Last Laughs* 68).

Not only is the rhetoric criticized but so are the “rectores de la moral imperante” who paradoxically did not hesitate to “aprovechar,” for their own “fines,” the “secuelas muy hondas de encogimiento y tacañería” left in a suffering population forced into postwar restrictions due to scarcity. Though a concept praised by the regime, “bendito atraso” becomes ironic in the mouth of Martín Gaité. She makes it quite clear that she and many others did not feel that this “atraso” was “bendito” and that living in those conditions they did not feel blessed but rather long-suffering. The book begins with a quote from the Pope Pío XII, whom she often refers to as Eugenio Pacelli, “el burgués romano” or Pacelli, in an effort to ignore his position of authority and therefore the importance of what he says: “Yo envío una bendición especialísima a las familias de los mártires españoles. De España ha salido la salvación del mundo” (17). This quote expressing such admiration of and affection for Spain forms the basis for the construction of a humorous and irreverent metaphor built around a satirical love relationship between Franco and the Pope:

aquellas primeras declaraciones de amor de Pacelli, que se siguieron citando en los años siguientes, como el que alimenta la validez de un idilio relejendo cartas atrasadas, habían dado pie sobrado al general español para que tanto él como sus propagandistas explotaran hasta la náusea la cantinela de que España [. . .] era una nación elegida. (18)

This friend of the Pope, Franco, is paradoxically described as being “poco amigo de curas,” and as possessing military codes and values that “distaba mucho

de ser el de un príncipe cristiano” (19). The juxtaposition of the general’s destiny as savior and redeemer with his un-redeemer-like background serves to discredit him and question his self ordained destiny. Her statement “desde que Franco se puso al mando de las tropas rebeldes” questions the very basis of the patriarch’s authority (19).

Continuing with this humorous metaphor, the narrator draws a parallel between the relationship of these two world-famous leaders,--one of whom is already regretting the first overtures made to the other--, and couples that did not truly know their own “aliado” before they married: “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). One can almost see her enjoying the “divorce” that the Vatican must have been desiring soon after making the initial statement--a divorce forbidden by the Church that the author may have at one time desired for herself, as she was separated from her own husband--intuited from her use of the words “sordas desavenencias conyugales” and “condenados a aguantarse,” since the truth was that Franco and the Vatican “pronto empezaron a llevarse peor” (17).

Among the concepts that are questioned is that of “españolidad” as interpreted by the Franco regime. The narrator frames the concept’s history for us, but the framing of it becomes ironic in her hands. We are informed that the “republicanos” were accused of having betrayed the concept “al beber su

ideología en fuentes de ‘ateísmo materialista’ importadas del extranjero” (19). Once again, the use of the quotation marks adds a dimension of unspoken mockery. Franco’s revolution supposedly was going to return Spain to her true self and renovation was to come from her authentic traditional style. Obviously ironic is the narrator’s use of Franco’s wording which she cites with irony: “A España la habían violado los rojos al injertarle costumbres y vestirla con atuendos que ‘no le iban’” (19).

According to Franco, Spain was to seek its self concept in its own tradition, “hacernos el traje a nuestra medida, español y castizo” (20). The concept is rendered humorous by the belittling metaphor that Martín Gaité constructs in her retort: “mirando las revistas de la época saca uno la consecuencia de que aquel traje castizo que devolvía a España su verdadero ser era una mezcla de bata de lunares y sotana de cura. Pero sobre todo esto último” (20).

Returning to the relationship metaphor, the narrator indicates that Franco, knowing how helpful the Church’s support would be in his campaign, was willing to “echarse en sus brazos, siempre que ella, a su vez, le rindiera ciega pleitesía,” not unlike that which women who arrived naïve to marriage were asked to do with their husbands (20). Just as official Vatican censorship forced a silence about the problems the Church experienced in dealing with Franco, so were wives told to endure marital problems such as the unfaithfulness of their husbands. Skeptical of such blind devotion, the author repeats the empty reasons disaffected couples use to justify their lack of courage to divorce: “lo mejor era hacer como si nada [. . .]

para que los hijos pudieran seguir viendo a sus padres aliados en lo esencial, en la tarea de sacarlos adelante a ellos, de enseñarles a amar la España nueva, de prohibirles cosas” (21). Hardly essential, the last reason, “prohibirles cosas,” an understatement, even sounds comical, signaling the irony. The crusade “del espíritu contra la materia” began by the regime resulted in a new slogan: “soportar cualquier revés y aceptar cualquier cruz con sana alegría” (21). “El divorcio no existía,” she comments, adding a sarcastic understatement: “Era cosa de rojos” (21).

Franco’s new Spain was to take pride in its destiny of “rompeolas europeo” as it ran contrary to the progress of Europe, even though the narrator wisecracks that “para buscar las fuentes de tal ‘novedad’ hubiera que remontarse a los godos,” who stopped “la marea islámica” (22). Life was “milicia, o sea, disciplina, sacrificio, lucha y austeridad” (21). Demythifying by deflating the models of that propaganda that were to serve as examples, she says, “Los niños de la postguerra, que lo que queríamos era ir al cine o que nos compraran una bicicleta, estábamos hartos de la vida sacrificada, vigilante y viril de aquellos hirsutos antepasados [. . .]” (23). But, “Buscar la felicidad se consideraba un propósito deleznable” (24). Repeating the rhetoric of the day, she “kindly” helps us interpret it, cutting through “aquella palabrería”: “A través de este jeroglífico solo para iniciados,” she tells us, “lo fácil se identificaba con lo triste” (24). The insufficiency of the rhetoric that “más parece aludir a cosas ocurridas en el país de los sueños que a furias, dolores y esperanzas encarnizadas en un pueblo real” (24) is pointed out as also being key to understanding “el desconcierto y la ceguera con

que la mayoría de los jóvenes de ambos sexos llegaban al matrimonio” (25). The basis for these and many of the incongruities mentioned throughout is that which the narrator considers the root cause of “las perplejidades de quien no estuviera dispuesto a comulgar con ruedas de Molino”: “aquella esquizofrenia entre lo que se decía que pasaba y lo que pasaba de verdad, entre lo que se imponía y lo que se necesitaba” (25).

“La vida fácil había resultado ser una indecencia” (25). The “estilos ‘viejos’” were for atheistic countries where, according to the Pope, “un aire malsano de paganismo” tended to engender and introduce “una amplia paridad de las actividades de la mujer con las del hombre,” (26) necessitating the imposition of the correct concept of lifestyle. Though the concept “estilo” was “en perpetua búsqueda de su propia definición,” Spaniards nevertheless needed to be guarded against slipping back into old ways of life (25). With tongue in cheek, she mocks *franquista* xenophobia: “Esos vientos de paganismo renacido venían, como casi todo lo malo, del extranjero” (26).

An intention of deceit is implied in the author’s interpretation of the regime’s strategy of implementing a propaganda that was meant to thwart those who would slip back into old styles with her use of the word “vender”: “vender como moderno, aquel tipo de mujer tradicional antigua y siempre nueva” (27). The term “mujer muy mujer,” equally elusive to define, was intended to be great praise. The passive example of Franco’s wife, a “borrosa proviciana” who “dio nunca muestras de interés real por ninguna cuestión social o política,” was often tauted as a “real woman.” The narrator, however, who does not even mention

Carmen Franco by name here, qualifies her as a “mera figura decorativa que se limitaba a sonreír mucho, a recibir a señoras de luto y a ponerse collares.” The understatement “a ponerse collares” makes “la primera dama de España” appear ridiculous, as it drives home the faint praise that the term “mujer muy mujer” would bestow upon someone, even as the regime held her up in opposition to “los modelos ‘nada digna de imitar’” (28).

The United States was not among those countries that could serve as a model for Spain. Taking up the press’ battle metaphor, Martín Gaité mocks conservatives’ attitude toward the phenomenon of foreign words appearing in the Spanish language: “Tales atentados, normalmente perpetrados por Francia, nos invadían ahora también desde América” (31). Of foreign customs becoming popular in the country she ironically writes that it was difficult to “detener la avalancha de aquellos influjos perniciosos para nuestras costumbres tradicionales” (32).

While the girl who chose to be a nun was admired and not pitied, those girls “a quienes se les había pasado o se les estaba pasando ‘la edad de casarse,’” were talked about by adults “con una mezcla de piedad y desdén” (38). The use of quotation marks to indicate a phrase often used by society also implies that the author may have more to say about the marrying age and the whole concept of singlehood. The rules for marrying were such that “Analizar las cosas con crudeza o satíricamente no parecía muy aconsejable para la chica que quisiera ‘sacar novio’” (38). Since sarcasm is verbal revenge, a cruel form of irony, we can see that the author is perhaps making up for lost time with this book, since “analizar

las cosas [. . .] sáiricamente,” a form of humor, is a risk she can now take as an established Post-Franco writer. This is because humor, due to conventional concepts of status and femininity, as the sociologist Mahadev Apte reminded us, is more acceptable coming from an older or married woman.

Martín Gaité’s retelling of an anecdote concerning a young woman adds a light-hearted touch to break the seriousness of the debate. Supposedly there was a young woman who wanted to make perfectly clear that it was her choice not to marry, thereby hoping to avoid society’s disdain. At the last moment at the church’s altar in front of everyone she answers the wedding question posed by the priest with “¡No, señor!” [. . .] ‘Y si he llegado hasta aquí, es para que sepan todos ustedes que si me quedo soltera es porque me da la gana!’” (44).

Among the inconsistencies she points out are that while boys could have complexes, girls could not show signs of that “galimatías de los complejos,” because it was “algo extravagante que se comentaba con desdén, como el existencialismo y demás frivolidades decadentes que se gestaban en París” (39). In addition, the conception of love as therapy was associated with the bachelor with different nuances than it was with women. “Se daba por supuesto, efectivamente, que ninguna mujer podía acariciar sueño más hermoso que el de la sumisión a un hombre,” is obviously ironic as evidenced by the pairing of the comparative “más hermoso” with “sumisión” (45). It was a beautiful dream because, as a popular magazine article of the era makes clear, it was “la absorción de todos los malos gérmenes--vanidad, egoísmo, frivolidad--por el amor.” The bachelor, however, Martín Gaité points out, was allowed to “vivir siempre

esclavos de aquellos ‘malos gérmenes’ en vez de someterse al yugo matrimonial [. . .]” (45).

Of society’s attitude toward helping single women prepare for the job market in the face of the overwhelming odds she confronted in finding a husband among a male population decimated by the civil war, Martín Gaité sarcastically comments: “Ante tan desolador panorama había que tomar alguna medida, aunque fuera a regañadientes, [. . .]. Porque resultaba patente hasta para la imaginación más cerril que el infortunio de quedarse soltera no era exclusive de las marquesas” (46). Yet while not even “a los censores más estrictos, se le ocultaba que estaba bien entrado el siglo XX y que aquel fenómeno, por muy alerta que conviniera estar sobre él, representaba [. . .] un efecto normal [. . .] de la transformación debida a los trastornos nacionales y mundiales,” those same censors insisted that young women working “suponía no sólo un peligro para el pudor de las jóvenes trabajadoras, sino un mal ejemplo para las que no lo eran” (47). Given the fact that “aquel trabajo que hacían ‘para ellas solas’ era probable que lo tuvieran que seguir haciendo siempre para ellas solas,” the censors’ attitude towards single women who worked appears all the more disdainful, a religious incoherency Martín Gaité voices with an overarching rhetorical question: “¿No era entonces más justo y más cristiano considerarlo como una gratificación merecida que condenarlo como una insolencia?” (50). Women faced another inconsistency related to their single status. It was believed that of her single years “era mejor que no dejara buenos recuerdos, que se viviera como una cruz, como una tensa expectativa. Pero, eso sí, sonriendo” (48).

Martín Gaité raises the idea of the political inconsistency of the fact that Franco himself brought on the civil war yet women,--encouraged by the government to dedicate “su atención al hogar y se separe de los puestos de trabajo” in hopes of producing “las familias numerosas” that would repopulate Spain--, “tenía que pagar el pato” (52). It is remarked that even Marxism was happy to rescue “la dulce Margarita” from the clutches of capitalism, and put back in her hand the “preciada rueca” that capitalism had taken away. Attacking “the crippling role definitions imposed on women” (Brown 156), the author sarcastically asks: “Dignificada y redimida ¿qué menos iba a hacer que dar las gracias?” (53).

Satire, Max Eastman tells us, “is a name we give to any form of jocularity that finds its point in worsting an opponent. It is humor as a weapon. It is not contrasted against caricature or irony, but comprises them” (229). One of those natural opponents for Martín Gaité was General Franco. Her satirical portrait of Franco is rooted in subversion of a popular fairy tale. She imagines Franco wondering who inspired the line “el mejor hombre de España” of a popular “copla,” (José Antonio Primo de Rivera), and writes of Franco: “No sabemos si se miraría al espejo alguna noche, como la madrastra de Blancanieves, y vería al fondo del azogue la sonrisa de aquel abogado joven, guapo y de encendido verbo, [. . .] En todo caso, se encogería de hombros, respiraría con alivio y se iría a la cama, complaciéndose una vez más en su buena estrella” (55). Her certainty that José Antonio’s death would be viewed by Franco ironically as an “oportuno fusilamiento” serves to portray him as insatiably needy for admiration.

She also reconstructs an amusing metaphor for us involving Pilar, José Antonio's sister, in which her negative portrait is carefully contextualized. Attacking the behavior rather than woman's nature or intrinsic flaws (Bilger 185), Martín Gaité repeats a joke that was circulating during the postwar years about Falange's female spokesperson and "ama de casa ahorrativa y prudente." It was said of the deceased dictator's sister that "de una camisa vieja de su hermano se había hecho una combinación de las que duran toda la vida." In her praise and defense, however, Martín Gaité says, cleverly continuing the domestic metaphor:

Buen resultado, desde luego, sí le dio, porque de hecho duró más que el propio Franco, aunque ya en sus postrimerías desteñida y hecha un trapo. Pero me parece de justicia quitarle a la palabra 'combinación' sus posibles resonancias de negocio desaprensivo, ya que ni Pilar Primo de Rivera ni las colaboradoras de su apostolado amasaron una fortuna predicando el ahorro, la sonrisa, la gimnasia al aire libre y el baile regional. (57)

Her opinion of the model for young women's formation provided by the women's auxiliary of the Sección Femenina is harshly summed up in these words, using a humorously sarcastic litotes which emphasizes how easy it would be for almost anyone to see through its veneer:

Las cumplidoras del Servicio Social que, gracias a sus estudios o a un ambiente familiar más propicio, no tuvieran totalmente atrofiada la neurona sacaban en consecuencia, más tarde o más temprano, que aquella formación cultural entendida como andamio previo para el matrimonio no pasaba de ser el timo de la estampita disfrazado con frases sublimes. (63)

The Servicio Social's "'complicada' misión de enseñar" from which no woman could escape, could erroneously lead us to believe, Martín Gaité warns us,

that their curriculum “requería unos conocimientos especializados y difíciles de improvisar” (59), when the reality was that it more closely resembled a domestic curriculum from a nineteenth century “instituto para mujeres”(59). Without the certificate of completion, among the list of activities that would be prohibited to women was “la pesca.” Creating a metaphor out of it she writes:

se echa de menos una puntualización en lo que se refiere al deporte de la pesca. Era para los barbos y las truchas para lo que había veda; para los hombres no. [. . .] Pescar marido era lo único que podía hacer una muchacha sin que se le exigiera ostentar en la solapa la preciada chapita de esmalte azul acreditativa de haber cumplido su Servicio Social. (60)

Lamenting that information for other “cosas serias que puede hacer una mujer” was not made available to young women to the same extent that information on sewing was, the author, with tongue in cheek, offers an explanation: “Los hombres, al parecer, se enamoraban de las chicas que cosían más que de las que se entregaban a cualquier otra actividad” (71). “Coser esperando que apareciera un novio llovido del cielo. Coser luego, [. . .] para entretener la espera de la boda, [. . .] Coser, por ultimo, [. . .] esperando la vuelta de él a casa” (72); such was the “magnífico destino de mujer abnegada” (58) for “aquellas ejemplares penélopes condenadas a coser, a callar y a esperar” (72). Here, the classical literary metaphor drives home the impact of how long a wait it was for young women as well as how outmoded a lifestyle it was.

Since the crux of her thesis is how and why her generation arrived blind to marriage, the other side of the equation, the males’ side, provides her the opportunity to talk about issues facing not only males but the poor as well. Since

young women were taught that making an error in choosing a husband was serious, the lack of trusty paradigms for judgement offered for one's use was incoherent. In addition, everything worked against providing young men and women an opportunity to get to truly know each other. This theme of the lack of true communication between individuals also received a "very witty and ironic" treatment in the brief story "La trastienda de los ojos", composed by Martín Gaité in 1954 (Brown 53). Co-education was apparently "contrario a los principios del Glorioso Movimiento Nacional" (91-92), a piece of the puzzle that would affect the preparedness and sincere knowledge of one another with which her generation would arrive at marriage. Since religious schools were more expensive, they were preferred by middle class parents fearful that a daughter "perdiera el freno de la Religión y se contaminara de costumbres impropias de una señorita," in hopes of avoiding the "muchacha mezclada" found in the public schools (92). She tells us that she did not go to those religious schools, so of course the expressions are ironic.

Once again the flip side of Spanish Catholicism is presented as she tells us that when it came to "la miseria" in the "suburbios," for the government it was "alarmante [. . .] que no estaban aislados de ella por ninguna muralla inexpugnable" (96). She laments the "retintín poco piadoso" that the word "miseria" had in the official texts of "la España triunfal" (94). She questions those moralists who, in their articles, would absurdly equate poverty with "una inmoralidad que se manifiesta en el propio modo de vestir, pues en general las mujeres llevan trajes extremadamente rotos que apenas cubren sus carnes" (94). Looking at prostitution from a woman's point of view, she attacks the

“belicosidad de estos ‘redentores’” who tried to redeem the women given over to prostitution, comparing their approach unflatteringly to a “caza de alimañas” (102). Vicious irony is seen in her affirmation that houses of prostitution were needed for the sexual release of men of “edad difícil” and “señores de noble condición varonil.” Often it was at the expense of poor orphans, single mothers and widows with children that the purity of the “condesas Ana Marias” waiting to contract matrimony was safeguarded (104). Much was made of the young women who fell into prostitution. A report sent from the “Patronato de Protección de la mujer” held that “Faltan muchachas de servir bien formadas moralmente” and that the “mayoría tiene un concepto erróneo de la situación y recurre al servicio doméstico como un medio de satisfacer sus afanes inmoderados.” Martín Gaité begs to differ: “Yo creo que los que tenían un concepto erróneo de la situación eran los que suponían que con 30 ó 40 pesetas al mes una chica tuviera bastante para satisfacer afanes ni moderados ni inmoderados” (103).

