

THE NOVELS OF ROSA MONTERO

DISSERTATION

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By

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To My Husband

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ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Crónica</u>	<u>Crónica del desamor</u>
<u>Función</u>	<u>La función delta</u>
<u>Te trataré</u>	<u>Te trataré como a una reina</u>

INTRODUCTION

I. THE SPANISH NOVEL OF THE LAST DECADES

In 1979 Rosa Montero published her first novel, Crónica del desamor. For Montero, already a widely-known and successful journalist, the year 1979 signals the beginning of a very productive career as a novelist. However for Spain, it signals the closing of a very difficult decade that saw not only the death of its long-time authoritarian ruler, but also some of the most difficult moments of the transition from dictatorship to democracy, which entailed profound political, social, and cultural changes, and that would not be completed until 1982.¹

On November 20, 1975, General Francisco Franco died, thus officially ending almost four decades of autocratic rule. In the immediately following years, many observers considered the

¹The choice of 1982 rather than the commonly mentioned 1981 as the end of the transition is based on the literary and historical arguments of Santos Alonso in his book La novela en la Transición. Alonso points out that on a historical level, "no se puede afirmar con claridad que la transición haya terminado si sigue hablándose de 'democracia vigilada' y del juicio por los sucesos del 23 de febrero de 1981" (7). On the literary level Alonso notes that, "durante 1981 han aparecido numerosas novelas españolas, algunas de las cuales representan un paso importante para el encuentro de una identidad madura y propia" (7).

death of the dictator and the subsequent political changes engendered by it to be the starting point of a rupture with the past, a signal of a new political renaissance in Spain.

During the first few years the opinions regarding the immediate future of cultural production ranged from extreme optimism to the opposite pole of excessive pessimism, these positions often determined by one's political interests. Some literary critics in particular optimistically considered the events of 1975 as a watershed that would correspondingly be reflected posthaste in the literary trajectory.

On the immediate level, there was a great expectation that with the end of the regime and its repressive mechanisms, censorship principal among them, all the works whose creation or publication had been impeded, or made impossible by the regime would suddenly come to light. The appearance of authors who had been unable or unwilling to write under these conditions was eagerly anticipated. Unfortunately, this ingenuous desire soon proved to be a fallacy. There were no great works hidden away in nightstand drawers just waiting for the end of the regime to be published. As critics came to realize, the course of literature during the years of transition, except for a few exceptions, did not vary dramatically from that produced before 1975.

This does not at all negate the validity of the idea of a possible correspondence between sociopolitical changes and changes in the mental structures of authors, and hence the

literary product. Indeed, regarding the trajectory of the Spanish novel in particular many critics, among them Gonzalo Sobejano and Santos Alonso, support the idea that the sociopolitical changes engendered by the change of regime do become manifest in the narrative production (Sobejano, "Ante la novela" 13; Alonso 7). However, these changes needed more time to gestate than earlier anticipated by optimistic literary observers. By the early eighties, with the advantage of the perspective afforded by the passing of time, what critics began to call into question was viewing the events of the year 1975 as a definitive rupture with the past. One example of this stance is reflected in the declarations of Luis Suñén:

La evolución de la literatura española no tendrá como jalón fundamental la muerte de Franco y la consiguiente liberalización política del país. Y no la tendrá, entre otras cosas, porque sería engañarse pensar que con la desaparición de la censura se produce un nunc caepit [sic] que cada escritor puede aplicarse a sí mismo independientemente del estado de su propia obra, haciendo tábula rasa del pasado histórico y de su realidad estética. (5)

If in the political arena there was no rupture, but rather an evolution of political forms that had in all reality started before the events of 1975, might not the same hold true for

the course of literature? If so, then to what point must one go back in order to fully understand the changes observed in the literary production of the past decade?

These questions have been much debated by literary critics in recent years. The answers vary from critic to critic as well as from genre to genre. With regard to the first question, in recent conferences and articles critics almost unanimously concur that in the case of the novel, the post-Franco novelistic production is the result of an evolution, and not a rupture, of novels written during the regime.² This stance, as we shall see, is based on analyses of the principal novelistic trends of the past decade and a half, and reinforced by an analogous sociopolitical trajectory.