“La mística de la masculinidad” that “venía exaltada ya en los tebeos de aventuras dedicados a los niños” affected boys as did the role of femininity for girls (98). Boys were obliged to repress their “desalientos y miedos,” “lo cual falseaba aún más su verdadera identidad” (98). The author irreverently points out the incongruence of “aquella monserga del heroísmo a ultranza, que, como secuela de la propaganda bélica, se seguía predicando en los tebeos, los colegios y los campamentos juveniles” in the lives of young postwar men who had suffered the loss of older brothers, parents, or relatives in the war. She explains that “era dura de compaginar con la mera supervivencia y la aspiración a un porvenir

simplemente decoroso, cuya conquista poca relación podía guardar ya con la letra de los himnos” (99). Defending the young men, she takes a swipe at those who supported the rhetoric of heroism with a sarcastic remark: “La crítica del heroísmo se desarrolló más tarde, bien entrada la década de los cincuenta, pero ya antes algún escritor sensato se había atrevido a defender la legitimidad del desencanto ante las expectativas de un futuro que no despertaba demasiado entusiasmo” (99). The use of the qualifier “sensato” applied to the writer implies the opposite for the propagandists, enabling her to mock them without doing so directly.

For their boyfriends, women felt that they had to “arreglarse, pero sin dar tres cuartos al pregonero de los quebraderos de cabeza que pudiera costar ese arreglo” (129). This belief had consequences of course in the male-female relationship. The author tells us that for many women, after going through a very complicated and time-consuming preparation: “Lo que más rabia daba era que él luego no supiera apreciar aquel esfuerzo, que no se fijara en que el peinado o el traje eran distintos. O que dijera: ‘Pero qué más da, mujer, si tú estás bien de cualquier manera!’” (129). Anticipating the confusion that a male would naturally experience after witnessing his girlfriend’s unexpected reaction to this “piropo”, she clarifies with: “La explicación de que una muchacha se resistiera a recibir frases como ésta en su significado de piropo directo y espontáneo, en vez de interpretarlas como una ofensa, hay que buscarla en el mismo cariz de defensa o parapeto que tenía el arreglo de una mujer decente” (130). After which, she gives us a long and detailed list of just exactly what was involved, a list humorous

simply for its length alone. Underlying women's dedication to the tedious preparation routine was a fundamental contradiction: "La relación de la mujer con sus ropas, [. . .] es de fundamental importancia para entender también su relación con los hombres, a los que tanto arreglo intimidaba, aunque en principio fuera dedicado a ellos" (130).

Another activity supposedly pleasing to a man, but perhaps not so much upon closer study, was cleaning. Disorder was talked about like a disease, in great disproportion to its importance. Other than dust, "No había males más terribles," she writes with sarcastic irony (118). More importantly dust was credited with playing a significant role in damaging a marriage. Men were said to be driven away by dirt and disorder. Martín Gaité ventures forth her view on the subject: "No estoy segura de que los hombres se alejaran siempre del 'mal ambiente' doméstico repelidos por la enfermedad del desorden, sino muchas veces por el exagerado olor a desinfectante con que se trataba de prevenir" (119).

Paradoxically, important discussions about diseases that could truly affect a marriage were omitted. In talking about "la enfermedad más extendida en la España del racionamiento," tuberculosis, she writes that the "proletariado" was uncharitably viewed as "aquella masa 'en que se ceba la tuberculosis'" (94) and that "Llamar 'tísico' a alguien era casi un insulto, era como llamarle 'desgraciado' o 'muerto de hambre'" (172). The sad statistics revealed an absurd injustice:

El mayor número de víctimas mortales se las cobró en barrios donde reinaba la miseria, es decir, donde las familias no contaban con los medios más elementales ni para prevenir el contagio ni para alimentar a los enfermos en condiciones, ni mucho menos para permitirse el lujo de que dejaran de trabajar por unos meses y se dedicaran a hacer reposo en una

chaïse-longue en la Sierra. Era, en una palabra, una enfermedad de pobres, pero que solo conseguían curársela los ricos” (171-72).

Martín Gaité ironically ends her book,--in which much discussion is given over to what the patriarchy considered to be the proper role models for the young and to which saints one was typically encouraged to commend one’s self in times of trouble--, with a saint of her own choosing, a type of personal rebellion. Explaining that today “la verdadera revolución es decir la verdad” (216), she proposes that in place of “La ceguera, la sordera y la tontería [. . .] para aquel aprendizaje” (163) traditionally prescribed for marriage, “Santa Lucía, abogada de la vista” concede us instead “el privilegio de seguir mirando” (218).

In these two narratives,--one novelistic, the other a social critique--Martín Gaité masters the delicate art of irony to point to the absurdities and incongruities of the early postwar years. Her sense of wit and irony stands out among postwar narratives. Unlike the more bitter, destructive irony of Martín Santos in *Tiempo de silencio*, she showed herself to be “an attentive observer of the surrounding world, which she recreates with a felicitous mixture of tenderness and humor” (Delibes, from a book-jacket review). Her themes are those that have been matters of concern to her, reflecting not only the domestic but the public sphere as well. In a voice long alert to being censored, she manages to reveal the very male-orientation of the pre-transition years while simultaneously pointing out the ridiculous in multiple aspects of Spanish postwar social life. However, since “las cuestiones de fondo” do not change “así por las buenas de una década a otra,” those themes, she instructs us, do not necessarily have to “a las mujeres quince

años más jóvenes que yo [. . .] sonarles a chino nada de lo que aquí se cuente” (14-15). In the next chapters we will see how women writers from a younger generation take up the gauntlet and reveal the continuing male biases of the transition and post-transition years, with a humor that will become increasingly more overt and direct.

Chapter 4

Rosa Montero: Humor and irony after the Mid-generation writers

While he lived, Franco had been the figure that “permitía al macho vivir camuflado, escondiéndose sobre todo de sí mismo.” He had been what had united men and women of the opposition in a common cause against him, and as long as the common cause existed, separate causes could not really exist. With his death, *franquismo* was revealed to be the giant cover under which machismo had been hiding, and it signaled the beginning of the younger generation’s fight against the patriarchy, against a value system that had been camouflaged for so long under the name of *franquismo* (Buckley 142-43).

One of the female writers who took up the fight was Rosa Montero. Women’s novels appearing at this time contained a debate of some of the important issues of the time: personal freedom, generational conflict, consumerism, political dogmatism. Among their arsenal in their writing, feminine humor became more radical and aggressive. The freedom to use humor as a weapon is an indication that they felt freer than ever before to express their point of view without fear of reprisal. In electing themes that were closely linked with their feminine condition and in using a linguistic register that traditionally did not correspond to them, these women authors proceeded with “una triple recuperación: del cuerpo, de la sexualidad y del lenguaje” (Arribas 135).

A. CRÓNICA DEL DESAMOR

To document her revelations of the existing machismo of the patriarchy after the patriarch had died, Montero adopted the form of a chronicle. Her *Crónica del desamor* (1979) was to be just that: the official notice that the patriarchy had been uncovered; a chronicle in which she was to detail the causes of this “desamor,” the distance that separated the two sexes. And the language that she used to write her chronicle was a voluntarily cold, objective, neutral language, very distanced from the language of the novel, from fiction, very close to newspaper/reporting speech, the speech that supposedly best expresses that which is called “Reality” (Buckley 143).

Crónica del desamor is Montero’s attempt to photograph that reality, a reality which appeared new but that in fact had been there before November 20, 1975 and therefore was not new at all. The novelty consisted only in that the curtain that had previously hidden that reality had been drawn back and that only then it could be “photographed.” The book was one of the first photos of the Spanish transition’s reality; “o acaso, más que una foto, es decir, una superficie [. . .]” in which Montero mapped the topography of that society, “un mapa donde estarán señalizados aquellos lugares donde se producía aquel desamor, aquel choque sordo entre los sexos, aquel choque producido por la dominación del uno sobre el otro” (Buckley 143-44).

The “lugares” that Montero highlights in *Crónica* with a red pen, in the case of women, are the lives of a rather specific group--Spanish women who in the nineteen seventies were in their thirties. Inheritors of a history of a country

where the presence of General Francisco Franco left an undeniable mark, they had been socialized “en sus roles genéricos por aquellas madres, tías y abuelas que crecieron con los ímpetus falangistas y quienes llegaron a encarnar la ideología de la misión maternal” (Ahumada Peña 36). The women in the text, however, “debutan en una temprana adultez y anuncian con su conducta los aires del cambio. Fueron educadas en la negación del cuerpo y, especialmente, de sus deseos, pero llegaron a sus primeras experiencias sexuales con unas ansias de liberación [. . .]” (37).

In *Crónica*, Montero “overtly parodies newspaper reporting and newspaper management with mordant humor and the outrage of an idealist” (Brown 243). At the same time she also portrays the lives of those marginalized by the newspaper management as well as those marginalized by society at large--both male and female--from a distinctly women’s point of view. And in doing so, she employs a darker, more aggressive humor than Martín Gaité, audaciously using scatological terms. The humor is increasingly pointed at males bolstered by the patriarchal system. In talking about the newspaper where Ana, the protagonist, works, the narrator does not hesitate to be sarcastic. The opening lines make us aware that Ana is working late and that the company, a source of power and dissatisfaction for her, wants more from her. Given this context it is easy to see the sarcastic irony in the lines “La máquina de cafés del pasillo se ha agotado, precisamente--esa máquina que la empresa instaló movida por su ejecutiva concepción del rendimiento, para que el personal ahorrara viajes a la calle, minutos muertos, segundos de trabajo” (5). The narrator’s iconoclastic sarcasm

extends to other management “fixtures” as well. She informs us that when still a young girl Ana interviewed for her first real job with the “sub-sub-subsecretario de Información y Turismo” (141), a term used to reduce the boss’s self-importance and to jab at the corporate system’s custom of bestowing meaningless titles on employees to falsely boost their self-importance.

Montero’s protagonist is an uncharacteristically irreverent female. At the newspaper Ana is working late and is asked to write captions for the pictures at the last moment:

Desde una cartulina brillante, Fraga mira al objetivo con ojos bizquísimos: es una oportuna, malévola instantánea. ‘El buen ojo de Fraga’... no, no esto es una estupidez, frisssss, gime la hoja al salir del carro, ‘Fraga: una mirada serena hacia el futuro’, es una tontería, pero qué coño van a esperar de una a estas horas. (6)

In Ana’s hands, the portrayal of males by females is uncharacteristically charged with impertinent and sarcastic irony. The juxtaposition of *bizquísimos* with “El buen ojo” seems to be a less than innocent concurrence. Her boss seems to be aware of this trait of irreverence in her. Given another picture for which she needs to write a caption--this time about the owner of the company--her boss warns her: “De todas formas refrena tus impulsos y no le dejes mal, Anita, que los jefes tienen el corazoncito delicado” (6). The narrator then satirically informs us that “El corazoncito de Soto Amón está envuelto en las ricas y acostumbradas sedas de su camisa, en ese traje cruzado tan impecable que ni siquiera resulta ostentoso [. . .]” (6). The repetition of the word *corazoncito* and the use of the diminutive

juxtaposed with the description of the luxurious wardrobe of a powerful businessman underscore the irony.

Barreca tells us that “women’s humor is often directed at the bizarre value systems that have been regarded as ‘normal’ for so long that it is difficult to see how ridiculous they really are” (*Snow White* 85). Montero uses the book that Ana would like to write about every day life, “el libro de las Anas,” in which she would create a space particularly for women, as a tool with which to display the nature of these values. The following scenarios that Ana imagines reveal the painful yet humorous side of what many women would recognize as the sad truth and at which they would feel compelled to laugh in recognition. Diego calls on the phone: “¿qué tal estás?” The author explains that “Ana acaba de llegar del dentista con una muela menos, o está en el primer día de una regla dolorosa, o tiene el ánimo arrugado por la espera, tantos días aguardando que sonara este teléfono.” Yet, contrary to what we would expect she answers “Muy bien, ¿y tú?” Diego’s answer to the same question juxtaposed alongside Ana’s cheery response despite any of the reasons she may have for feeling badly seems all the more pusillanimous: “Bah, tirando.” When he asks her “¿tienes algo que hacer esta noche?”, the narrator provides us with a range of possible excuses that Ana might face: “Ana tiene que acostar a Curro, o ha de entregar mañana ese reportaje tan largo que aún no sabe cómo hacer, o ha quedado para cenar con un amigo muy querido que a estas horas resulta ya ilocalizable.” Without hesitating, she responds: “Pues no...” (9). The scenario continues in the same vein. Diego asks

her if she feels like dining with him. Incredibly, despite all that she has to go through in order to be able to dine with him, she accepts:

Ana decide en un cuarto de segundo que madrugará para escribir el reportaje, calcula cuánto tiempo tardará en vestir al Curro y llevarle a casa de su madre--claro que no le gustará nada tener de nuevo al niño--, piensa con suicida melancolía en el plantón que sufrirá el buen amigo, recompone la cara para que no se advierta la tristeza, intenta recordar si tiene melabones en la caja de viejas medicinas para neutralizar el dolor de la extracción o el de ovarios. (9)

The long and painful list of all the trials that she would have to endure for a simple dinner date alongside the amount of time it takes her to decide “un cuarto de segundo” makes her acceptance all the more incongruous and humorously desperate. In addition, her use of language in which she tries to imagine the female body lends a distinctly female perspective to the narrative. Knowing as we do that some sort of calamity will most likely have transpired before her dinner date, Ana’s prediction of events, containing an ironic touch, is a humorously incongruous measure of the distance between how she is really feeling and how she will present herself: “Y sabe que saldrá y será encantadora, inteligente, divertida y amable, que representará con sabio hábito su papel de mujer fuerte y libre, ni exigencias ni lágrimas que son deleznable y femeninos defectos” (9). The quote, echoing Martín Gaité’s disappointment in the roles that women were socialized to play instead of being and valuing themselves, is humorous not just for Ana’s blatant hypocrisy but also because as Barreca tells us “Sometimes just the very act of naming something, saying something out loud, admitting

something about how we view our lives is enough to make us laugh. It's so absurd, we realize as soon as we see it clearly, that it's funny" (*Snow White* 186).

Even though the times have changed from the Franco years (1936-1975) represented in Martín Gaité's works, Montero's women are still playing similar roles, dropping everything for a man and not valuing their own friendships, career and importance over his. It is a tradeoff that is not productive. With cynicism, the narrator notes that during the meal he will tell her that she is "una mujer maravillosa... con entonación admirativa y lejana--como quien elogia un vino fino, una sonata amable, esas delicadas cosas que hacen más grata la existencia--sin poner en la frase más compromiso que el del propio aliento" (9-10).

Perhaps what renders this novel more modern and feminist is the character's consciousness of her condition as woman, seen in the way in which she assimilates her date's "compliment": "Y Ana compondrá una sonrisa lista y segura mientras intenta tragar su vergonzante sensación de ridículo mezclada con el leve sabor a sangre de la encía rota" (10). The ridiculousness of the situation is tinged with pain, adding a tragicomic side to the work. It seems to parallel Barreca's belief that humor is a way "to affirm ourselves, to rise to meet a challenge, channel fear into pleasure, translate pain into courage [...]. When we can really laugh, we've declared ourselves the winner, no matter what the situation, because our laughter is an indication of our perspective and control" (*Snow White* 201-02).

In another scenario, the boyfriend laments having to go to work while Ana gets to remain behind and "enjoy" her "lazy" afternoon in the hot apartment

which is all her salary as a marginalized employee can provide. Demonstrating limited comprehension of the situation, the boyfriend appears to be self-involved and complaining, reversing the strong silent norm depicted in *El guerrero del antifaz* with which young males were expected to identify elaborated upon by Martín Gaité in *Usos amorosos de la postguerra española*: “Qué envidia me das... Ahora me tengo que ir a trabajar y tú mientras tanto te quedas aquí, en tu casa, con tu música, a tu aire...” (10-11). The incongruity of his envy of this single, hard-working, self-supporting mother is driven home by the presentation of the facts:

El verano se cuele agobiante por las ventanas, aplasta el techo de la vieja casa, son las desventajas de vivir en un último piso. La habitación hierve y en el cuerpo desnudo de Ana se mezclan los sudores de agosto [. . .]. Ana deja que el sudor resbale por su cuerpo, pegajoso. Ha ordenado su día en torno a estas tres horas, ha prescindido de citas, ha postergado los trabajos. (10-11)

While demonstrating how women still willingly subordinate themselves to men, males’ misjudgement or underestimation of women here at the same time also serves to show how strong women are capable of being, for what they have to endure. Thus, the humor in the incongruous situations, while making us smile, simultaneously strikes a blow for feminism.

Ana sums up her thoughts about writing such scenarios for the public, her “libro de las Anas”: “Pero escribir un libro así, se dice Ana con desconsuelo, sería banal, estúpido e interminable, un diario de aburridas frustraciones” (11). Yet, strangely enough, Ana does manage to accomplish, with Montero’s help, the

inclusion of these scenarios within “otro discurso, ya no ‘el libro de las Anas,’ sino esta crónica de su tiempo, gesto que le permite ampliar el horizonte de la observación e incorporar otras voces, tan marginales y silenciadas como la propia” (Ahumada Peña 54).