The unsettled question has been to what point must one go back in order to comprehend this evolution. Should one, as María Elena Bravo suggests, consider the post-Franco novel as:

...una etapa de maduración de tendencias que han ido apareciendo a lo largo de un proceso que arranca de la actitud ante la novela de los escritores del noventa y ocho y ... a partir del final de la Guerra Civil. (1)

It is clear that the trajectory of the Spanish novel reveals two primary tendencies: one that relates a subjective

²For further information regarding this position see cited critics Alonso (7), Amell (185), Bravo (24), Mainer ("Poderes" 17-18), and Soldevila-Durante (49).

perspective on intemporal problems with a preoccupation for form and verbal expression; and another that centers on the reality of its period which is generally conveyed through a more transparent structure and mode of expression.

It has become a common place to remark that in the decades following the Civil War, especially in the late fifties and the early sixties, due to a series of literary and extra-literary conditions it was the novel that drew from the longstanding Spanish literary tradition of realism that predominated. However, in the mid to late sixties the trajectory of the novel began to mark a different course; and while an understanding of the development of the novel since the turn of the century, and especially since the Civil War, is essential for the apprehension of the evolution of the post-Franco novel, if the primary desire is to explore the immediate bases for the evolution of the genre during this period it is necessary to consider at some length the events, literary and extra-literary, that occur during the time frame that precedes and leads up to the transition.

In an article entitled "1975-1985: The Powers of the Past," José Carlos Mainer asserts that while the death of Franco was significant, officially symbolizing the end of the regime, in reality the perpetuation of the Franco government had already been seriously called into question on various fronts several years earlier. Among other events the 1972 economic crisis and the assassination of Carrero Blanco in

November of 1973 both critically unsettled the regime. On a social level, Mainer points to the signs of the beginnings of a mass consumer society in the late sixties that would change not only Spaniards' general consumption habits, cultural included, but their expectations as well.

It is on the cultural level where Mainer, and other critics, believe that the end of Francoism was most clearly anticipated. As previously indicated, this anticipation, which on a literary level takes the shape of significant changes in aspects such as structure, content, and verbal expression, does not occur at the same moment, nor to the same degree in all the genres.

In poetry for example, many critics point to the publication of the anthology Nueve Novísimos in 1970 by José María Castellet as the bench mark of poetic renovation. The nine poets included by Castellet in the anthology symbolized a new direction, a change in mentality from the social poets who had generally linked political ideology to aesthetics hoping to change society with their poetry. The "novísimos" on the other hand had become disillusioned with the power of poetry to effect change, basing instead their renovation on the idea of poetic autonomy, through a renewal of expression and imagination.

The case of the novel is roughly parallel to that of poetry. In the mid to late sixties a questioning of the attitude toward the function of the novel begins to surface.

The dominant novelistic tendency prior to that period had been the social realist novel, whose point of origin is commonly centered around 1954 with the publication of three significant works of the tendency: El fulgor y la sangre by Ignacio Aldecoa, Los bravos by Jesús Fernández Santos, and Juegos de manos by Juan Goytisolo (Sobejano, Novela española 312). With the passage of time, various trends within the social novel itself became apparent, as well as differing degrees of political commitment in the authors. The predominant tendency promoted a social realism tied closely to social and political intentions. These were conveyed primarily by the thematic aspect of the novel whose primary function was to reveal or comment upon the state of the situation in Spain. In order to emphasize the themes, formal aspects such as structure, time, and space were often simplified. In the case of some practitioners of the social novel (Antonio Ferrer, Jesús López Pacheco, Armando López Salinas) the subordination of these aspects became quite notable, resulting at times in Manichean characterization, overly simplified plots, and poor language. However, despite the social novel's frequently-signaled, and negatively-valued esthetic quality, as Sanz Villanueva points out, "no faltan títulos de cuidadosa organización y de muy esmerado estilo" (120).

Nonetheless, by the mid-sixties, as José María Martínez Cachero points out, the situation of the social novel had

reached a point that could be summarized in the following terms:

...se llegó [la novel social] así a un estado de repetición y de cansancio, a una repulsa generalizada incluso en boca de partidarios a ultranza tiempo atrás y, en casi todos, al convencimiento de que era necesario y urgente encontrar una salida. (258)

The response to the malaise of the social novel took its motivation for reform from several fronts, not the least of which, as seen above, was the social novel itself. The stability of the Francoist regime in the mid sixties made the literary community recognize that the idealized goals of the social novel, among which stood out the desire for a literature that would combat political and social inequities, were not materializing. This in turn led to disenchantment and calls for reform. Many of those who had previously championed the social novel, like critic Castellet and editor Carlos Barral, became among its most notorious detractors (Barral 41-42; Castellet 4-5). The recriminations even reached the point of the pejorative labeling of the social realist novelists, for example the well-known nickname given by Santos Fontenla, "Generación de la berza."

Through the sixties as the dissatisfaction with the social novel was growing, and the search for new novelistic directions was surging, the normally restricted literary

market of "quality" foreign novels was engulfed in a wave of hispano-american novels, that came to be known as the "boom." These novels, such as Mario Vargas Llosa's La ciudad y los perros (1962), Guillermo Cabrera Infante's Tres tristes tigres (1964), Carlos Fuentes's Cambio de piel (1967), and Gabriel García Márquez's Cien años de soledad (1967), were characterized by a verbal and thematic freedom not enjoyed by their Spanish counterparts. In conjunction with the employment of a non-schematic social criticism, the hispano-american novelists made freer use of the imagination to portray a more inclusive view of human reality. In addition, their unfettered contact with literary tendencies in other countries allowed them to be technically up to date.

The impact of the "boom" novels in Spanish literary circles can be observed in the frequency with which they were awarded literary prizes in the late sixties and early seventies. Beginning in 1962 with the awarding of Seix Barral's "Biblioteca Breve," the traditional prize of the social novel, to Vargas Llosa's La ciudad y los perros, hispano-american novelists were frequent winners and finalists. This culminated in the years from 1970 to 1974 when they received a total of seven major awards: two "Planeta", one "Alfaguara", one "Biblioteca Breve", one "Barral", one "Nadal", and one "Gabriel Miró" (Martínez Cachero 278). Yet despite the appreciative, and in the early years overwhelmingly positive reception (much to the detriment

of Spanish novelists), of hispano-american narrative by a large sector of the Spanish literary community, it did have some vocal detractors who claimed that its popularity was due to, among other things, editorial maneuvers (Martínez Cachero 274-281).

By the mid-seventies the enormous popularity enjoyed by hispano-american novels had leveled off, as well as the controversies surrounding them. On the whole, the balance of their impact on the Spanish narrative was positive. Their beneficial effect as a stimulus for those sectors of the Spanish novel that had stagnated far outweighed the reactionary comments and debates, and servile imitations they inadvertently inspired.

It is curious to note that one of the peculiarities concerning the debate on the excellence of the "boom" novels versus that of Spanish novels is that it generally involved, as previously signaled, a comparison with the social realist novel of the fifties and the sixties; as if this were the only type of novel being written at that juncture. Admittedly the social realist novel dominated the panorama in the early to mid-sixties, but it was not the only tendency, nor was it the most modern one.

As the decade progressed, the growing, or continued presence of other tendencies had to be taken into consideration. As suggested by Martínez Cachero, in general terms these tendencies can be grouped into three, not

including the social novel, principal directions: the traditional novel; the novel of renovation; and the experimental novel (342-377).

Although not the most fashionable nor the most appreciated by the critics, a traditional type of novel with its roots in the pre-Civil War, Barojian style narrative was still being written and was quite popular, as it had been previously, with the general public. This type of narrative sprung from a realist base that put more emphasis on the story than on the technique, as did the social novel, but differed in content and focus from the latter. Its story line was generally linear, with few digressions, and the structure and expression were not the objects of experimentation, but rather served in function of the content, facilitating comprehension and communication more than emphasizing aesthetical aspects. Authors such as José María Gironella, Angel María de Lera, and Juan Antonio de Zunzunegui are representative of this narrative direction which continued into the decade of the seventies, and that ultimately played a role in the narrative of the eighties as seen in the latter's frequent return to the use of traditional recourses and emphasis on the realism-based argumental narration.