Montero’s women characters get extremely angry and express their fury, which, Barreca reminds us, has been particularly discouraged in women by society in general. Nor are these female characters afraid to liberally hand out insults. A lonely, bored surveyor has called Ana’s apartment one too many times and when the phone rings again, her girlfriend Elena finds herself on the wrong end of the phone, receiving the brunt of Ana’s frustration: “¡Bueno, ya está bien! Ana ha descolgado esta vez llena de furia, me va a despertar al Curro este cretino, y al otro lado del hilo oye una voz conocida... Es Elena, qué risa, perdona, creí que eras un plasta que no hace más que llamar para invitarme a vermut” (15). We expect, like Ana, that at such a late hour, it will be the surveyor on the phone again. Like Ana, we laugh because the unexpected surprises us. We also laugh in recognition because this breach of polite phone etiquette is something that can happen to anyone. When it happens to women and they respond in a less than what society determines as polite feminine manner, it is more humorous because it breaks two norms--that of polite phone etiquette and expected feminine behavior. Elena breaks the same norm of societally conditioned feminine behavior when she tells us “He tenido una agarrada con mi catedrático y le he mandado a la mierda, con lo cual me quedaré pronto sin trabajo, y después por si faltara algo he estado toda la tarde a gritos con Javier, para variar” (15). The understatement

“para variar” innocently slipped in at the end is, of course, comical, showing us that she can laugh at herself.

When the subject turns to women and male gynecologists, the humor becomes bitter. The gynecologist “va de progresista,” a term which will be refuted in the text by a series of ironies, incongruities and humorous situations. His swank office is “en un barrio periférico, en una torre, eso sí, nueva y flamante, que destaca del entorno de casitas baratas y avejentadas” (18). Candela is described as possessing “una estructura grande y angulosa, de mandíbula rotunda, de rostro expresivo y un punto trágico, tan pálida siempre [. . .] ese rostro de actriz griega, a lo Irene Papas a punto de hacer de Electra” (19). The reason for her paleness, we find, is that she is now “convaleciente, rajada como si hubiera sufrido una cesárea” (19). Her troubles started “cuando un ginecólogo español le colocó un *esterilet*, un DIU” (19). After listing all the reasons she does not want to continue on the pill, she requests a change of her contraceptive method, a request which is abruptly followed by: “A los tres meses de haberle incrustado el cobre se quedó embarazada y fue a Londres. Abortó higiénicamente, esterilizadamente, internacionalmente. Abortó con amargura, como todas, como siempre” (20).

The juxtaposition of the paradoxical understatement that speaks volumes with the request for birth control highlights Montero’s indictment of the medical profession. Males are portrayed as a members belonging to a patriarchal club from which women are categorically excluded: “Piensa Ana que si los hombres parieran el aborto sería ya legal en todo el mundo desde el principio de los siglos.” The hierarchy of the Church is included among the members of the male

club: “Qué Papa, qué cardenal Benelli osaría ser censor de un derecho que pedirían sus entrañas.” The politicians who would hypocritically pay for “un raspado internacional a sus hijas descarriadas, mientras otras mujeres han de someterse a carniceros españoles e ilegales” are scornfully called “guardianes del orden genital ajeno” (20).

Montero manages to personalize the struggle of a young single woman who becomes pregnant, foregrounding her humanity against that of the doctors, portrayed as paradoxically attempting to wrest humanity from her. After describing Teresa’s pathetic economic and social situation,--“durante semanas ahorró para su hermano pequeño, haciendo como siempre de madre para él” (21), “ha sido un error mío” (22), “porque no tenemos dinero, porque ya es suficiente con tu embarazo” (22)--Montero then details Teresa’s disastrous experience with a backstreet abortionist. She becomes very ill as a result and in the hospital she was

la única que estaba sola, tapada hasta el cuello con la sábana porque ni tan siquiera habían traído un camisón, estaba lívida y cansada. Sabes, Ana, dijo bajando la voz, me han preguntado que qué me han hecho, estaban muy enfadados conmigo, sospechan que es un aborto aunque la caña de bambú no deja afortunadamente las mismas señales que un raspado, el médico me dijo que había estado a punto de no operarme, que yo ya era mayor para saber lo que hacía, son unos cabrones. Ana, son unos cabrones peligrosos. (24-25)

After Candela’s surprise pregnancy caused by switching from the birth control pill to the IUD, the image of the British doctor with a supposed “aire

mecanizado y eficiente [. . .]. Acostumbrado a manipular úteros ajenos le instaló un nuevo DIU” is then juxtaposed with the paradoxical result:

una mañana, llegaron los vómitos inesperados, los dolores, el vientre endurecido, el internamiento urgente en un hospital, la operación, el veredicto: peritonitis aguda por la infección que larvó durante tiempo el DIU, ese aro de cobre inocente colocado sin prevision ni escrúpulos en una anatomía de reciente aborto. Ahora Candela tiene la tripa rajada como si hubiera sufrido una cesárea. (25-26)

Her response--“Y menos mal que aún estoy con vida” (26)--is not a comment that one would expect from someone after receiving a doctor’s care. The Spanish doctors continued to energetically prescribe the IUD, a fact that did not escape the implacable sarcastic gaze of the author: “un método limpio, inodoro e insípido, tan ajeno al hombre como la propia píldora. Y además, es tan cómodo, los mismos médicos que te lo recomiendan pueden insertarlo, son 10.000 pesetas la colocación (hay que reconocer que es un anticonceptivo que resulta muy rentable)” (26). Again, the matter of the profit margin is raised when the country, in the eighties, is becoming a more capitalistic, consumer society.

Male fear in taking an active role in birth control is the root of humor in the diaphragm scene. The doctor is portrayed with an irreverence not typically given to his station:

dibuja una sonrisa de conmiseración y desprecio en su boca rosa y aniñada. Es un hombre de media edad, de pelo aceitoso y bien peinado, piel delicada e imberbe como de bebé. Está sentado muy derecho en su silla de rígido respaldo y apoya la punta de sus manos--extendidas en un ademán que él quizá considera digno y distante [. . .]. Así está, observándolas desde lejos con sus ojazos redondos y vacunos, impostando

la voz ligeramente para expresar con mayor reciedumbre su sabio desprecio por el diafragma. (26-27)

The description is combined with the ironic “sabio” to present an unflattering portrayal of the distant doctor.

The scene is set up so that the doctor’s words betray themselves, reversing the norm of the doctor appearing wiser than the patient: “Es un método muy malo, yo no lo trato, no tiene ninguna seguridad, te quedarás embarazada.” Candela’s response juxtaposed to his statement highlights the irony: “Sí, puede ser menos seguro, pero ya me he quedado embarazada con el DIU y luego casi me muero por una infección que provocó” (27). Yet, the doctor is unmoved: “Pero mujer [. . .]--y el hombre mueve una de sus manos con aire vago y mayestático, barriendo las protestas de Candela junto al aire--eso del diafragma es una calamidad, dentro de un par de meses te veo viniendo otra vez con una barriga [. . .]. Y además, es muy latoso, es una cosa que [. . .]” (27). This time it is Elena’s response that makes him appear ridiculous, a response that contradicts the doctor’s wisdom, something that women are not accustomed to doing: “Yo lo llevo usando cuatro años [. . .] y me ha ido muy bien.--¿Ah, sí?--contesta el médico con gesto escéptico--. Habrás tenido suerte... y, ¿cómo te lo pones? ¿Cortas al tipo y le dices que se espere?” The narrator, using parentheses, cannot hide her scorn: “(Hay algo común en muchos ginecólogos: ese desprecio por la persona, la grosería de grandes machos que ven-y-curan-coños.)” (27).

Elena proceeds to show the doctor her diaphragm:

El hombre la ha abierto con aire displicente y los polvos de talco que impregnan la goma han inundado su escritorio, colándose por los repujados, dejando una blanca nevada que se reparte, generosa, entre sus pantalones y los papales doctorales. El tipo enrojece, su voz se agudiza en tonos femeninos, ‘qué es esto?’, repite enrabiado mientras sostiene el disco blanquecino con dos dedos melindrosos. (27-28)

The doctor’s lack of understanding of diaphragms unnerves him as the powder falls on his pants, seeming to disturb “los papales doctorales.” The squeamish tone and priggishness attributed to the “grande macho” who, now covered with powder, is “enrabiado,” serve to mock him. The narrator confirms the doctor’s knowledge gap with “Está claro que es la primera vez que este médico ve un diafragma. Está claro que le asquea [. . .]”. Using exaggerated exclamations the author writes in bitter terms:

La píldora, el DIU, son problemas de mujer. Es ella quien las toma, quien lo sufre. El diafragma, sin embargo, es algo más cercano a la pareja: ¿ha de interrumpir al varón sus acalormientos previos para que ella pueda colocarse el disco de caucho? Qué horror. ¿Ha de utilizarse a veces crema espermicida? Qué desastre. Son tan cómodas las píldoras o el DIU, esos métodos que el hombre no padece [. . .]. (28)

The doctor charges them a thousand pesetas each for the visit. Elena sarcastically replies: “Total para nada, ese imbécil, ni sabía lo que era un diafragma, no te jode.” Summing up her feelings in no uncertain terms, at the same time she enlarges the scope of the medical problem beyond the individual level: “eso de que casi ningún ginecólogo varón sea capaz siquiera de explicar que existe es indignante” (28). After discovering that her car was broken into and cassettes were robbed, Elena comments with sarcastic irreverence: “maldita sea,

ya es la segunda vez, pues sí que ha sido una visita fructífera ésta del ginecólogo.”

They take comfort in Candela's laconic remark: “por lo menos [. . .] tenemos el consuelo de que el tipo ése todavía estará limpiando la mesa de polvos de talco”

Among their “risas” she jokes: “¿os acordáis de la cara que puso el muy cretino?” (29).

The women characters are presented as having a sense of humor, as if to refute long years of males' traditional belief to the contrary--Elena “con su genio rápido y algo bronco” (18) and Candela who

Posee un agudizado y terrible sentido del humor que quizá le haya crecido por defensa. Con sangrante ironía cuenta y reconstruye su barroco pasado [. . .] con tal gracia y aparente falta de sentimientos que es capaz de producir lagrimeantes risas al narrar por cuarta o quinta vez cómo aquel muchacho se arrojó ante sus ojos por la ventana de un noveno. (19)

Here, the women are portrayed as using humor as a defense mechanism or survival technique to help them through a difficult situation. Bilger echoes Freud's “liberating effect of humor” when she says that humor is a “mental survival skill and emancipating strategy” (9). From survival to a means of coping with death, the range of humor is wide: the narration of the suicide of a marginal character, “el Gobernador,” provides an unforgettable if harrowing moment of truly black humor:

--Pues nada, que anoche abrió la ventana del patio y se tiró. Pero el muy memo no tuvo en cuenta que se trataba de un segundo piso nada más, así es que sólo se partió algún hueso y se quedó sangrando como un cerdo, con la nariz machacada, yo qué sé. De modo que el tío se levantó, se arrastró al ascensor, subió a la terraza, al quinto piso, y se volvió a tirar. Y ahí se hizo puré, claro. (173)

The nonchalant, matter-of fact manner in which the story is told,--“comentaba fríamente el Barítono envolviendo el horror en un cinismo de pub” (173)--the metaphors, the incongruity of the surprising events and the insults help to inject a humorous dimension to the blackness of the episode:

[. . .]. Y cómo sabéis lo de las dos intencionas?--Porque estaba con la Marga [. . .] le vio en pelotas al borde de la ventana y [. . .] se fue a levantar, pero el tío ya se había tirado, así es que la Marga se acercó y miró para abajo y le vio allí espatarrado en el suelo como una rana, y la tía salió zumbando escaleras abajo y cuando llegó al patio ya no estaba [. . .] el tío al parecer iba en el ascensor camino de la terraza, y al ratito de estar allí la Marga gritando como una histérica, en pelotas [. . .] pues al ratito, plafff, el Gobernador que vuela de nuevo desde la terraza y se le revienta como un higo a sus pies.

--Jo, qué trago.

--Es un chapuza.

--Era un imbécil.

--Era un macarra, un inútil.

--Qué bestia, qué bestia [. . .]. (174)

Cecilio, a homosexual on the margins of society, adds a similar moment of black humor to an imagined death scene:

moriremos un día tontamente, saliendo de la ducha, resbalando y golpeándonos contra el suelo, agonizaremos durante horas sin que nadie esté acostumbrado a visitarnos, nuestra débil voz no será oída por nadie: y saldremos en la prensa, se ha descubierto el cadáver de un viejo. Cecilio, de todas formas, tiene cierta tendencia a la tragicomedia, al melodrama. Al histrionismo. (72)

Black humor’s “denial of social reconciliation or individual release” (Schulz 20) and its positing of “an absurd world devoid of intrinsic values” (18) are epitomized in the incidents that Montero has portrayed here.

It is difficult for a work to sustain a purely tragic or purely comic tone throughout its entirety. The genesis of this intermixing of tragedy and comedy dates from classical antiquity with the Greeks who possessed a *comico-serious* tradition (Busch 15). According to Bakhtin, the Menippean satire was the humorous successor of the Socratic dialogue with its many-sided, dialogized approaches to truth. Generic markers of the Menippean satire, to one degree or another, can also be seen in Montero's humor: the sharply contrastive tonal effects, the prominence of scandal scenes and eccentric behavior and a carnivalized atmosphere, along with Menippean satire's tendency to pose the ultimate questions in a highly ambivalent context that allowed for laughter (Busch 15).

A scandal scene that stands out in the novel is "el Zorro" and his eccentric behavior in the café:

Se produce un pequeño revuelo, se oyen unos grititos, alguien que aplaude. Acaba de entrar el Zorro cubriendo sus casi dos metros de estatura con fantásticos ropajes, lleva unos pantalones de raso negro que se abomban en los tobillos, los pies mugrientos y descalzos pese al frío de la calle, un chaleco con bordados, y por encima de sus grandes barbas negras brilla un ojo maquillado en forma de mariposa, con azules y verdes y morados. (109)

His manner of dress, the applause he is given upon entering and even his height all contribute to the carnivalesque tone. He is drunk as he crosses the room and then suddenly:

Toma una pistola de plástico de la cartuchera de juguete que lleva a la cintura, 'pun, pun', hace que dispara alrededor, 'muertos, estáis todos

muertos, que sois todos un muermo', alguien silba, el Zorro guarda la pistola con gesto desmañado y saca una navaja y la enseña a todo el mundo con aire de triunfo, para después abrirla despacito y [. . .] como quien saluda al público de un circo, 'nada por aquí, nada por allá', está diciendo, y de pronto, de rápido tajo, se corta profundamente las venas de la muñeca izquierda [. . .]. Ana se sorprende a sí misma observando con extraña indiferencia que la navaja tiene las cachas de nácar. El Zorro ríe con carcajadas vacías, como es muy alto saca la cabeza a los que han empezado a rodearle, y así dominándoles, sacude el brazo herido en alto y riega a todos con su sangre. (109-110)

Ana watches with an indifference that resembles the distanced perspective needed for irony. The scandal scene, in which a carnivalistic ambivalence is present in the treatment of death and rejuvenation, combines the humorous with the bodily grotesque.

The use of grotesque and scatological humor is new in women's writing, playing a role in the revindication of language, sexuality and body mentioned by Arribas, Walker and Dresner, areas that were formerly taboo for women authors. Just as humorism provided Gómez de la Serna an opportunity to transgress the conventions of language (Arribas 41), so do grotesque and scatological humor provide Montero an opportunity to transgress the conventions of acceptable language for females. Such humor draws on the tradition of the picaresque novel. Although some Spanish authors such as Unamuno, Baroja, Casares, and Clarasó reject the humor of the picaresque (in particular the work of Quevedo), seeing in it only satire, associated with aggressiveness and criticism, which they exclude from humor due to its lack of tenderness and indulgent comprehension (Arribas 42-46), for Gómez de la Serna, Quevedo is the most representative figure of Spanish humor: "Quevedo lleva al laberinto de la ciudad, al baile de la Corte, el

humorismo verdadero, enjundioso, con espesura, con profundidad”

(“Humorismo” 1090).

Quevedo’s *Vida del Buscón*, with its satire and bitter humor, has long been associated with Spain’s tradition of tragicomic humor, beginning with *La Celestina* (Arribas 40). Like Quevedo, Montero uses grotesque and unflattering images in her satires that are often tinged with bitterness and criticism. She seems to have a predilection for this kind of humor which appears in *Amado amo* as well as in her short story “Paulo Pumilio” in the anthology of short stories *Doce relatos de mujer*. In “Paulo Pumilio,” the killer who writes his confession from jail, reminiscent of other famous picaresque characters, has a physical anomaly as do her characters in other works.

A particularly feminine focus on the often unappreciated labor of women is observed in this following anecdote with a humorous twist to the ending. After spending the whole day preparing and fruitlessly waiting for her boyfriend to show up, Candela intuits the quiet desperation in which her mother and so many other women lived their lives. Antonia, her mother, is envisioned by Candela telling her, while smiling, about “una cosa muy graciosa que les pasa a muchas mujeres” (212). One can almost visualize a female standup comedian of today recounting a version of this story. Complete with nasal sound approximations comically rendered by “snrifffff,” the painstaking elaboration of all the steps involved in the proper laundering of a handkerchief renders the punch line all the more riotous:

es de risa, verás, esto es una mujer que coge un pañuelo sucio, prepara agua caliente en un barreño y echa detergente. Mete el pañuelo ahí durante largo rato. Luego tira el agua, pone otra limpia y frota bien el pañuelo con jabón. Cambia de nuevo el agua y echa una gotas de lejía para que la tela quede bien blanca. Después lo aclara y lo mete con añil para que azulee de tan limpio. Más tarde le echa suavizador para que la tela quede rica de tocar, lo aclara, lo escurre bien y lo tiende en el patio, al sol, ¿eh?, para que termine de blanquear. Cuando ya está seco lo recoge, pone la mesa de la plancha, humedece ligeramente la superficie para poder quitarle todas las arrugas. Lo dobla con esmero y lo mete después en un armario, el de la ropa blanca, en donde antes ha puesto naftalina y unas bolsitas de hierbas para que den buen olor. Y ahí queda al fin el pañuelo, limpio, fragante, dobladito [. . .]. Entonces llega su marido del trabajo, da un beso distraído a la mujer, va al armario, coge el pañuelo, snrifffff, se suena las narices con gran ruido y lo tira arrugado al cesto de la ropa sucia. ¿A que es gracioso?” (212-13)

The frustration, couched in terms of “una cosa graciosa que les pasa a muchas mujeres” (212), is made humorous by the juxtaposition of the elegant, clean and white with the ignoble. The loving treatment the handkerchief carefully tucked away receives from the wife is comically contrasted with its final destination--the blowing of the nose by the barely grateful, barely-there husband and its rapid disposal into the basket. Candela’s reaction to the story--“Antonia se deshacía en carcajadas, con un vaivén atrás-alante, mientras Candela no sabía si reír o llorar” (213)--is a reaction perhaps shared by many other women. Antonia’s own marriage, “un matrimonio feliz,” in her words, endured almost forty years--forty years in which she accustomed herself to “quemando días, esperando la noche, reventada de cansancio y de rutina” (214). She laughs upon reflecting that she has never been with any man other than her husband. Antonia’s laughter, however, has a haunted, almost demented, quality to it. Candela observes “con

espanto” that “entre las carcajadas de Antonia resbalaban cuajarones de sangre amoratada” (215).