A somewhat less popular option with the general public, but more appreciated by the critics, is the novel of renovation, which is considered in this work in a less restricted sense than that proposed by Martínez Cachero:

...se refiere solamente a aquellos [novelists] que tiempo atrás practicaron el social-realismo y que, llegados el agotamiento de la tendencia y el cansancio producido por su práctica, decidieron cambiar -renovarse para no perecer-, aunque no fuese más que en la apariencia expresiva. (359)

Here, the novel of renovation includes those authors that, even if they were not practitioners themselves of the social novel, continue in a broad sense its thematic objectives but renovate the means of conveyance: technique, language, and structure.

The first representative novel of this direction came in 1962 with Martín Santos's Tiempo de silencio. The underpinnings of the novel are of a traditional nature and characteristic of the social novel. Although the background for the novel springs from a specific historical, political, and social reality, Spain of the late forties, the main character is reminiscent, as both Mainer (Introduction 11) and Fernando Morán (386) have signaled, of certain Barojian characters like Fernando Ossorio from Camino de perfección, and more specifically Andrés Hurtado from El árbol de la ciencia. Through the analysis of the protagonist's personality Martín Santos delves not only into the confused, depressive, and paralyzed character of this individual, but also reveals his relationship with the society that surrounds him. As in the social novel this partially represented

society is viewed with a highly critical eye, and although the secondary characters are clearly individualized, to a limited extent they represent and constitute a certain sense of collectivity.

However, Martín Santos's focus is not the typical social novel's schematic confrontation between "evil" and "good," but rather the dialectic between the individual and his reality, and the abolition not of a certain societal class or structure but rather its myths. As Mainer points out in the introduction to Tiempo de destrucción:

El novelista persevera en la convicción de que el relato se ha de plantear *desde* el análisis de una personalidad y *hacia* su triunfo o su pacto con la realidad que la condiciona; apunta la convicción de que su objetivo se cifra en la destrucción de los mitos inmovilizantes -edipismos, complejos de culpa, tradiciones- y la reconstrucción de una convivencia que sus personajes -tan locuaces como mutuamente incomunicados- tienen imposibilitada.

(18-19)

While the testimonial and critical aspects of the novel are traditional, the method of expression and its resultants are quite innovative for Spanish narrative of the period. Martín Santos incorporates experimental techniques such as interior monologue and the second person narrative with an incredibly rich, cultivated, baroque-like language that

includes a variety of levels of expression, from the scientific to the vulgar to the elite. The literary allusions are just as rich and varied as the language, which when coupled with the aforementioned, an omniscient narrator, and a subjective perspective that goes beyond the objectivism of the social novel, result in a panoramic, non-limiting interpretation of Spanish society.

Although acknowledged in later years as a turning point in Spanish narrative, Tiempo de silencio's great renovative import was not immediately assimilated. It was not until 1966 and the publication of three key novels of this direction, Cinco horas con Mario by Miguel Delibes, Señas de identidad by Juan Goytisolo, and Ultimas tardes con Teresa by Juan Marsé, that the novel of renovation truly triumphed.³ As in Tiempo de silencio, the novelists of this tendency demonstrated an enthusiasm for the renovation of formal elements of the novel while maintaining certain aspects of the thematic objectives of the social novel. This is evidenced in the heightened artistic concern for linguistic renewal and structural complexity which served, not as an experiment in formalism per se, but rather to better express a more complex and global vision of the Spanish society.

³Not all critics agree upon the extent of influence exercised by Tiempo de silencio. See for example Amell's discussion of this with regard to Ultimas tardes con Teresa in La narrativa de Juan Marsé (57-59).