At the end, Ana leaves with her boss Soto Amón--on whom she has had a secret crush--“para tener un final de fiesta irónico y grotesco” (Ahumada Peña 53). Detached and with great irony, she predicts his actions: “(Y con entristecida certidumbre, Ana intuye en un segundo el desarrollo de la noche, él me desnudará con mano hábil y ajena, simularemos unas caricias vacías de intención, nos amaremos sin decir nada en un coito impersonal, Eduardo tendrá un orgasmo ajeno a mí, sin abrazarme, sin verme, sin recordar seguramente quién soy yo [. . .].)” (257-58). The ironic feminine perspective becomes even more obvious in these lines: “Se desarrolla, pues, la pantomima con asombrosa semejanza a lo previsto (¿qué hago aquí con este extraño?), se hacen un amor callado y hueco (qué absurda situación, absurda, absurda), el aire se llena de silencios (es como si me contemplara a mí misma desde fuera, tan lejos de la realidad, de él, de todo)” (258).

Far from being tragic, her disillusioning “noche rota en desencuentros” (260) leaves her with “unos histéricos, irrefrenables deseos de reír” (259) and the conviction that “en este ajedrez de perdedores más pierden aquellos como Soto Amón que ni tan siquiera juegan.” Soto Amón, his pride as a powerful and triumphant man wounded by Ana’s “pequeño despego,” is revealed as insecure, fragile and immature. His “automático, bien ensayado, autosuficiente gesto” of removing his own tie--“Un gesto cruel y poderoso”--will serve her instead as “un

buen comienzo para ese libro que ahora está segura de escribir,” a thought which Ana ponders with an “ácida sonrisa” (260).

Ahumada Peña reminds us that “En el momento de su publicación, el mostrar la mecánica de lo sexual desde la perspectiva de la mujer aparece como un aspecto revolucionario de la novela” (53). While less revolutionary, the subversion of norms that occurs here is revolutionary in that stereotypes that have been viewed as conventional by society for millenia are tackled. This constitutes one of the distinguishing features of women’s humor; it takes subjects traditionally regarded as beyond joking for its subject matter. Women look at those in power, or at those institutions they were taught to revere, and laugh. Taking as its material the powerful rather than the pitiful, women’s humor makes fun of men in high and seemingly invulnerable positions. A humorous lens is turned on the upper-level figures, ridiculing their incompetence, the absurd mind-sets and rules that keep repressive patriarchal institutions strong (Barreca 13-15). Women’s humor has a particular interest in challenging the most formidable structures, since they keep women from positions of power (179). “In this way women’s comedy is more ‘dangerous’ than men’s, because it challenges authority by refusing to take it seriously” (14). Certainly, *Crónica* depends on the use of irony and humor for its full, dramatic impact as a “Texto profundamente subversivo, en voz y mirada de mujer, que se dispone para reinaugarar el mundo” (Ahumada Peña 54).

B. *AMADO AMO*

In *Amado amo* (1988), nine years later, Montero renders ridiculous the cultural sources of females' oppression, as she points to problems that both men and women face in the work place of contemporary Spain. The theme of inequality between the sexes in the workplace invades the private lifestyle of the couple and becomes central in the narrative. Women now have a larger role in the world outside the home as she observes the cultural absurdities, confronts the cultural restrictions and mocks patriarchal authority. Traditional stereotypes are subverted and the inversion of the expected provokes a comic effect of surprise. César becomes the caricature of a male professional confronting a hostile, aggressive, competitive and predominantly masculine business world in the big city. He is tormented by insecurity and obsession, contradictions, impatience, incoherency and bad humor. His complaints and worries are narrated in great detail, making him a comic yet at the same time pathetic character, but not so pathetic that our emotion prevents us from laughing at him, a notion that both Freud and Bergson maintain as important for provoking humor.

The novel begins with observations about the two-sided nature of César's personality. This wresting of nobility from him makes it easier for us to laugh at him. At the misfortune of his fallen colleague Matías, César presents himself both to us and to Matías as sympathetic. Though he immediately intuits Matías' fate in the firm correctly,--"Está acabado"--, he nevertheless reassures him, "No te enfades [. . .] a mí también me quitaron la plaza del aparcamiento hace unos meses, no es para ponerse así [. . .] ya sabes que [. . .] no hay plazas suficientes,

yo ahora le doy las llaves al encargado [. . .] es incluso más cómodo, Eso decía César, mentiroso y magnánimo” (10-11). He does not reveal to Matías that his case is different because he was one of the firm’s stars, giving us a vague impression that he is self-serving and hypocritical.

Insecure in the face of the future plight of Matías,-- “Infeliz Matías mediomuerto. Encorbatado cadáver laboral”--, César tries to reassure himself of his own position within the company various times with the thought that he was once “[. . .] una estrella, Quizá declinante, pero estrella.” Included among other thoughts that consume him, the rapidly degrading self-description produces humor as he continually adjusts it downward each time: “Quizás medio apagada, pero estrella,” shortly thereafter followed by “Quizás agonizante, pero estrella” (16-17). Revealing his fake compassion he refers to the man that only moments ago he was consoling so “generously”: “por lo menos debo evitar convertirme en un ser tan patético” (17).

This unpleasant incident unleashes the *manía* the ruling passion or obsession of this caricature, which will plague César throughout the book. It is a way of undermining male supremacy, subverting the traditional image of the stereotype of the strong, confident man, revealing his weaknesses. We see him go back and forth several times in throes of indecision. From the secure “era una de las estrellas de la Casa, poseía una situación privilegiada,” Matías’ misfortune starts him thinking about how a few off-beat words one day is predictive of one’s downfall in the company:

Un buen día, unas cuantas personas parecían descubrir defectos de Fulano; defectos que, de la noche a la mañana, se convertían en la comidilla de la Casa. Pero lo más curioso era que, a los pocos días de este espasmo chismoso, el Fulano resultaba indefectiblemente degradado, o arrinconado, o incluso despedido. (12)

This sets him to worrying if his situation is really so different from that of Matías. He starts to become paranoid, “over sensitive,” and takes every little word seriously: “Como tú vienes tan poco por aquí es una pena desperdiciar así el espacio, le dijo Morton. Sonriendo. Pero había algo en el tono que raspó sus oídos [. . .] ¿Eso de que vengo tan poco es un reproche?, respondió César con forzada jovialidad” (14). He fears that his boss is insinuating that he is not working because he is not painting. César then surprises us with a swift mood change: “Un momento. No había que perder la calma. A fin de cuentas él no era como Matías” (15-16). However, this self-confident state is not to exist for very long.

Revindicating language and sexual themes that were once taboo for women writers, Montero boldly uses scatological humor to subvert the traditional role of the strong male breadwinner. César’s self-description, a rather unflattering one, is not that of the ideal man: “Arriba, gandul, inútil, zángano” (19). Unlike the heroic Superman image of the comics, César appears rather fearsome and in need of help himself: “Para poder cerrar los ojos sobre sus miedos tenía que atiborrarse de píldoras” (19). In addition, he is lazy, seeming to fall victim to even those at the dry cleaners: “Tenía tantas cosas que hacer [. . .]. Recoger el traje gris de la tintorería, si es que los empleados no se lo habían rifado para entonces, porque llevaba allí quizá medio año” (20). The metaphor used for him,--“César sentía un gusano y la cama era su acogedor capullo”--, turns comic with the unexpected

reversal of the ending: “El problema era que el paso del tiempo no le convertiría en mariposa” (21).

His reasons for not having children are a way to mock him, since they make him seem shortsighted, self-involved and unappealing: “Claro que la escena paternofamiliar conllevaría otras obligaciones menos gratas: la rutinaria convivencia familiar; ver televisión todas las noches; y los sábados, que es cuando vendría la canguro, ir a cenar a un restaurante con otra pareja” (22). The negatives that he mentions seem like childish complaints, revolving mostly around his lack of freedom. He cannot imagine that it would require any extra work on his part, any real negatives, such as diapers he would have to change, waking up with sick children in the middle of the night or the extra dishes or housework it would entail. That topic, however, is all academic he informs us: “A qué venía tanto pensar si hubiera sido mejor tener un hijo? Como si la decisión hubiera dependido de él. Ninguna mujer quiso nunca dejarse embarazar con su semilla” (23). This ineffectual male, like a victim, blames women for rejecting him:

sintiendo pequeño y desgraciado. La dictadura femenina de lo maternal: qué poder tan abusivo y repugnante. Ahí estaban ellas, decidiendo tíranicamente de quién querían parir y a quién condenarían a una esterilidad eterna. Mujeres: dueñas de la sangre, hacedoras de cuerpos, despiadadas reinas de la vida. Nunca podría perdonar a las mujeres su prepotencia de ser madres. (23)

The comment in which the tables are turned and the women are presented as powerful dictators reverses the male perspective in which men see themselves as the aggressors. Since this is an interior monologue of César’s paranoid mind, it

gives the author a chance to have us attribute her words to him, oddly enough all the more authoritative because the words are coming from a man.

César continues his self-pity with a bitter scatological description: “mirándose los pelos de los huevos: le habían empezado a salir canas” (23). We are then presented with an embarrassing view of him as he “chancleteó en cueros hasta la cocina” (24). We are not the only ones privy to this vision. The secretaries in the office across from his apartment giggle at this man who habitually parades around his apartment naked: “estaban soltando risitas y haciéndole muecas, como siempre.” He seems completely unconcerned “como si no hubiera visto nunca un hombre desnudo” (24). The portrait of him is consistently anti-heroic: “entró en el cuarto de baño y se contempló en el espejo: pálido, esquelético. Con esas carnes desmayadas que solían empezar a criar los hombres de su edad; unas carnes en las que podías hundir el dedo fácilmente, como en una pelota poco hinchada” (27).

The scatological descriptions provide us with humorous images which reduce him even further:

Había un placer sombrío, un fulgor de hara-kiri en esa manera de asesinar el tiempo [. . .] en la incalculable estupidez de consumir la tarde sentado en el retrete, fumando como un suicida y machacándose las entendederas con la lectura de una revista horrenda [. . .]. Ahí estaba él, César, hundido en la insensatez de esas hojas impresas [. . .] mientras [. . .] se le escapaba la vida, y él, César, sentía la dolorosa satisfacción de quien ejerce el mal conscientemente. (32-33)

The image is all the more comical due to the connection between the purposely emphatic and attention-drawing repetitions of the phrase “él, César”

with the Caesar of the “Hail, Caesar” joke of a colleague that the text reproduces later on. This historic and noble comparison, which serves to highlight the banality of the original subject, semantically seals the hilarious connection of a king on his throne with this man sitting on a toilet. The humor is further reinforced by this less than regal image: “Le dolían las nalgas, a estas alturas sin duda profundamente repujadas con los perfiles de la tabla del retrete”--his symbolic dethroning (34).

The author defrauds César’s expectation that women will always be there waiting for him: “Ahora que lo pensaba, era una idea estupenda lo de cenar con Paula [. . .]. Se abalanzó sobre el teléfono, marcó, consiguió localizarla.” The fact that she is not at his beck and call upsets him: “Lo siento, César, pero he quedado para ir al cine, dijo ella. Pero mujer, con quién, dale una excusa.” Unlike Ana in *Crónica del desamor*, she refuses to cancel, leaving him perplexed, angry and yet oddly repentant. After many months of futilely centering her world around him, trying to inject life into their relationship and the apartment they shared, she begins to remove César from the center of her universe: “Estaba muy rara Paula últimamente. Un año atrás jamás le hubiera dicho que no. Anda y que te den por culo, pensó, furioso, mientras colgaba el auricular. Pero inmediatamente después se dijo: Tengo que cuidar a Paula un poco más” (35). This reinforces his capricious nature and at the same time strikes a blow for women in the battle for better treatment. Montero is encouraging them to act in a more upright and confident manner with men by suggesting that perhaps they too will be rewarded by having men treat them with more respect and consideration.

The excuse this aging star gives the company for his declining performance reduces him to “disculparse ante Morton” and is sadly comical: “Perdona, Morton, pero llevo varios días sin dormir bien y... Oh, no, no, qué excusa tan horrible. Perdona, Morton, pero estaba pensando en... No estaba atento porque... Me he distraído con... ¡Lo siento, Morton, pero no me encuentro bien, estoy en crisis!” (37). His constantly reworking the storyline is funny adding to our perspective of him as a bumbling neurotic. In addition, the emotion that men never want others to see is revealed, along with the powerless position that their bosses often put them in, thereby contributing to the demythification of the strong male hero. Montero strikes a blow for all corporate workers when she caustically writes: “Pero los directivos no tenían derecho a estar en crisis. Un directivo en crisis era un ser profundamente sospechoso: algo malo tendría, algún fallo en las virtudes básicas, alguna enfermedad moral se enroscaría en su ánimo” (37). The exaggeration makes the corporation’s attitude seem even more foolish.

Montero’s wit and irony is evident in this surprising image reminiscent of Gómez de la Serna: “Y además, hasta tenían razón en desconfiar. Porque un directivo en crisis era como un lanzador de cuchillos con el mal de Parkinson: con qué talante, con qué norte, con qué temple iba ese ejecutivo crítico a decidir las supremas decisiones de la empresa” (37). The reasons that the author voices on behalf of the corporation are so pitiless and exaggerated that we know she is being derisive: “No perdería semejante ejemplar un tiempo precioso enfangándose en las morbosidades de la duda? Y no se engolfaría quizás en la lucubración de sus propios pesares en vez de dedicar todas sus energías al trabajo?” Unfortunately,

there is more truth than irony in her sadly humorous conclusion that rings out as a condemnation: “Estaba claro: la única crisis que se podía permitir un ejecutivo era la crisis coronaria” (37).

Satire and irony, Nimetz reminds us, “help to expose and correct distortions, but [. . .] in order to expose distorted values, the author must depict those values in their original state. He must create, isolate, select, and even exaggerate them. Distortion is a necessary adjunct to criticism” (118). With the previous distortions and others, Montero extends her satire of the male boss to include capitalistic corporate culture as well.

César voices the female criticism of the system while simultaneously sounding less than sympathetic to their concerns:

A veces, cuando César se quejaba de las humillaciones recibidas, Paula le decía que aún podía darse por contento. Que ella y las demás sí que se encontraban relegadas, que por ser mujer nunca conseguiría nada. Y entonces soltaba la vieja retahíla, que si ella era la única persona proveniente de la antigua agencia que jamás había sido ascendida, que si promocionaban a gente incomparablemente más inepta, que si nunca le daban una oportunidad, que si se apropiaban de sus ideas. (67-68)

Though he does give women some credit--“Quizás Paula tuviera razón”--, César also looks foolish as he admits: “pero de algún modo pensaba en su interior que era distinto, que en el caso de una mujer todo eso no era tan importante, que el drama que él vivía ella jamás podría entenderlo”--which of course is ironic as it is a woman author who invented César’s situation in the first place. Montero puts chauvinistic words in his mouth, confident that readers will recognize the familiar

stereotyping as foolish: “Porque el que Paula no fuera ascendida a fin de cuentas no era una injusticia tan enorme. Las mujeres carecían de ambición” (68).

In this new democracy, “Los jefes eran los dioses de un mundo ateo, los reyes absolutistas de una sociedad republicana! [. . .]. Los jefes eran los dictadores de la democracia” (39). As an explanation for why Paula “[. . .] la única persona de antes de la absorción [. . .] todavía no había sido ascendida,” César’s boss Morton offers this: “En cuanto a Paula, en fin, es una chica muy simpática. . . . Pero no es precisamente una lumbrera” (41). We know that César does not totally subscribe to his boss’ opinion: “¿Cómo sabes que son unos inútiles, quién te lo ha dicho, [. . .] Eso era lo que César hubiera querido contestarle” (41). But weak and subjugated by his bosses, César “guardaba silencio, derrotado, sin fuerzas para contrarrestar la maraña de tendenciosos datos” (42). Summing up Morton’s uncharitable perspective of Paula, César’s use of exaggerated vocabulary produces a humorous effect, hinting at sarcastic irony on César’s part: “Paula Pobrepaula en las mismísimas antípodas de la esencia lumbrera.” The run-on Paula Pobrepaula emphasizes the idea of a César on automatic pilot, not really feeling what he is saying. He is incapable of truly caring for Paula or for any woman. He dreads even to have to listen to women, resorting to pretending that there is something wrong with the phone or drugging them when they become over-talkative. César then adds: “Morton hablaba con tanto aplomo, con tanta seguridad en lo que decía” (42). Due to its placement right after his disingenuous comment about Paula, César’s observation of Morton seems to be more a criticism than a compliment of the boss’s impeccable and “always correct”

judgement. César tries to reassure himself several times that Morton's assessment is correct, continuing to insinuate insincerity by the repetition of "sí" and the qualifiers "tanta" and "tan": "Oh, sí, sí, sí, Morton, tienes tanta razón, es tan sensato lo que dices" (42).

César finally convinces himself that he is a "reo de un delito de desidia; perezoso, estéril, vergonzosamente improductivo," proven by the fact that he was "a las dos de la madrugada, leyendo tebeos del *Principe Valiente*" (43). The royal metaphor is taken up again to point up the power of the rulers of the corporate world in this bit of satiric travesty: "Y César necesitaba imperiosamente que Morton le absolviera, ni siquiera disculparse, ya no quería ni eso; sólo hablar con él un instante, [. . .] renovar su permiso de existencia" (43-44). But the recollection of Morton, "el Rey," simply brushing him aside as he exited the conference room along with the other indignities suffered at the meeting is too much as César "hacía triza, apenas consciente, el viejo tebeo del *Principe Valiente*" in a sadly comic moment (44).

However, our sympathy for César is quickly turned into laughter in one of the most hilarious scandal scenes of the book--the unforgettable party scene with the dog. Our company star shows up at the party dressed just as elegantly as everyone else but "el maldito perro parecía haberlo descubierto con su olfato infrahumano, el maldito perro le había seleccionado a él y solo a él de entre los ejecutivos presentes" (45). César's paranoia is unleashed in full force. He imbues the dog with intelligent, even telepathic, abilities, humanizing him: "el perro lo había reconocido; se había dado cuenta de su condición de forastero, de su penosa

extranjería interior.” His sense of being specifically singled out by the dog for harassment becomes increasingly comical as the party progresses: “En fin, algo debía de haberle delatado, porque el maldito perro se había abalanzado directamente sobre César. Era un *teckel* diminuto de enredado flequillo y ojos malignos tras las greñas.” The fact that the little dog had “ojos malignos” only adds to the humor of his personification by César.

César begins to suspect that the very hosts of the party--his rival Nacho and his wife Teresa--have trained the dog to single him out (46). This gives rise to a discussion of the concept of “hombría.” César voices that “lo peor era carecer de la hombría necesaria para aguantar abiertamente el peso de su enemistad con Nacho.” Paula corrects him: “No confundas las cosas: eso no es falta de hombría sino de dignidad” (47). When asked what she thought “hombría” was she responds, in a mocking, iconoclastic tone: “Oh, un invento, una mentira, una convención que vosotros mismos habéis creado” (47-48). Paula has little esteem for her superiors: “Que si lo peor de no ser jamás ascendida era que todos los imbéciles acababan siendo jefes suyos” (176). The author reminds us that perhaps her not being promoted has another explanation: “A veces Paula le sacaba de quicio con su feminismo tan latoso” (48).

Temporarily coming to his senses, César realizes that “sospechar que el perro estaba adiestrado era un pensamiento absurdo, una idea demente y peregrina” and that he has to “actúa como una persona normal.” In order to do this he suggests to himself that he pretend to walk “hacia la mesa con el animal pegado a tus talones; coge un nuevo vaso de whisky y bebe un poco; sonríe a

Smith” (61). Just the mere fact that he thinks he could appear normal with a dog attached to his leg is ludicrous. The image of César walking and behaving as normal as possible while ignoring the dog on his leg is riotous, reminding us of Bergson’s concept of humor found in the rigidity of the mechanical man who does not adapt to real life around him.

After the party, César is plagued by the thought that others may also suspect that “A estas alturas cualquier joven imberbe parecía tener mejores ideas que él” (80). He reveals that he did not always feel “así de enano y de gusano”; that there was a time when things went well in the company for him (79). However, when things began to go badly, he recalls, he thought--like so many women in bad relationships think--“No me merecen. [. . .] Me marcharé [. . .] y entonces se darán cuenta de lo que están perdiendo.” Yet instead “se fue acostumbrando a la pequeña indignidad, como esas mujeres que se emparejaban con un bruto, y que, a fuerza de padecer brutalidad, terminaban convertidas en víctimas perfectas, ajenas a sí mismas, amoldadas a la paliza o al insulto por una morbosa dependencia” (80). In an ironic twist of fate, César is compared to a woman caught in the same kind of brutalizing situation in which men typically put women. By paralleling César’s struggle in the workplace with that of women caught in degrading relationships, Montero brings attention to the predicament of women, attributing importance to their suffering. These women are shown as suffering the same fate that men have to endure under brutal bosses in the workplace, making it easier for men to understand their situation. Strangely

enough, this is the same kind of relationship that César's mother had with her husband, and the kind of treatment that César then continued with her.

The secretary assigned to César, Conchita, reveals the plight of women in the system. Conchita is, in her assigned role as his secretary, César's female counterpart. Although neither César nor Conchita do anything, César is still considered an aging star, even while declining. Conchita, on the other hand, doomed to inactivity, is seen in much darker terms. He is afraid to look at her: "Sí, eso era, le despreciaba por inútil. Conchita era para César como uno de esos espejos de aumento en los que, cuando uno se asoma a ellos, solo se ve enormes poros negros y espinillas de tamaño colosal" (77). She is described as "una veterana", the "fiel secretaria de Matías." Incongruously, the company "no se fiaban ahora de ella, porque era inteligente, sabía mucho." The reason for this apparently absurd contradiction we find is that she "había sido demasiado lenguaraz tras la destitución de Matías" (76). When Matías, her boss, "cayó en desgracia" she "se encontraba furibunda" and "ella le siguió al abismo" (76).

As if in a scene from a movie, we can picture a sly Quesada coming to César in an effort to deviously convince him of his "good fortune": "Se lo había dicho Quesada una tarde, como vendiéndole el favor: Que te vamos a mandar una secretaria, César". We can then imagine César's reaction, standing there "boquiabierto" with joy when he gets the news, quickly juxtaposed to the look on his face when the bubble burst upon discovering that the secretary he has inherited is Conchita: "Pero luego comprendió que tan solo se trataba de un

castigo” because Conchita “le odiaba, considerándole uno de sus verdugos” (76-77).

Conchita’s passive aggressive behavior to get back at the system is droll. When the telephone rings, she informs her boss without even looking at him that Francisco Ríos is on the phone and would like to talk to him. César instructs her to “Dígale que no he venido, que llame a última hora de la mañana, por favor.” Conchita obstinately repeats into the phone: “Que no ha venido y que le telefonee usted más tarde, repetía en el auricular malevolentemente y sin esforzarse en disímulos,” making César look foolish and powerless to control even his secretary (76). Her typical posture is “los brazos cruzados sobre el pecho y clavaba la vista, desafiante” with which she wants to communicate “Miradme, aquí estoy sin hacer nada, me habéis enterrado viva en la tumba de la pasividad.” Highlighting Conchita’s rebellion against the system with comic and sarcastic irony, Montero writes: “Conchita contemplaba obcecadamente la pared y mantenía sus brazos bien cruzados porque temía que, si bajaba los ojos o apoyaba sus codos en la mesa, algún paseante pudiera confundir su postura y creer, siquiera por un horrible instante, que se encontraba ocupada en algún trabajo” (78).

The relationship between César and his secretary takes on laughable proportions:

el despacho apenas si había sitio para las dos mesas. Ahí estaban, el uno contra el otro, condenados a verse; la mesa de Conchita pegada a la suya, la cara de Conchita justo enfrente. Con sólo extender un brazo podría tocarla. César se sintió incluso tentado a agitar los dedos por delante de los ojos en trance de Conchita. Sacudir airoosamente las falanges como el mago que rescata a su ayudante de una hipnosis profunda. Hale hop, y la mujer rompería su molde de piedra y se convertiría en persona. Aunque

no, sería mejor no arriesgarse; porque César sospechaba que Conchita ocultaba un talante de Gorgona y temía despertar su mirada letal y fulminante. (80-81)

The company deliberately foments the paranoia of its employees since

casi nunca se sabía si algo se había hecho mal o bien, sino tan solo si una persona se encontraba en gracia o en desgracia, estados mortificantes o beatíficos que los empleados debían adivinar a través de pequeños signos revelados, de indicios tales como una alentadora sonrisa de Morton, durante el *brainstorming*, que Miguel se detuviera a contarte un chiste en el pasillo [. . .]. (86-87)

Some of the little signs hinting that one was doing well were quite entertaining:

“o que Quesada se interesara por la salud de tu hijo pequeño, buenísima señal aun en el caso de que no tuvieras hijos” (87). “O, por el contrario, los síntomas funestos: un desdeñoso comentario a tu trabajo soltado en público por alguno de los esbirros de Quesada [. . .] o el que uno de tus más encarnizados enemigos viniera a palmearte ostentosamente las espaldas y a llamarte maestro en mitad de la agencia,” cruelly humorous for being so brazenly two-faced (87).

The technique of announcing yearly promotions and firings, which made the employees “más nerviosos hoy que nunca, claro, más tensos hoy que antes, claro, más inseguros, más inquietos, más ávidos, más amedrentados [. . .]. Todos paranoicos” and “fomentaba la hostilidad y la paranoia,” was paradoxically supposed to, according to “un libro norteamericano sobre dirección de empresas” that César had read, “galbanizaban a los trabajadores, dinamizaban la mecánica laboral y aumentaban la productividad; no había nada peor para una firma,

advertía el manual, que el hecho de que los empleados se sintieran seguros en sus puestos” (88-89).

The fate of the company’s employees is mockingly described in schoolhouse terms. After the promotions are given out “en los primeros momentos, se apreciaban bien todas las gradaciones y matices, la euforia de una matrícula de honor, la satisfacción de un notable, la decepción de un aprobado pelado, la depresión de un suspenso, la desesperación total del cero. Los escolares aplicados ascendían a la gloria empresarial y los escolares perezosos se hundían en el infierno de los pillos” (95). When Paula finds out that once again she has been passed over for promotion, she expresses her frustration in a voice “entrecortada por la ira.” No longer suffering in silence, she mocks the newcomers as she tells César “¡Que lo han vuelto a hacer! [. . .] El ascender a dos recién llegados, a dos inútiles, el dejarme a mí en la cola. ¡Pero yo no lo aguanto más, de ésta no paso [. . .]!”. His laughable reaction reveals him to be not only distanced from the conflict, unwilling to help a woman with whom he has been close, but also very childish: “Frotó un lapiz contra el teléfono, estrujó ruidosamente un papel ante el auricular y asumió un tono de perfecta inocencia: ¿Qué dices? ¿Qué dices, Paula? Hay interferencias, no te oigo! Cuando colgó aún se escuchaban, exasperados, los gritos de Paula. En ese momento César no se sentía con ánimos para aguantar sus quejas” (96). This is the same woman who shortly afterwards he asks to marry him, but then decides to betray.

Paula is equally upset when she arrives at César’s apartment looking for a copy of the company standards regarding how women must dress. In strong

derisive terms she insists “Que si ya estaba harta de que en la agencia la explotaran. Que si lo peor de no ser jamás ascendida era que todos los imbéciles acababan siendo jefes suyos.” But César is as equally unhelpful as before: “Olvídate de todo eso y ven a la cama.” Speaking for many women, she replies: “Déjame, nunca me has tomado en serio cuando se trata de hablar de mi trabajo” (176). Then suddenly, in the midst of all this, César asks her to marry him: “Paula se detuvo en mitad de una frase, abrió mucho la boca, se la tapó con una mano, se echó a reír con grandes carcajadas y luego se quedó mirándole muy seria, casi se diría furiosa.” Unable to fathom how she could turn down such an appealing offer, he quickly assumes she is having an affair with Nacho, his business rival. In no uncertain terms she disdainfully tells him “Pero qué tontería, tú estás loco” (177).

In addressing women’s position outside the workplace, Montero talks about the “trading up” of wives that occurs after the men’s prestige in the company increases: “Luego, claro, Mari Tere adelgazó, y se vistió mejor, y se cortó el pelo de otro modo, y de todas formas Miguel se divorció de ella y hoy había venido a la iglesia con su nueva mujer, una rubia teñida y de apariencia atómica” (127). As César looks around the church while attending services for a co-worker driven to commit suicide, he makes a new discovery:

ahora que se fijaba, se daba cuenta de que todas eran rubias. Las mujeres de los directivos, de los jefes. Los primeros bancos eran un maizal. Rubia teñida y atómica la de Miguel, rubia teñida y anémica la de Quesada, rubia natural y atlética la de Morton, fofamente rubia la de Smith, espléndida rubia de oro la de Nacho: [. . .]. En medio de semejante mar de espigas, la ex-mujer de Matías, melena lacia y negra, traje negro, parecía un cuervo en un trival. (127)

César explains the phenomenon of the sea of blond trophy wives of the company men sitting before him in language that clearly reifies women:

¿No se apresuraban todos a adquirir las mujeres apropiadas a su estatus? Como la rubia teñida de Miguel [. . .]. O como la rubia teñida de Quesada, asténica y más bien lánguida porque el tosco Quesada quería alardear de esposa fina. ¿No eran ambas, no eran todas esas mujeres un derivado del cargo, un beneficio añadido al salario, pura material laboral, equiparables a una paga extra o a un trienio? (182)

César's personal relationships with women are portrayed in strangely paradoxical terms, subverting the traditional stereotype of the macho Spanish womanizer. César's girlfriend, Clara, "buscaba en César el reposo, el mimo y el aburrirse juntos por las tardes." However, "cuando llegaba el aburrimiento de verdad, Clara se desesperaba y achaba fuego por las fauces como un dragón colérico. Y entonces le miraba." Caught under her gaze in those moments, César "se sentía como un insecto atrapado por las pinzas de un científico. De una entomóloga que sopesaba, calibraba, escudriñaba, analizaba, descuartizaba y a la postre despreciaba a su modesta víctima, que en vez de mariposa era una simple polilla algo panzona" (105). No longer a "mariposa," the "simple polilla algo panzona" sinks to slipping a sleeping pill into the drink of a young girl he has taken home who will not stop talking and is too excited to sleep. César reflects on what he has done: "El cálido brebaje olía a merienda escolar o a piel de madre, y desde luego la chica se lo bebió todo como una niña dócil; como Caperucita cayendo en la trampa del Lobo Feroz; como Blancanieves mordiendo la manzana emponzoñada que le ofreciera la perversa madrastra" (116). His conversion from

the traditional don Juan, powerful seducer of women, into the fairy tale image of “la pérfida madrastra” offering poisoned goods to young women serves to comically denigrate him.

It is a degradation that he further completes as he betrays Paula in a cowardly deal that he arranges with Morton and the corporate bosses at the end of the book in an attempt to protect himself and ward off the competition--indicative of the lengths he will go to get the outcome he desires. Though he tries to convince himself that he is doing the right thing--“En realidad Paula se había comportado mal, se había excedido [. . .] se merecía el despido” (206)--, he seems to have some qualms about betraying her, sarcastically commenting: “Con qué propiedad hablaba Morton, pensó César; Morton suave, Morton cortés, un Morton tan delicado como las criaturas celestiales, como un querubín ávido de poder, como un serafín implacable y tirano, Angel de Perdición de los humanos” (207). César’s betrayal of Paula is a darkly comical moment because the excuse he uses, “she deserved it,”--one that even he has trouble believing--is what males have always said about female victims of everything from rape to crimes of passion throughout history.

By means of characters like Ana and Candela of *Crónica* and César, Conchita and Paula of *Amado amo*, Montero points to problems that both men and women face in the contemporary work place. While her humor touches upon some of the same topics Martín Gaité brings up, it also includes new concerns that women face as they increasingly participate in the workforce outside the home and deal with the demands of feminism and women’s equality. Addressing the

changing values or lack of values of the times, cultural absurdities and restrictions, the author subverts traditional stereotypes, provoking comic effects of surprise. The macho womanizer is by now seen to be a spoiled character, obsessed and self-serving, who will go to the lengths of drugging women to get them to behave as he wants them to. Powerful corporate men are revealed from a particularly female perspective to be banal, fragile of ego, immature and selfish. Mocking and ridiculing through irony, humorous situations, incongruity and paradoxes as well as black humor, Montero's humor is darker and more aggressive than that of Martín Gaité. The sexual language and sharp humor she uses is indicative of the inroads towards equality that feminism has made since the Franco years. In the next chapter, another female writer on the heels of the Generation of 1950 will continue the path of a more aggressive and direct humor with a dark joke to be played upon a respected male writer who aspires to win the Nobel Prize. Like the character Paula, she is betrayed by her mentor/lover but this time the female character fights back with a betrayal of her own.

Chapter 5

Female wit, humor and retribution: Carme Riera's *Cuestión de amor propio*

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Grubar documented the endeavors of women writers in the world of English literature in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. As early as the end of the eighteenth century, women were conceiving fictional environments in which patriarchal images and conventions were radically revised (44). From their marginalized position (the madwoman in the attic), in a cultural milieu dominated by men, women authors have been struggling to establish their place in that very masculine world, a place that Virginia Woolf claimed, in a physical sense as well, for herself and other women writers, with *A Room of One's Own* (1929) (Buckley 127).

The woman writer of the twentieth century, however, demanded not only a place, according to Buckley, but *the* place in the terrain of letters that until that moment had been occupied by men. Agreeing with Gilbert and Gubar, he reaffirms their position that writing is not innocent, that it has a sex. Writing, they tell us, has always been from and about the patriarchy, from a world of values and traditions that man has created in his image and likeness. It is an environment that has been difficult “and still often is, for a woman writer to find her form and language, since readers, regardless of their gender, have grown accustomed to the works and tradition of male writers, especially to their themes” (Howe 17). Consequently, “A la mujer no le bastaría entonces con encontrar un lugar, un hueco, en ese mundo de hombres, porque sería siempre un lugar extraño para ella.

Necesitaría entonces arrebatarse al hombre la autoridad misma desde la que escribe, necesitaría arrebatarse su pluma” (Buckley 127).

In enunciating her perception of that marginalization of the woman writer, that “lugar extraño para ella,” Woolf applied the term “outsider” (Little 6). It is a concept that Kathryn Everly, bolstered by Foucault’s and Kristeva’s theories on the decentering of the speaking subject and marginality, persuasively argues is a type of gender exile (17). And it is from this position of gender exile, of outsider looking in that “una larga pugna entre escritores y escritoras por esa autoridad, por esa *pen*” has been waged. It is this battle of the sexes in the field of literature, in Buckley’s opinion, that defines the very history of the literature of the twentieth century, the elemental condition to understanding its development (Buckley 127-28). It is a battle in which “Esa ‘patriarquía’, esa tierra que tenía el hombre para su exclusivo provecho y disfrute, es ahora ‘tierra de nadie’, terreno que separa las líneas del frente de una batalla que todavía está por concluir” (128-29).

Humor has always been a tool for the marginalized to voice their opinions and values that may differ from those of the dominant culture. Jewish humor, Sarah Blacher Cohen writes, was “the salvation of the powerless against the powerful.” Jewish women, however, were slower than their male counterparts at writing down their complaints and embellishing them with humor (8). They were not alone in their delay, Constance Rourke tells us, for “Women had played no essential part in the long sequence of the comic spirit in America” (*American Humor* 118). The same can be said of women in Spain. Yet, while women may not have been the originators of comedy, “they certainly have been the butt of it [.