Although there is a varying degree of formal preoccupation in the authors of the novel of renovation, for the authors of the experimental tendency this was the foremost interest. Their concept of the novel differed radically from their aforementioned counterparts. They advocated what was considered by many to be an anti-novel. Not only were formal aspects of more importance than content, but the story line of the latter was often barely developed or non-existent. Traditional elements such as time, space, and characterization also underwent massive transformations, while the use and experimentation with technical aspects, such as interior monologue, counterpoint, multiple points of view, and narration in the second person, was greatly expanded.

In some cases the emphasis on formalism went to the extreme of experimentation for its own sake where language or punctuation became the protagonists, much to the dismay of many readers who had already found the novels of this tendency to be hermetic and difficult to read. Despite the facilitating effects of Francoist censorship, the praises of a select minority, and a concerted promotional effort on the part of certain publishing houses, the experimental novel that had begun in the late sixties as a response/solution to other novelistic directions, principally the social novel, was no longer of great interest by 1975.

Just as the novel of the early seventies was struggling to find an adequate direction so was Spanish society. During

the period in question Spain was undergoing great political, social, and cultural changes. The somewhat limited opening of the Spanish borders to foreign influences initiated in the early sixties had tremendous repercussions on the society as a whole. Contact with Western Europe, principally through Spanish "guest workers" into the Common Market countries, incoming tourism, and travel, produced expectations incompatible with an authoritarian regime, and this desire for change was becoming less patient and more radicalized in sectors like the artists, the intellectuals, the university students, among the political opposition, and in areas such as Catalonia and the Basque provinces where regional problems came into play.

This limited openness was also applicable to certain aspects of the literary scene. In the early sixties the Ministry of Information under Manuel Fraga Iribarne began to let appear previously forbidden Marxist literature by such authors as Marx or Che Guevara in Spanish bookstores. Official government censorship, which was not to end until 1976, was also modified. The Media Bill proposed by Fraga and made law in 1966 changed the focus of censorship from moral issues to that of criticism of the regime. In addition, the official processes of censorship were altered, the submission of a work to censorship prior to publication was not longer required, but if it were not submitted then the responsibility for the "correctness" or non-subversiveness of the work fell to both the author and the publisher. The ramifications of

this new policy were legal as well as economic. If a work was suspected of being unsuitable it was confiscated as evidence, which meant immediate monetary losses to the publisher, and both the author and publisher were subsequently subject to prosecution. Hence, on the surface while this caused the appearance of greater openness, in reality it only encouraged writers to continue their literature of allusion.

The myriad political, social, and cultural restrictions imposed by the Francoist regime, coupled with numerous sectors of the Spanish society's resentment of them, lead to an increasing politicalization of these sectors. After almost four decades of authoritarian rule, when the end of the regime finally occurred, Spaniards were eager to explore that which had been forbidden to them; principally politics and sex. As Raymond Carr and Juan Pablo Fusi point out:

The 1976 publishing boom flooded bookshops with books and pamphlets committed in politics but often poor in quality. Weekly magazines have discovered the market value of a combination of oppositional politics and formerly forbidden sex: full frontal nudes accompany leading articles by prominent politicians. (132)

These interests, especially that regarding Spain's immediate political past, lead to a situation that was not favorable for the novel. Due to prior disinformation and distortion of the truth, an inquisitive public now clamored for works related to

the recent political events, informative texts such as (auto)biographies and interviews with political figures, political or sociological essays, etc. (Soldevila 50-51).

Exacerbating the situation of the novel was the position of the publishing houses. Because of the economic crisis of the mid-seventies that had affected almost all sectors of the economy, the publishing industry included, what was published after 1975 was only that which had guaranteed sales or low production costs. This meant on the one hand that demanded by the public, as previously mentioned, and established authors with a significant reading public. On the other it included nineteenth century and classical authors to whom no copyright is paid. Among the first casualties of this editorial policy were evidently new writers who had of yet to develop adherents, and those who wrote for a minority, such as the experimental authors.