. .]. With no humorous tradition of their own which retaliates against a common enemy, women have been hard pressed to turn their wit outward” (Blacher Cohen 9-10).

As women authors began to find their own voice, they also began to find their comedic voice with which to retaliate. Even more so than art, “humor is a primary form of social communication that serves both an individual and a group purpose [. . .]. It is a means by which humans convey both negative and affirmative emotions, approval and disagreement, joy and anguish” (Boskin 3). “For Freud, derogation--assault by joke--is socially acceptable hostility. When expressed through humor, the penalties for aggression are diminished” (Boskin qtd. in Morreall 255), thereby rendering humor an appealing method of retaliation for women. The battle between the sexes for “authority” in which Martín Gaité and then Montero first engaged is continued by Riera, as she “recreates the roles of men and women in her narrative” (Everly 199), a battle paralleled by Angela in *Cuestión de amor propio* (1987) which she wages against Miguel, her ex-lover, subverting the norm of the passive woman.

CUESTIÓN DE AMOR PROPIO

As Dudley Zuver noted in *Salvation by Laughter. A Study of Religion and the Sense of Humor*, we can adduce that the first to laugh was the serpent upon tempting Eve (186). Vilas, coinciding with his opinion, writes: “La serpiente, al reírse como parece que lo hizo, dio nacimiento al humor que se ha dado en llamar ‘negativo’ o ‘negro’ y a sus derivados: la ironía malintencionada, el sarcasmo y el ridículo [. . .]. Hay que suponerse a la serpiente argumentando para engañar a Eva

y desternillándose de risa después del triunfo,” a triumph that resulted in her being thrown out of earthly paradise (43).

In Carme Riera’s novella, we shall see that this is what the main character envisions that she herself will be doing as she attempts to turn the tables in order to savor her triumph over her ex-lover. The letter that the narrator, ironically named Angela, writes to her girlfriend Ingrid is mostly a defense for the dark joke that she is planning to perpetrate against her ex-lover Miguel with Ingrid’s help. He is aptly named Miguel, Angela informs us,--“en realidad es un nombre muy adecuado el suyo, ya lo verás”--(25), because “Como el arcángel cuyo nombre lleva y al que hace honor--ya te dije que casaba muy bien con su personalidad--, Miguel cercenó también mis posibilidades de rebelión y me arrojó, o pretendió arrojarme, por lo menos, al infierno, como hiciera su tocayo con Lucifer” (52). Like Eve, Angela is deceived by someone who would like her removed from “paradise”; but unlike Eve, Angela is intent on getting the last laugh.

Women’s humor, Barreca reminds us, is about speaking up. Boskin reiterates Bergson’s view of laughter as a powerful corrective “for humor permits the offended person an opportunity to create both a space and an opportunity to retaliate (Boskin qtd. in Morreall 255). However, “It is important to recognize that the responses to the joke tellers depend on the adequate disguise of the aggression. If the hostility or anger is too obvious, the joke won’t work” (Barreca, *Snow White* 76). Psychologists have found that “if you pick on someone who has behaved well all along, it is likely that your joke will be considered unfunny, because it will be seen as an open act of hostility. But if you can turn humor on

someone who has behaved badly, you will be perceived as ‘righting’ an unjust situation. Your humor, according to Professors Gutman and Priest, would be enjoyed, even applauded, by others around you” (77). Since humor depends on the perceived righting of an injustice (179), in Ingrid’s as well as in our minds, Angela’s task becomes that of presenting a good case against Miguel. She must reduce sympathy for him so that we too can laugh at the joke to be played upon him in the end. As Bergson pointed out, “laughter has no greater foe than emotion [. . .] we must, for the moment, put our affection out of court and impose silence on our pity. To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple” (62-63).

Cuestión de amor propio, begins with a quote from Jaime Gil de Biedma: “¡Oh innoble servidumbre de amar seres humanos, y la más innoble que es amarse a sí mismo!” The second part of the quote appears ironic in light of the title and the plot of the book, given that this is the story of a woman’s struggle to summon up enough self esteem to fight back from what she perceives as an injustice--the poor treatment she feels she received at the hands of her ex-lover. Angela’s hard-won self esteem and retribution for less than honorable behavior on Miguel’s behalf appear to contradict self esteem’s lack of nobility. After all, isn’t all fair in love and war?

The words of the second part of the quote also seems to be Michael’s lamenting Angela’s self esteem, since Angela’s learning how to “amarse a sí mismo” is most likely going to bring him grief, thereby making it difficult for him

or any man to escape the consequences of thoughtless behavior. It is ironic that the voice of the epigraph is male, almost as if it were a plea for women to not acquire the self-esteem required to fight back in a relationship--patriarchal advice that is not heeded in this story--causing women to chuckle in solidarity with Angela's revenge. At the same time, in retrospect, it also seems to be a cautionary tale for men like Miguel whose desire to combat their own low self esteem by lowering the self esteem of others can lead to trouble. And yet, at times Angela seems to agree with the first part of the quote. Much to her dismay, she comes to feel towards the end of the story that her abruptly terminated love affair with Miguel was indeed "innoble servidumbre," yet the bonds between her and her female friend Ingrid seem strong--quite the opposite of "innoble servidumbre"--as if to promote solidarity among women.

With ironic intention, Riera has the narrator tell her good friend Ingrid that:

La luz otoñal de un fugaz atardecer, la penumbra de las cuatro de la tarde que tanto detestas hubieran propiciado el inicio de las confidencias mejor que este intermediario convencional del que ahora me sirvo y en el que (por más que me ayude la pluma que tú me regalaste) no confío en exceso, siendo como es mucho menos cómplice que la voz, puesto que escamotea todos los matices que quisiera conjugar con las palabras. (12)

This declaration seems particularly incongruous since she informs us that "Acostumbrada como estoy a escribir" (12). She writes of the "pudor" and "timidez infinita" which she tells us "tal vez se valga de una garabatosa estratagema para organizar una imaginaria línea de protección" (13), yet, paradoxically, in her explanation for the delay in writing we see her confidence in

her writing skills. She tells us that she has been looking for “la manera idónea” in which she can “hacerte cargo de todo lo que me ha ocurrido.”

Riera appears to be enticing us to “stay tuned,” promising a reward if we stay with her. She seems to be foreshadowing the sinister deed that Miguel will have to decipher: “Suelo enmascaramme a menudo tras mi pésima letra. Así obligo a las pocas personas con quienes me carteo, las pocas que de verdad me importan, a que me dediquen algo más de tiempo tratando de descifrar mis mensajes” (13). Unlike with Ingrid with whom the narrator claims to be “directa y explícita,” there will be a hidden “mensaje” that Miguel, the lover that scorns Angela, will have to decipher at the end of the story.

Angela hints at “mi afición por lo deletéreo, acentuada en los últimos tiempos” (16). She wants us to keep in mind “esta faceta,” “la memoria” that “ha sido todo para mí,” as we judge her conduct (17). With false modesty she writes:

Pese que estoy acostumbrada al íntimo trato con las palabras [. . .] cuando acudo a ellas, [. . .] para conjugarlas en primera persona de acuerdo con mi realidad, soy torpe, obtusa y a duras penas consigo que la expresión se adecúe con exactitud al contenido. Lo que escribo o digo es pálido reflejo de lo que quiero expresar. (18)

Suspense is created here as we cannot help but wonder what has caused the lack of serenity from which she now seems to feel purged: “ahora que he vuelto a la serenidad que tan necesaria me era y puedo verlo todo con mayor perspectiva” (18). The emotional state in which she found herself and from which she considers herself “casi curada del todo” is described in terms of black humor:

con cierta ironía si me apuras, con la lucidez suficiente para saber que la angustia atenazante del año pasado se debió, sobre todo, a una enfermedad moral que me llevó--no quiero ocultártelo--a calibrar obsesivamente qué proporción de alcohol y barbitúricos sería la ideal para una mezcla efectiva o qué distancia debía mediar entre la ventana y el asfalto para obtener el resultado apetecido. (18)

Angela attributes the “daño incommensurable que me causó” “mi enfermedad” to the fact that she was never vaccinated with “los anticuerpos necesarios para combatir el virus” (19). The defensive humor is subversive as it serves to deflate the over-importance women often place on romantic love by equating it with a disease against which one needs to be vaccinated and from which one needs to be cured. She explains her “rechazo visceral a establecer cualquier relación seria” as she reveals her lack of self esteem: “Un extraño instinto me hacía huir a tiempo. Suponía que mi entrega no sería correspondida en la misma medida y me veía ridícula” (19). Her Danish friend Ingrid, she recalls, repeatedly tries to get her to take a more “modern” approach: “solías reprocharme mi actitud pusilánime frente al amor y me aconsejabas que adoptara una postura mucho más abierta” (20). Ingrid’s is definitely not the traditional approach: “que considerara el sexo como un apetito más, como una necesidad que debe ser colmada para poder guardar tanto el equilibrio físico como el mental” (20). And although Angela defends herself--“Yo en cambio pertenezco al tipo de mujeres--especímenes a extinguir--que son incapaces de entrar en otros brazos sin estar enamoradas” (20)--, she appears to take the advice of Ingrid, who is also a writer, to turn the rejection by a past lover into something positive:

‘Tus novellas [. . .] ganarían mucho si fueras capaz de resolver por ti misma, y no a través de los orgasmos de tus personajes, tu vida sexual, si fueras capaz de aceptar con naturalidad y sin cortapisas el deseo. Yo no renunciaría a ninguno de mis amantes, ni siquiera a aquellos cuyos rostros y cuerpos he olvidado. Todos aportaron experiencias positivas a mi vida, la enriquecieron...’.(20-21)

Angela debates with Ingrid the issue of sex and the mental space in which women’s liberation put many women of her generation:

En realidad, lo que busco--y casi estoy segura de que también lo buscan o buscaban la mayoría de mujeres de mi generación--es la ternura [. . .]. Y sin embargo, muchas de nosotras, y de manera especial las más combativas, las que pasábamos por más inteligentes, llegamos a avergonzarnos de esta propensión a la ternura, pues nos parecía un rasgo de debilidad femenina, y preferimos mostrarnos ante los demás, especialmente ante los hombres, frías, fuertes y autosuficientes. (21)

She unabashedly elaborates on her desires that are quite at odds with feminist principles:

[. . .] una de las cosas que más he deseado toda mi vida ha sido que alguien me llamara pequeña, pequeñita mientras me abrazaba, aunque mis principios feministas se vieran seriamente resquebrajados y mi concienciación se relajara en demasía al tener que admitir que no solo aceptaba, sino que deseaba ser disminuida, cosificada, casi degradada. (22)

She misses the “calor que proporciona otro cuerpo en la cama” but even more the “complicidad, una defensa común ante las ingratitudes y mezquindades de la vida, más llevaderas de dos en dos” (22), a complicity or solidarity which she thought she found in Miguel but which in the end she ironically finds with other women.

When Miguel betrays her it is Ingrid that she turns to for help. It is Ingrid that then becomes her “defensa común.”

The conception and plotting of revenge by women is new in Spanish literature by women, nor has the topic of female friendship ever been a topic of interest to male writers who have dominated Spanish literature since it began. Coming to terms with the fact of that domination, of “her own cultural marginalization in a literary tradition defined largely as male,” Walker argues, might well be part of the project of a woman’s writing (*The Disobedient Writer* 6). In her endeavor to define herself as an author, the woman writer, Gilbert and Gubar assert, experiences that cultural marginalization--her gender--as a

[. . .] painful obstacle [. . .]. Thus the loneliness of the female artist, her feelings of alienation from male predecessors coupled with her need for sisterly precursors and successors, her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers [. . .] mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creation from those of her male counterpart. (50)

Riera attempts to overcome that isolation and differentiate herself from male writers in this particular work by seeking out female friendships as a way to express herself artistically and emotionally (Everly 198). She addresses a female audience to express herself artistically just as Angela seeks out female friendship as a way to express herself emotionally. Through Angela’s correspondence with Ingrid we gain a sense of the moral support this friendship provides her, the connection between the two women suggesting female empowerment.

Angela falls in love, using traditional poetic rhetoric that contrasts sharply with the realistic outcome of this affair: “sí, noté el momento en que el arquero divino disparaba sus flechas doradas y mi mitad perdida, tras la catástrofe que nos condenó a una larguísima escisión, se soldaba por fin con mi ser” (23). The modern woman so taken up with poetic rhetoric at the moment of falling in love provides a humorous tonal counterpoint to the protagonist and the seriousness of the story. In this segment, her lack of self-esteem is evidenced by her view of herself as only half until she finds her lover, a traditional view to which convention and language have contributed, a fact she acknowledges when she admits: “el mundo--sé que es un tópico asegurarlo, pero fue así--cobró todo su sentido, un sentido primigenio, desacostumbrado, armónico” (23). Angela’s comment portends their future in suspenseful and ambiguous terms: “nuestra fatal predestinación” (24).

Angela wants Ingrid and Miguel to meet so that she can give the relationship her “*nihil obstat* y te sintieras, una vez por lo menos, orgullosa de mí, que por fin había sido capaz de dejar a un lado la literatura y apostar por la vida” (25). This is ironically not what happens in the end. If “apostar por la vida” means plunging into life and taking a chance on men, which does not turn out well, then writing ultimately wins with the publication of this memoir based on an elaborate plan for revenge that Miguel brings upon himself by his own behavior.

Our curiosity is piqued when Angela mentions her desire for “los tres hablando y hablando sin parar junto a la chimenea del salón”--Miguel, Ingrid and Angela. For some unexplained reason she imagines Miguel and Ingrid in her

absence: “Y es posible que esta conversación interminable--claro que sólo entre vosotros dos--tenga lugar muy pronto, ya que, en el plazo de un mes, Miguel [. . .] viajará a los Países Escandinavos. Pero no quiero adelantarte acontecimientos” (25). It is a hint at what is to come for both Ingrid and us.

Angela declares her overestimation of males, particularly of male writers: “en la adolescencia les rendí un culto devoto. No sólo recogía autógrafos en un cuaderno impecable, sino que mantenía correspondencia con varios” (26). This imbalance, where the male is viewed as a god and low worth is attributed to the female, precludes a good relationship based on equality. Reminding us of the interest pointed out to us by Martín Gaité that boys with “complejos” held for young girls, Angela repeats the rhetoric typical for young girls, acknowledging that:

lo que es peor, aspiraba en secreto a casarme con alguna joven promesa, todavía incomprendida, a quien yo ayudaría a triunfar. Gracias a mi estímulo, pronto la gloria y la fortuna le llevarían en parihuelas, y bajo palio sería introducido en la Academia tras haber renovado la vanguardia. (26)

This young girl’s dream is more or less what the adult Angela’s reality becomes except for the very last part of the line, where due to the course of events her goal instead becomes paradoxically that of ensuring that the “Academia” does not honor him. Society has been influential in Angela’s social conditioning; she sees her path as enhancing the career of her “joven promesa,” more so than her own. This emphasis on increasing males’ self esteem is not reciprocal. She has not been taught that increasing her own self esteem is a worthy undertaking.

Angela's character remains puzzling. She insists that "después de la buena acogida de mi segundo libro, mi fascinación por los escritores, por su capacidad de fabulación, decreció hasta casi desaparecer" (26-27). Yet at the same time she admits:

No mantengo relaciones demasiado buenas conmigo misma, de manera que apenas valoro lo que soy capaz de hacer, aunque tal vez lo que sucedió en Valencia contradiga en parte mis afirmaciones, pues toda esa propensión a maravillarme ante la habilidad de un encantador de palabras, que creía olvidada, resurgió de nuevo cuando, en el Salón Dorado de la Lonja de Valencia, Miguel tomó la palabra. (27)

After all her success she confesses that she still could not keep herself from seeing Miguel as "El mago de mi adolescencia," "el prestidigitador" and "el más brillante, lúcida y redonda de cuantas escuché," contradicting her affirmation that with her own success, the fascination with successful male writers decreased (27). In her second affirmation, she claims to not value her abilities yet she possessed enough confidence in those abilities to speak up at the conference and challenge Miguel, in part to get his attention, an action which also contradicts in part her claim of low self confidence. In addition we recognize that she summoned up enough courage by the end of the book to turn the table on Miguel.

During the conference, Miguel focuses on "los aspectos sexuales" in *La Regenta*, due to the fact that "se daba tanta importancia al erotismo." He attributes "el problema de Ana Ozores, de todas las Anas Ozores de la época" not to "una personalidad inadaptada, sino el de una libido insatisfecha" (28). Incongruously, Angela appears to have just such a personality. In a metaphor à la Gomez de la Serna, surprising in its dissimilarity yet comical in the image it evokes, she

describes her intervention: “Con el esfuerzo de un tísico por reprimir un ataque de tos levanté la mano para pedir la palabra” (28). Even though she confides that “llevándole la contraria” was the best way to attract his attention, her suggestion recalls what she mentioned earlier about her own desire for tenderness: “A mi entender, todas las frustraciones de Ana Ozores provienen de su infancia, de la falta de afecto en que creció, [. . .]” (28-29). In what is to be a foreshadowing of their relationship, Miguel does not see the issue the same way. She responds: “[. . .] sólo las mujeres estamos en condiciones de decidir si nos sentimos, no como dioses, como diosas [. . .] cuando triunfa el orgasmo o lo hace sencillamente la ternura” (30). It is also momentous because she is confronting him, a respected masculine figure, in public. She tells us: “arranqué algunos aplausos--eso sí, tímidos--” (30).

Interestingly enough “Hablamos de Clarín y Galdós, de literatura y moral, y, no sé bien por qué, discutimos sobre los escrúpulos que, a lo largo de la historia, han tenido los novelistas a la hora de utilizar, como heroínas enamoradas, a mujeres de más de treinta años,” something which ironically she appears to be rectifying with this book (31). She brings up the frequent misogynous characterization of women in novels, pointing out the lack of solidarity portrayed by them as well:

[. . .] doña Perfecta [. . .]. Es la paradigma del conservadurismo y la estupidez que suelen encarnar los personajes femeninos maduros. [. . .] incluso en el caso de los personajes secundarios, las viejas--madres, tías, abuelas o suegras--, suelen ser, por lo general, malhumoradas, hipócritas, avaras, rancias o se oponen al triunfo de la juventud. (31-32)

She confesses that it was with “intención coqueta” that she told Miguel: “El amor es el opio de las mujeres, ya se sabe, pero sólo de las jóvenes...” (32). This comment is ironic because she obviously is not one of the “jóvenes” yet she still falls under its influence. However, it is ambiguous because she was able to “recover” in time to give Miguel his due, proving that she was not addicted to his “opio.”