The prevalent tone of the immediate post-Franco narrative was one of disenchantment. This was precipitated by several factors, among them the previously mentioned lack of reader response to fiction and limited editorial possibilities, and the additional impediment of what Santos Sanz Villanueva terms a general "desnortamiento" among writers themselves (48). This was due in part to the lack of a tradition of creative freedom, and compounded by the frustration of the inability of the experimental novel to solve the narrative impasse of the sixties; both of which lead novelists to continue searching

for a direction that would adequately express the new situation of political and social, as well as, artistic liberty.

This is not to say that the experimental novel in particular, nor the other prevalent narrative tendencies of the late sixties and early seventies, were of no consequence to subsequent Spanish narrative. On the contrary, many techniques introduced in these novels appear in later narrative. Case in point is the novel considered by many critics to signify the end of the post-war novel, La verdad sobre el caso Savolta (1975) by Eduardo Mendoza. This single novel encapsulates several important tendencies of the first decade of post-Franco narrative.

As already noted, the experimental novel was in a decline by the mid-seventies, but its impact on Spanish narrative was still apparent in the adoption and incorporation of selected experimental techniques into the novels of the transition. La verdad sobre el caso Savolta is representative of this process of technical modernization. Mendoza incorporates some experimental techniques such as counterpoint, and spacial and temporal changes, while eschewing others like interior monologue and labyrinthic structures. However, this incorporation is not gratuitous but rather at the service of the story, which brings us to the foremost commonality of a great number of the various post-Franco novelistic directions: the return to the pleasure of telling a story.

While there continued to be a notable group of novelists favored by the critics that were producing a discursive, experimental, or metaliterary narrative, like Juan Benet, Juan and Luis Goytisolo, and Esther Tusquets, the quickest growing direction was that of a return to the objective, argumental narrative anchored in some type of realism, be it everyday, fantastic, mythic, rural, etc. These novels tended to recuperate traditional recourses like caricature, dialogue, humor, irony, and parody, that were teamed with a more careful and varied verbal expression, legacy of the experimental period. This combination functioned at the service of the argument, the telling of the story, as in La verdad sobre el caso Savolta (Alonso 12-15).

Also evidenced prophetically in this novel was the heterogeneity of tendencies that would appear in the novel of the transition. Given the official artistic freedom of the new political situation, authors no longer felt obliged to follow a certain schema, such as opposition to the regime, and were able to explore different avenues that they hoped would more adequately express the society of the period. Some of the more prevalent tendencies were the action/adventure novel, the chronicle, the detective/intrigue novel, the erotic novel, the historical novel, and the novel of memory, both collective and individual.

This last modality is of particular interest because it often falls into the longstanding category of novels that deal

with the Civil War and the difficult post-war period. Obviously, during the regime these novels were severely restricted as to content and perspective. Those that were written from a critical perspective had to resort to a series of allusions and symbols that were often structured to imply a sense of collectivity. The post-Franco novel, on the other hand, that deals with the period has been quite different. Evidently it is not constrained by the agenda of its predecessors, and the great temporal distance separating many of its authors from the era results in a distinct perspective. As Sanz Villanueva points out:

...ya no se trata de un conflicto atravesado por la ideología, sino que es una referencia que pertenece no al campo de las vivencias o de los enjuiciamientos, sino al de los mitos. (3-4)

The intention is often to demythicize the past, or to explain the present, through an examination of the historical roots from the perspective of the collective and/or particular memory. The latter frequently lends itself to a subjective or intimist bent in the narrative tone, which in turn often leads to the questioning of the very idea of identity and reality.⁴

Another aspect that has benefitted from the greater novelistic liberty is that of a more extensive incorporation of imagination, fantasy, and myth. Since the novel no longer

⁴For further information on the relationship between the individual and history see Jo Labanyi, Myth and History in the Contemporary Spanish Novel, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).

feels the need to be a substitute for the press or to limit itself to portraying a suppressed reality, it is free to explore hereto infrequently touched avenues. Incorporated into a base of reality, these elements generally serve to open up a new level of comprehension into the universal human condition. An excellent example of this is Luis Mateo Díez's La fuente de la edad (1982), that incorporates intriguing examples of the above into a realist, traditionally structured narration that depicts the post-war years from a perspective quite different from that of social realism.