In the beginning of their affair, they write notes to each other, “apuntes tontos y acabaron en ‘actas fundacionales de nuestro amor’, según designación suya, documentos valiosísimos para nuestros futuros biógrafos, que él se empeñó en guardar” (34). This is an indication of his character that will be revealed in the future when he takes more of her work for himself, something she does not suspect at all: “Mi desclasamiento, mi repugnancia por la política, mi falta de ambición en ese terreno, tampoco constituían aspectos que pudiesen encandilar a un oportunista.” Erroneously and naïvely she states: “Más bien era yo quien, en todo caso, hubiese podido aprovecharme de la situación de Miguel en el mundillo cultural ya que, precisamente un mes antes de conocerle, había sido nombrado director de la Fundación para el Progreso de la Cultura, sin duda una de las más importantes del país” (35). Oddly enough, however, in a certain sense she does utilize his position for her own means, taking advantage of it to accomplish her ends of retribution.

Plagued with low self esteem, Angela writes:

Tenía miedo, Ingrid, de todo o de casi todo. Miedo a mi propia edad, a mi cuerpo no precisamente en plenitud, que en todas partes [. . .] exhibía la desmañada caricia de los días [. . .]. Y sobre todo miedo a mi cara, que el

abandono del amor dejaría sin el maquillaje que disimulara el rictus de la boca, ya definitivamente entre paréntesis, sin el amparo de las sombras protectoras que enmascararan bolsas, ojeras y arrugas, [. . .]. (36-37)

Although her definition of his marriage sounds naïve, the ironic “claro” and “triste” seem ironical, belying any naïveté: “aunque me siguiera hablando de su trabajo o de su familia, de lo inteligentes que eran sus hijos o de su mujercita, con quien mantenía, claro, únicamente adocenadas relaciones de triste convivencia” (37).

Once again, she breaks the story line to keep the reader’s interest by reminding us of the favor that she will require of Ingrid: “Grítame como sueles. Estoy dispuesta a cumplir la penitencia que gustes imponerme, sobre todo si me haces el favor que con esta larguísima carta [. . .] trato, también, de pedirte” (39). Trying to build her case for Ingrid’s (and our) support of her she writes: “Pasé los primeros meses de mi enfermedad tratando de recordar el temblor de mi mano entre las tuyas, [. . .]. Pero la memoria hostil no me devolvía ninguna sensación gratificante” (39). She brings up the bitter memory of a “tarjeta fechada aquella misma mañana, sin firma, decía: ‘Te amo ya para siempre’” along with other declarations and promises of eternal passionate love such as “Nadie podrá separarnos, amor mío, Angela, ángel mío, porque soy definitivamente tuyo” and “No te dejaré nunca, NUNCA, escúchame bien. Por más que me rechaces, te alejes, me apartes, te seguiré persiguiendo” (40-41).

She writes of the telephone as their “aliado”:

Podía sonar a las horas más intempestivas, simplemente ‘para oírte y nada más’, para consultarme cualquier nimiedad--el tono adecuado de una

corbata a juego con el traje (en la recepción estaba la presidenta)--, para aconsejarle sobre el tema de una conferencia o leerme el último artículo que había escrito. (41)

The insertion between parentheses alluding to the presence of and possible affair with another woman, seems to, in retrospect, ironically give us insight into Miguel's character. He appears to be lying to her early on in the relationship, which would serve to build Angela's case of innocent woman wronged. However, the question of Miguel's affairs with other women appears to have been left ambiguous intentionally. In an interview given to Everly in Oct. 1998, Riera admits: "Por eso las cartas me gustan tanto a mí, me parece un género tan fácil porque no tenemos más que un único punto de vista y por eso no siempre tiene la razón la persona que escribe. Yo no sé si, pues no he llegado a saber si él realmente fue tan malo como dice Angela que fue" (Carme Riera, interview by Everly, tape recording, Barcelona, Oct. 6, 1998. in Everly 184). Angela's seeming to know and yet not to know about Miguel's character gives a playful tint to the affair, leaving us with the question of just how much she knew and who is playing whom. It is from this superior stance of an ironic viewpoint that she conducts the orchestration of the joke designed for revenge.

Her love for Miguel ironically increases her self esteem, a self esteem which later when fueled by jealous anger provides her with the strength to get back at him: "Todos mis miedos habían desaparecido. Me encontraba en plena forma y no tan fea como de costumbre, casi te diría que atractiva, y esto me daba fuerzas. Sabía que el amor transforma en belleza todo cuanto toca" (42-43). However, the affair is soon over: "la ruptura llegó inexplicablemente" (44). He

sends her the “consabida orquídea” and suddenly becomes quite laconic, writing simply: “Muchas gracias” (45-46). Showing the effects of romantic literature, she comes to the realization of what “en realidad éramos: amantes de ocasión y no de libro, como yo entonces creía” (45). When Miguel turns to leave her for the last time he tells her: “Nunca hubiera podido sospechar que ese corazón de cristal guardase tanta pasión” (45), ironically never suspecting that he is about to find out just how much passion her heart does contain when she turns it against him.

Unable to get in contact with him, --the “odiosa secretaria perfecta” (46) informs her that Miguel has gone abroad--, while in the dentist’s office she comes across a photo of Miguel “con un vaso en una mano y en la otra la cintura de una tipa exuberante de apariencia venal” (47). She begins to let us discover her personality: “Nunca imaginé que la tristeza pudiera tener una forma tan obsesiva, incluso tan melodramática. Aunque todavía no hacía frío, pasaba las horas junto a la chimenea mirando en estado casi catatónico el fuego” (47-48). She builds our sympathy for her: “Las llamas, tras un velo de lágrimas, exhiben fosforescencias inusitadas, temblores nuevos. Contaba uno por uno los días que faltaban para su vuelta” (48). She begins to see him with different-colored lenses. Rereading his letters, she comes across the first clues for a way to seek revenge against him:

[. . .] leyendo sus cartas, [. . .] me di cuenta de que las referencias artísticas cosmopolitas que tan sabiamente utilizaba solían acumularse de manera abrumadora en los párrafos de las guías Michelin, que los conciertos de música barroca, por los que tanta afición demostraban sus personajes, eran atribuidos equivocadamente, y que sus protagonistas masculinos, en especial los triunfadores, tenían ante la vida una actitud ampulosa casi estentórea, que de pronto me pareció algo grotesca e incoherente. Leí con ojos nuevos su obra y descubrí infinidad de detalles que me supieron a pedante exhibición, a retahíla de falsedades. (48)

Despite finding flaws, she finds some good elements in his writing that she seems to have incorporated into her own: “[. . .] el mundo que Miguel construye en sus novelas me pareció de cartón piedra, sin ninguna cohesión moral, [. . .]. Admiré una vez más, en cambio, su habilidad para mantener el interés del lector hasta el final, creando un gran expectativa en los últimos capítulos, en los que la acción intensifica” (49). Ironically she says of their relationship: “Tal vez ni él ni yo éramos otra cosa que un montón de palabras que ahora” (49). She constructs scenarios sympathetic to her:

Quizás nuestra historia--y ahora tengo más elementos a mi favor para creerlo así--no fue otra cosa que un ensayo general previo a la escritura, a la escritura misma en forma de experiencia de laboratorio.

Pero a esa interpretación solía superponer otra, [. . .] me equiparaba a las estúpidas heroínas del más siniestro folletín, seducidas y abandonadas por tontas [. . .] me convertiría en un simple objeto [. . .] tras ser usada una sola vez, va directamente al cubo de la basura. Y sin embargo yo me tenía en más, [. . .]. (50)

She wonders if the breakup was due to the influence of a Hispanic literary tradition that held that “una mujer de casi cincuenta años no tiene ningún derecho al amor, ni mucho menos al deseo físico” (51). It is a tradition that, as luck would have it, will be corrected as Angela seeks retribution for the “amor” and “deseo físico” that Miguel mistakenly believed she did not possess nor have the right to possess. Angela herself refutes his idea: “Me pregunto si algo de eso, si mi capacidad de transgredir la ley severa que me aparta, según parece, a mis años de cualquier veleidad erótica, si mi entrega apasionada, mis insaciables ganas de amar, mi deseo ilimitado, no le aterrorizaron” (51).

Angela feels abandoned by him: “Supongo que [. . .] tomó un avión [. . .] como si yo nunca hubiera sido suya, como si nunca nos hubiéramos conocido [. . .]” (52). Incredibly, when she calls Miguel, he still wants to use her--“hay un montón de cosas que quiero consultarte. Tus puntos de vista me son siempre tan útiles...” (54). However, she intuits that he no longer loves her. After she gives him the cold shoulder, he calls her: “[. . .] Angela, a veces pienso que no me he portado bien del todo contigo... [. . .] Soy yo el que a ratos se siente culpable sin saber demasiado bien por qué... Y eso me intranquiliza...” To which she sarcastically replies: “Tómame dos comprimidos de Válium, [. . .]” (59). He insists that she is just being cruel: “No eres justa, me interpretas mal. Te quiero mucho, [. . .]. Todo lo tuyo me interesa.” Unimpressed, Angela wryly responds: “¿De veras?” He assures her, unwittingly getting himself deeper into trouble: “Puedes estar segura. Si no fuera así, a santo de qué me crearía enemigos por tu culpa... [. . .]. Ayer mismo te defendí ante Martínez Camorera. Ya sabes que es un crítico durísimo.” But Angela is wary: “¿Ah, sí? ¿Y qué dijo Martínez Camorera, si puede saberse? Porque no creo ni que me haya leído...” Miguel has an answer for her: “Por lo que dijo, eso parece, amor” (60). She wants to know what the critic said of her. He responds: “Prefiero no decírtelo, cielo. Estuve a punto de liarme con él a puñetazos.” Surprisingly, he does not see this one coming: “¡Qué fuerte estás! Dime, ¿qué dijo?” After hemming and hawing and mumbling something about not wanting to hurt her he says: “Pues dijo: ‘Angela Caminal es una escritora acabada’” (61). Angela reminisces as she nurses her resentment, explaining to Ingrid:

A menudo la gente, los propios colegas que convivieron con nosotros en el congreso habían echado pestes de Miguel. La envidia--es un triunfador nato--, le convertiría en un blanco tentador [. . .]. Te aseguro que en muchísimas ocasiones he desviado los tiros que le iban dirigidos sin aludir jamás a ello. Sin pasarle ningún tipo de factura. La suya, además de resultar inoportuna, había sido gravada con un excesivo impuesto de lujo. (61-62)

Miguel and his lies are unmasked however:

Mi traductora al castellano es amiga de Camorera desde la infancia. No pude evitar comentarle el incidente. Rocío se prestó encantada a hacer todo tipo de averiguaciones. Al cabo de pocas horas supe que, en efecto, la anécdota que me había contado Miguel era cierta, pero que los papeles de los actores habían sido cambiados. Fue Camorera quien me defendió y él, Miguel, quien puso en duda, entre bromas y veras, el interés de mi obra y vaticinó frívolamente, como quien no quiere la cosa, mi defunción literaria. (62)

Her interpretation of this revelation is crucial to the ending of the story: “Estaba claro que Miguel no me había querido nunca y que, desde el principio, se había burlado de mí” (63). This sets up her mind for pay back. She reminds us of the anguish he has caused her: “Me sentía absolutamente incapaz de escribir una sola línea, porque me parecía que, entre sus páginas, me esperaba una trampa llena de púas venenosas que me cercenaría los dedos” (63). Drawing a parallel between Miguel and Narcissus she fumes: “La imagen que busca no es otra distinta de sí mismo, no es la de su hermana muerta.” It all becomes clearer to her now:

De este modo su conducta parece explicarse con más facilidad. Incluso su última llamada. Con aquella fingida defensa--él nunca debió de imaginar que me llegaría la otra versión--intentaba restablecer ante mí su maltrecha fama, puesto que tal vez, en algunos momentos, por contados que éstos fueran, intuía que mi espejo se había roto en mil pedazos y que jamás

podría volver a recomponer en él su imagen de seductor. Creo que solo acertó en parte, ya que su refinamiento, la sofisticación con que se esmeraba en hacerme daño comunicándome la sentencia de Camorera, se debían--creo que ahora ya no me faltan datos--a otros móviles más útiles. (64-65)

She claims to have entered a new stage. Miguel no longer is the figurative magician that she once clapped for: “he entrado en una nueva etapa. Tengo el corazón casi tan frío como la cabeza. El sentido común ha ido imponiéndose poco a poco sobre la neurótica melancolía” (65). Angela begins to see the world as the one posited by dark humor--“an absurd world devoid of intrinsic values” (Cohen 20). She claims:

Me estoy convirtiendo en una escéptica [. . .]. Los valores que una educación burguesa y esmerada trató de inculcarme--la lealtad, la sinceridad, el obsesivo culto a la verdad--ya no me sirven, están obsoletos. Su tendencia tan a la baja en los últimos tiempos los ha vuelto incluso no cotizables. Durante muchos años creí que mis convicciones me servirían como norma válida con la que juzgar tanto los comportamientos ajenos como los propios, que debía ajustar mi conducta a tales convicciones simplemente por razonables cuestiones de ética elemental que harían más llevadera la convivencia y me permitirían, [. . .] sentirme por lo menos integrada en el sistema de valores por el que se rigen las personas civilizadas, [. . .]. (66)

The result: “Quizá me he vuelto definitivamente misántropa. No espero nada. No me conmueve ya nada en especial” (67).

Despite her claims, Angela cannot help but read the cultural pages of the newspaper once in a while where she learns that Miguel has published a book ironically titled *El canto del cisne*, which may literally turn out to be his swan song in the publishing world if Angela gets her way. While the copy of the book

Miguel has sent Angela has “en la contraportada, como reclamo, unas letras de cuerpo gigante destacaban [. . .] de manera especial la originalidad de su tema, inédito en las letras hispánicas. . .,” the newspaper critic “calificaba de paráfrasis decimonónica, ya que su personaje principal, una escritora provinciana, es un claro exponente del romanticismo de la desilusión, heroína degradada en un mundo también degradado” (68). Angela continues to build the case against him, attacking his “originality”: “Puedes imaginarte, Ingrid, [. . .] con qué atención la leí, subrayando los párrafos en los que me parecía que se hacía referencia a mi físico, a mis estados de ánimo, señalando las páginas en las que Miguel recogía parte de nuestra correspondencia o transcribía nuestras conversaciones o incluía párrafos robados a ‘las actas fundacionales’” (68). The negative picture Miguel draws of the heroine stings her, wounding her self esteem, while at the same time he builds up his own: “Olga, la madura escritora catalana, cursi como un repollo con lazo, si no es mi retrato es, por lo menos, mi caricatura, y el de Sergio, novelista de moda, triunfador, brillante y excesivamente inteligente, es él, tal como se ve, revestido de un halo hagiográfico.” Even their night together is no longer sacred:

en las páginas de la novela no se describe una noche intensa, bella y pletórica como yo la recuerdo, sino vergonzante, fracasada y estéril. Olga, prisionera de sus prejuicios, se comporta de una manera ridícula, noña, fuera de lugar, y es incapaz de complacer la fogosidad de su amante. . . Cuando leas el libro [. . .] verás qué final tan apoteósico dispensa el autor a la pobre tontiloca. (69)

Angela feels used: “Le interesé únicamente porque creyó ver en mí un personaje hecho a la medida de la trama que urdía? [. . .] No sé, el caso es que, sin

duda, me utilizó para extraer una información de primera mano que le permitió dar una mayor consistencia humana a su criatura de ficción” (70). Her plans for payback are darkly humorous, as she looks for a way to avenge herself without increasing Miguel’s fame at the same time:

No te negaré, Ingrid, que durante estos días me han venido ganas de emular a la Serpieri--¿recuerdas *Senso* de Visconti?--, pero incluso eso redundaría en su fama póstuma. También se me ha ocurrido la posibilidad de una demanda judicial basada en el derecho a la intimidad que su novela viola o en airear en la prensa sensacionalista nuestra relación, pero ambas cosas no harían sino multiplicar las ventas y la popularidad de Miguel en detrimento de mi persona. (71)

Bergson says that comedy and aggression can be entwined: “In laughter we always find an unavowed intention to humiliate and consequently to correct our neighbor, if not in his will, at least in his deed” (65). Freud also expounded on the aggressive ends humor serves: “Humor is not resigned, it is rebellious” (*International Journal of Psycho-analysis*, IX, Part I, Jan. 1928, 2). Boskin, agreeing with Freud, asserts that “derogation--assault by joke--is socially acceptable hostility. When expressed through humor, the penalties for aggression are diminished” (Boskin qtd. in Morreall 255). Lacking power, Angela uses her wits in order to fight back. The dark joke Angela plans in her struggle against Miguel where she envisions getting the last laugh is a defense mechanism she uses to protect herself. The joke allows her to strike back at Miguel while reducing any penalties against herself that she might incur for that aggression.

She informs Ingrid that Miguel’s last name is not Delibes, but Orbaneja and that he plans to visit Denmark within the month to give various conferences at

several universities there. He will write a series of reports that the “agencia EFE difundirá entre los más importantes periódicos de España e Hispanoamérica, previos a la publicación de un libro de viajes por los Países Escandinavos” (72). Angela assures Ingrid that he will bite the bait:

Estoy segura de que Miguel hará todo lo posible por conocerte [. . .]. No lo encuentres nada raro. Le hablé muchísimo de ti, de tu afición por la literatura española, de tus estupendas relaciones con los intelectuales escandinavos--y en especial de tu gran amistad con Lunkvist, eterna puerta del Nobel, al que por supuesto, en un futuro no demasiado lejano, él aspira--[. . .]. (72)

Angela sees all this as a game: “Tienes, en materia de hombres, mucha más experiencia que yo, y unas cartas marcadas. El juego es definitivamente tuyo” (73). Then Angela, still angry at the thought of what Miguel did to her, finally gets around to asking Ingrid the favor that she felt needed seventy-three pages in order to make its case and build solidarity for her cause:

[. . .] te anuncié que te pediría un favor. Creo que ha llegado el momento de decirte de qué se trata, aunque tal vez tú ya lo has adivinado, o casi. Pero no. No te pido que pagues a Miguel con la misma moneda, por supuesto falsa, con que me compró a mí. Seducirle sería para ti un juego de niños y dejarle en la estacada lo más fácil del mundo. [. . .] Sólo una estúpida como yo podía no verle venir con su altar portátil bajo el brazo, dispuesto a preparar con todo esmero la ceremonia de la inmolación de la primera cordera bobalicona que le saliera al paso, autoofreciéndosela como víctima propiciatoria a su egolatría hipopótamo. [. . .] No en vano te has divertido con las vengadoras de su honra del teatro español... y, mira por dónde, ahora tienes una oportunidad por persona interpuesta para interpretar ese papel. (73-74)

Angela plans to use Miguel’s own weakness against him:

En fin, [. . .] lo que te pido es mucho más sutil. Verás, Miguel tiene la milagrosa habilidad de convertir en sí mismo todo lo que toca, de apropiarse con espontaneidad graciosa de las ideas ajenas, de expresar como si fuera suyo el parecer de los demás y, siempre que lo cree oportuno, intertextualiza lo que le viene en gana. Nunca contrasta opiniones. De manera que no me cuesta nada imaginarle coincidiendo plenamente con tus puntos de vista, sorprendiéndose, maravillado, ante la identidad de vuestros gustos e identificándose con tus palabras. Ni tampoco me resulta nada difícil adelantarme a lo que será su primera crónica repleta de observaciones agudísimas sobre vuestra idiosincrasia, de referencias históricas y literarias brillantes y sobre todo *originales* que tú habrás ido sugiriéndole. (74-75)

Her plan is witty because from what we know of Miguel we can see that her observations of his shortcomings are true and we begin to chuckle at the thought of knowing that he will, in a sense, be the cause of his own undoing, accepting the bait and becoming the dupe of the joke. As Boskin noted, “Jokes fulfill various functions, not the least of which is to insult and denigrate” (27). She then provides Ingrid with specific details of the plan:

Fíjate en lo genial que sería que le convencieras de la nostalgia de Isak Dinesen por los acantilados de la llana Fionia, que le hablaras del expresionismo pornográfico de los primeros films de Dreyer o del erotismo explosivo de los torsos del gélido Thorwaldsen, a quien sus admiradoras llamaban el Rodin danés... [. . .]. Claro que de ti cabe esperar una erudición mucho más sutil y mayor finura imaginativa en vistas a enseñarle ciertos aspectos de tu país a través de una lente distorsionada. (75-76)

Angela is already enjoying her joke: “Falta un mes, Ingrid, [. . .] pero ya me regodeo pensando en lo bien que lo voy a pasar leyendo los reportajes de Miguel plagados de gazapos, cuando no de dislates que, a buen seguro, enfurecerán a Lungvist, mermando así las posibilidades de que Miguel se vista un día de frac

frente al rey de los suecos para recibir el Nobel” (76). But she confesses that “En el fondo, no es haber contribuido, con tu ayuda, claro, a dejarle en ridículo lo que más va a satisfacerme, sino estar segura de que, en su infinito engreimiento, sacará una moraleja misógina: no hay que fiarse--porque no lo tienen--del criterio de las mujeres.” The benefits are two-fold because at the same time Miguel’s “lesson” will serve to protect other women writers whose “criterio” is honest from Miguel’s tendency to bolster himself by plagiarizing their ideas.

Aristotle suggests that “a joke is a kind of abuse. There are some kinds of abuse which lawgivers forbid; perhaps they should have forbidden certain kinds of jokes” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IV, ch. 8, in Morreall, 15). But Angela is already planning her celebration. Confident in her solidarity with Ingrid she ends the letter with: “Ahora mismo, en cuanto acabe esta carta, comprobaré en qué estado está la bodega. No quiero que falte un *Pomer* para cuando llegue el momento. Brindaré por ti, queridísima mía, te lo aseguro. [. . .] como siempre, y más que nunca, estoy a tu disposición y que puedes pedírmelo todo” (76). Echoing Bergon’s belief that “our humor is always the laughter of a group” and that “laughter appears in need of an echo,” Boskin reminds us of humor’s “ability to create a sense of solidarity, a knowledge of belonging to a certain set. Only the group, it is understood, can truly know the thrust of the humor, or the nature of the laughter” (Boskin 1). Even more than art, “humor is a primary form of social communication that serves both an individual and a group purpose [. . .]. It is a means by which humans convey both negative and affirmative emotions, approval and disagreement, joy and anguish” (3).

As we have seen in the works of Riera and Montero, the humor of the younger generation of women writers is angrier, darker and more direct than that of Martín Gaité as they deal with male-female relationships in the pressures of the competitive working world. This assertive humor also reflects the greater confidence and freedom that the younger writers have in speaking their mind, an indication that echoes of the women's liberation movement are reverberating in their country. It also reflects the authors' consciousness of a group of women who share these experiences, who are listening, and will enjoy their humor in solidarity.

Conclusion

Men have traditionally been the theorists of humor and have seldom considered the role of gender in humor (Gagnier 136-7). While a sense of humor has been considered a nearly universal trait, women have been customarily thought to be devoid of humor (Walker and Dresner xvi). The separation between male and female worlds which society had imposed caused their worlds to be so different that women found it difficult to perceive and therefore to enjoy as humorous an incongruity that came from the male sphere, consequently rendering the impression that women did not possess a sense of humor (Walker, *Serious* 82). Rather than lacking humor, it has been suggested that it is the opportunity for its free expression that women have lacked (Apte 69). The socially constructed female role in which women who used humor were perceived to be masculine and aggressive contributed to the social unacceptability of female humor (Walker and Dresner xvi). Women's subordinated position in society further constrained their use of humor by exerting pressure on them to not use humor in front of males of the dominant culture who were generally regarded as being of a higher status (unless that humor was self-deprecatory of course). This complex set of cultural assumptions, values and expectations has worked to not only constrain but to misconstrue women's humor as well (Sheppard 48-49). The social perception that women lacked a sense of humor caused critics not to look for humor in their works and consequently not to find it. Since humor requires the enjoyment of an incongruity or comical situation as well as their perception, men have found it

difficult to recognize and appreciate as humor those situations in which they appear as the oppressor (Walker, *Serious*72).

In Spain, any attempt to trace a female literary tradition, Joan Brown informs us, “is for scholars of Spanish literature either an abbreviated enterprise or else a search outside the canon” (13). It is hardly surprising given the fact that accomplished women writers in Spain were excluded from the canon, a suspicion substantiated by publication statistics recently collected on literature by women and by the current reevaluation of their works (Brown 16).

Just as women writers have not been included in the long-established literary canon, neither have their contributions been recognized in the field of humor. The fact that the humor tradition had been defined in male terms led to the assumption that humor in women’s writing, if it were to exist, could not be different from that of men’s. Consequently humor in works that varied from the conventional presented challenges to the existing critical methods. Since many socio-cultural constraints operated to limit her free expression, women’s humor was realized in different ways and to different ends than that of men’s (Walker and Dresner xxi). Unable to deal with the differences, literary criticism tended to ignore or consider insignificant women’s humorous writing. As a result, few women appear in the major anthologies and critical analyses of humor. Among the names of Spanish humorists that have been mentioned are Emilia Pardo Bazán, Mercedes Ballesteros, Remedios Orad and Nuria Pompeya (Arribas 12,121). Even in the 1992 issue of *Diálogos Hispánicos* in Amsterdam dedicated to humor in Spanish literature there is no mention of any humorous woman

writer--proof of the lack of recognition of talented Spanish women writers' capacity for humor and their continued exclusion from any sort of canon even after Franco's death (Arribas 124). This lack of awareness of Spanish women's humor is an invalidation of women's perception and experiences, representing a loss of power and meaning that needs to be rectified (Sheppard 48-49).

In writing and recognizing the uses of humor women are able to rectify that loss of power, validating their own experiences while simultaneously criticizing the other sex. For "The capacity to criticize the other sex" Virginia Woolf proffers, certainly "had its share in deciding women to write novels, for indeed that particular vein of comedy has been but slightly worked and promises great richness" (26-27). Paradoxically, it is women's minority status that has provided women writers with "a vantage point from which to mock the majority culture [. . .]. Since humor often depends on outsiders making fun of insiders, it is very difficult for insiders to discover what is laughable about themselves" (Blacher Cohen 3).

Despite the scant recognition of female humor, I have shown in this study how three post Civil War Spanish women writers--Martín Gaité, Montero and Riera--have nevertheless made use of humor in their works. Lacking a tradition of their own, they have had only male models of literary humor upon which to call. And although some overlap between male and female humor is to be expected, women's humor has its own patterns. Many of the common attributes of male humor, for example, are less evident or even absent in that of women. Due to their subordinate position, women had to express frustration and anger at gender-based

inequities obliquely (Walker and Dresner xxi-xxii). Forced to be covert and indirect, their humor tended to rely more on verbal devices such as understatement, irony, and self-deprecation, rather than on the verbal duels, wordplay, wise-cracking and practical jokes that men would utilize (Dresner 151). Therefore, to understand women's writing more fully, it is important to recognize that there are gender differences in humor, leading to sexual differences in humor appreciation and differences in sexual humor appreciation. Feminism, for instance, seems to be increasingly tied to humor (Barreca, *Snow White* 85). This is because, Barreca explains, "nearly all women's humor is in some way feminist humor [. . .] because you're offering some sort of challenge to the system. You're taking on a new perspective, offering your statement or question when the system would encourage you to be silent" (182). And while it works differently from men's, "there is no doubt that women's humor certainly works for women" (194).

The humor I have uncovered reflects the different world of Spanish women--a world a little apart from that of the dominant culture. Affected by the same pressures of the marketplace as male writers, these Spanish women authors have tended to use many of the same devices and trends in their humor as men, but their humor has focused on women's roles and lives, concentrating on areas and activities that were of interest to them and with which they were familiar. Many of the absurdities, inconsistencies and hypocrisies during the Franco years that Martín Gaité's recollects address those that affected the lives of young women not covered in men's writing. Alert to the conventions that limited women's lives such as those that discouraged higher education and channeled

women solely into marriage, the author puts a particularly feminine slant on the much-dreaded Servicio Social required by the Sección Femenina of the Franco regime. She also attacks the role models put forth as part of the Franco regime's propaganda for young women, such as the severe Queen Isabela, the blank and passive Carmen Franco and the submissive, altruistic Pilar de Rivera. Concerned with the effects of its stereotypes of dependent women on young girls, Martín Gaité parodies the "novela rosa" and its language in *El cuarto de atrás*. While many of the experiences that form the basis of her humor in the two works are those of growing up female during and after the Spanish Civil War, her sardonic jabs at various facets of Spanish society incorporate not only the domestic sphere but the public sphere as well. She mocks conventions, attitudes and policies that affected both men and women, particularly those that fostered the insincere communication between them that led to many unhappy marriages and those that served to limit women's lives. Her personal approach attacking the attitudes and often pitiless propagandistic rhetoric employed against prostitution, poverty and disease results in a humane perspective that is distinctly female.

Montero's themes are also closely linked with the feminine condition. She documents the existing machismo of the patriarchy and the distance it has caused between the two sexes. As women of her generation increasingly occupied the workplace, Montero encompassed more of the public sphere in her writing than Martín Gaité, with her humor focusing on the newspaper publishing world and its over-ambitious, insecure male managers as well as on heterosexual relationships. There is an increasing consciousness of her condition as woman evident in her

disappointment in the roles women were socialized to play and in the lack of appreciation for women's domestic labor. And although she mocks and ridicules the medical profession, Montero's attacks are basically aimed at the inept, patronizing male gynecologists with which so many Spanish women have had to deal.

Riera centers her theme on personal relationships, in which the male-female relationship is problematic and the female-female friendship is supportive and empowering. This close, intimate look at the details of female friendship is new in Spanish literature, as it has not been a topic of interest to male writers in the past. Socialized to become a supporting and self-sacrificing nourisher of male enterprise, Angela ironizes over her own behavior. She makes fun of her mythification of male writers and her girlhood desire to marry one and nurture his career. Her subsequent breakup and direction of her energies to her own rather than to men's writing constitute a subtle attack against submissive female roles. While the theme is centered on a personal relationship, the scope of the novel touches by necessity upon the public sphere of the world of literature, professional writers and their conferences.

Noticeable in the writing of these female authors is the use of portrayals of women's lives as a basis for much of their humor. The humor, however, is not based on the misogynistic, denigrating portrayals of women that have appeared in men's humor in the past. Instead of appearing as the nag, the gossip, or the bimbo, their women characters are portrayed realistically, contradicting stereotypes and challenging old assumptions. They are presented as neither morally or

psychologically superior nor intellectually inferior to men. At times they are allowed to be just as confused as their male counterparts. And while their female characters are not shown as being overly emotional, they are permitted to demonstrate anger, especially justified anger, in place of polite smiles. In *El cuarto de atrás*, Martín Gaité juxtaposes the female protagonist that resembles the author even down to her name with parodied characters from romance novels. Like Martín Gaité, the main female character is a divorced single parent working as an author while supporting her daughter. The true or close to true life experiences that the author remembers of growing up female during the Franco years are the source of much of the irony. In *Los usos amorosos de la postguerra española*, she includes herself among a generation of young women whose real life memories she recounts. Her recollection of the events and conventions that affected their daily lives provides the basis for much of the irony and humorous comments.

In *La crónica del desamor*, the main female characters, like the one in Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás*, are divorced single parents struggling to survive in a patriarchal world. Just as in real life, those struggles at times provoke anger. Montero's Ana becomes angry with a persistent male caller, only to be embarrassed when her exasperation is taken out on her girlfriend who innocently happens to call at the wrong time. Encounters with the medical profession motivate Candela, Elena and Ana as well as the narrator to express anger in mordant irony. To render more authentically women's experiences and views of life into fiction, the authors endowed their characters with sexuality as well as

anger. Montero's Ana in the final scene with her boss in *La crónica del desamor* is ironic as the sexual act is described in an emotionless, perfunctory way from a woman's perspective for the first time. Riera's protagonist in *Cuestión de amor propio* is also divorced. She is looking for love and, far from being presented as the perfect character, is sometimes portrayed as angry, mentally confused and depressed. The resultant trials and tribulations of her personal love relationship are the motivation for the joke that is to be carried out.

In these writings, the women show signs of awareness of connectedness to other women, directing their attacks especially at powerful men, questioning their authority and power as moral determiners of policy. Martín Gaité, addressing *Los usos amorosos de la postguerra española* to Spanish mothers, takes a less than reverent approach towards males bolstered by the patriarchal system, such as Spain's Franco and even the Pope. Just as female characters are portrayed more authentically in their writing, so are male characters. Unlike the men in the romance novels, Montero's male character, César of *Amado amo*, is one whose role is often lived by females. He is a true-to-character male from the female perspective, in no way spared from the wrath of his creator. Soto Amón, the boss in *La crónica del desamor*, is lowered from his pedestal as he is revealed through his empty gestures of love-making to be insecure, fragile, and immature. Riera's novella is basically a letter from one woman addressed to another woman designed to convince her to help castigate a popular male writer whose faults and wrongdoing are suffered by the letter writer.

Since women had to express irritation and resentment at gender-based discrimination circuitously, due to their subordinate position, particularly in the early post Franco years, their humor tended towards irony as a mode of expression. Their humor was less aggressive and hostile than men's, and their language and tone reflected their audience as well as the cultural norms established by their gender role. When compared to the acerbic parody and satire of one of her literary predecessors, Martín-Santos, a less overtly bitter style becomes particularly evident in Martín Gaité's writing as evidenced in her use of irony and subtle understatement.

Feminist humor encodes an important message about women's relation to the dominant ideology (Bilger 33). We can gauge the state of feminist reprisal, Bilger suggests, by the ease and various means with which female polemicists summoned up laughter to combat male hegemony (40). In the eighties, as the feminist consciousness grew, women authors began to find their own voice. Greater freedom for women, which contributed to the battle between the sexes, was also reflected in their humor, which became more overt and aggressive. Women's disenchantment was now expressed through biting irony. And as gender equity became more permitted in society, more barriers were broken. Taboo areas of female experience were described as sexual subject matter and language came to be gradually included in women's humoristic writing. This change is reflected in the works of Montero and Riera.

In Montero, grotesque and scatological humor appears for the first time in women's narrative writing--something new in women's humor. The aging anti-

hero of *Amado amo* is described in unflattering physical terms, down to the grey hairs he discovers in his genital area. He provides comic relief for the secretaries watching across the way as he saunters around his apartment naked. In *Crónica del desamor*, black humor is used in conjunction with the suicide scene and the grotesque scandal scene in the café where a male character spews the onlookers with his blood. Riera's humor is also dark as she gleefully contemplates the downfall of her ex-lover due to the sinister joke she is about to orchestrate against him.

Throughout literary history, humor has often provided those on the margins of society a means with which to articulate and resist abuse and injustice. One problem that has been pointed out in recognizing women's humor is that it is often not read as subversive as it really is. It has been suggested that what appears in their writing to be submission to the stereotypes of mother, housewife, or bimbo as manifested in the female characters they create is often a thinly veiled indictment of the society that trivializes a woman's life. They may not always be making a joke per se, but by simply emphasizing the sorts of situations in which women find themselves, "they are uncovering and therefore making humorous an unreasonable arrangement" (Barreca, *Snow White* 185-86). With a framework of gender differences in humor that accounts for different tastes, means and ends to which humor can be applied, along with feminist contextual criticism that allows us to foreground gender differences, I have analyzed the humor that was not recognized in these Spanish women's postwar works, validating their perceptions and experiences and thus restoring their true perspective and reaction to past

events. As we look to the twentieth century and beyond where male and female spheres are becoming increasingly the same, by examining women's changing perceptions of themselves and of men as reflected in their literature, we can validate the new perceptions and experiences of women as their roles continue to evolve and change.

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Vita

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