During the years of transition, all of these novelistic directions were struggling to establish themselves, and the predominance of one over the others was never unanimously recognized. Some critics, such as Sobejano, believe that the "meta-novel" and the "culturalist" or "escriptive" novel have dominated ("Novela y metanovela" 4),⁵ but the majority of critics (Alonso, Amell, Martínez Cachero, Sanz Villanueva) consider that it is increasingly the novel that returns to the telling of a tale that has triumphed, although the particular focus of the tale, as pointed out, is quite heterogeneous. This can be observed in the novels of recent years, and especially among the latest generation of writers - those born in the forties and the fifties - such as Eduardo Mendoza

⁵Sobejano expands upon these same ideas in his article "La novela ensimismada (1980-1985)."

(1943), Soledad Puértolas (1947), Rosa Montero (1951), Antonio Muñoz Molina (1956), etc.

Although the novels of this generation are quite varied, ranging from historical to lyrical to detective to name a few, the story line is generally what is predominant, although these novels are not extent of all formal experimentation. And while the argument of the narration is very important, a great amount of attention is paid to dominating the technical aspects of the novel and maintaining a high quality of expression.

Unlike their predecessors, these novelists, who are writing under a very different political and social climate, do not tend to center around one or two major tendencies but rather exhibit a greater freedom to choose what and how to write. The point of view within the narration often reflects this, tending more toward the perspective of an individual, and not a collectivity, who serves to represent both the particular and the universal human experience. This perspective is perceived as more in tune with our present, post-modern, fragmented, and dehumanized society. These novels often convey a sense of the insecurity and randomness of existence, and the need to delve into not only our immediate reality but our continuous one as well in order to find some semblance of personal cohesion and stability.

To even the casual observer, it is apparent that the present day writers' adequation of the perceived needs of

society to the narrative produced has evolved over the past quarter century. Today's Spanish narrative has its roots in yesterday's, and its evolution has been a result not only of the changes in the literary trajectory itself, but also the enormous changes within the Spanish society.

II. ROSA MONTERO

The five novels of Rosa Montero that are the subject of this work⁶, as we shall see, fall within the general tendencies of the post-Franco novel described in the preceding section. Of the authors writing during this period, Montero belongs chronologically to the younger group of authors who were born in the mid forties and early to mid fifties and who began to be published toward the end of the regime and during the transition.

Montero herself was born January 3, 1951 in the Madrid neighborhood of Cuatro Caminos. At the time of her birth Montero's father was a novillero, an aspiring bullfighter, who later became a matador, exercising his art until he retired when his daughter was five. Although her father was politically a conservative, Montero's mother on the other hand was from a Republican family. Montero has stated that while growing up this political dichotomy in her family did not affect her because her mother always deferred to her father in these matters, and as with most adolescents of the period her political conscious was not developed; something that would not occur until she entered the university.

⁶The novels that will be studied are Crónica del desamor (1979), La función delta (1981), Te trataré como a una reina (1983), Amado amo (1988), and Temblor (1990). This study does not include El nido de los sueños (1991), a child's story, nor Bella y oscura (1993), which was published close to the termination of this work.

Of greater influence during her childhood was her health, which was not good. Montero contracted tuberculosis and anemia at the age of five and was unable to return to school until the age of nine. Confined to bed and unable to interact with other children of own her age during her illness (her only sibling was a brother five years older), Montero read voraciously. The books that she devoured did not come from her immediate family, who were lower-middle class and had few books in the home, but rather from an uncle with a large collection who would bring her an armful of books each week. These first contacts with the world of fiction were not children's books but rather books for adults, and ranged in content from westerns and detective fiction, to love stories. It was around the age of seven or eight that she began to write stories as a means of amusing herself. Montero explains that each day she would begin a new story, which might be of adventures, crimes, or a western, and would write several pages, never finishing one story completely before starting another the following day. Because of her isolation the young Montero believed that writing in this fashion was a normal childhood activity, and it wasn't until she returned to school that she realized that the other children her age did not "play" this same game. She quickly learned that society did not view writing as she did. As Montero herself states:

Entonces vi que lo de escribir era una cosa rara,
observada por la sociedad con ciertas mayúsculas;

que podía una convertirse en una Escritora, con mayúsculas; en una Artista, Escribir. (Monegal 5)

Although she continued to write stories for several years, her attitude toward the activity had changed, the innocence and pleasure had been replaced by self-criticism and doubt. Montero recalls that by fifteen, overwhelmed by modesty and convinced that she had nothing to say, she tore up all the stories that she had created and stopped writing for her own amusement and pleasure.

Formal education was also a pivotal aspect of the author's childhood. Due to the family's economic situation, when Montero did start to school she went not to a private school, which for girls were often run by nuns during the Francoist period, but rather to a public school that was attended principally by the daughters of the working class. Montero feels that this was decisive in her life because of the conditions under which she learned, and the education she received at that school (Glenn 276).

At the particular public school Montero attended along with three thousand other young girls, there were a very large number of students in each class, around ninety, so there was precious little individual attention. At this young age it was left up to each student to take responsibility for her own learning experience. Because there was no one to check up on the students individually, the result was very empowering for those students, among them Montero, who had interest and paid

attention, and extremely destructive for those who got lost in the crowd and learned nothing. In addition to this lack of guidance, the physical condition of the school was not conducive to learning, the building was old and falling down, and the rooms were too large, overcrowded, and cold.

On the other hand, the teachers at the public schools were very qualified, providing a high quality instruction much superior to the type of instruction offered by the nuns. A clear example of this is that at one point Montero had poet Gerardo Diego as a professor. As a result of her experiences at the public school Montero received not only a good education, but also learned independence and responsibility.

These traits would carry over into her university studies, which Montero began at age seventeen at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid. She initiated her studies in the field of Psychology, but soon became disillusioned. She also considered theater, working with independent theater companies in Madrid for a period, but decided to concentrate on Journalism, the field in which she received her degree from the Escuela Oficial de Periodismo. Montero felt that this area was the most compatible with her writing abilities, her curiosity in the world around her, and her desire for new experiences and travel.

Montero did not wait to graduate to enter the profession. In 1969 after finishing one year of university studies, at the age of eighteen she began collaborating with Informaciones, a

newspaper in Alicante. From that moment on Montero freelanced continuously in a number of newspapers (Arriba, Pueblo, Mundo Diario, etc.) and magazines (Contrastes, Posible, Fotogramas, etc.), at one point working in fourteen different places at the same time because the pay in each was so little. Over the years the hard work invested in the multiple and simultaneous collaborations combined with quality writing and a distinctive style gained her respect and recognition from both her colleagues and the public. This singular style was especially notable in her interviews which were quite popular.

In 1977 when the newspaper El País got started, Montero was asked to collaborate on the Sunday Supplement section, doing a last minute interview with Ana Belén, a popular actress and singer. El País quickly became an enormous success due in part to political timing, its high quality of writing, and the fact that it represented the new image of the country itself. Montero, as well as several other journalists, were propelled to widespread popularity as they too were reflections of this new Spain. In addition to writing articles and interviews for the newspaper, Montero has also been a special envoy to Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe. She was also the editor in chief of the El País Semanal from 1981 to 1982, the first time a Spanish woman has held such a high position in a newspaper.

With the fame has come official recognition in the form of awards such as the "Premio Mundo de Entrevistas" in 1978,

and the "Premio Nacional de Periodismo" in 1980. As a journalist her renown is based in large part on her skill as an interviewer. Her style, which she had to fight to implement, is a departure from that of the typical Spanish newspaper interview. Montero views the interview and its subsequent writing as a mixture of game-playing, theater, and storytelling:

...porque cada uno interpreta su personaje, te pones truquitos, te los quitas, saltas por encima de los obstáculos que te pone el otro, tú intentas poner también y te los derriban siempre... Y luego escribirlo, pues está bien, me gusta hacer de cada entrevistado como un personaje de cuento, de los miles de personajes que tiene cada tío o tía yo escojo uno y procuro hacerlo más o menos de cuento.

(Torres 11)

As a result of this ability Montero has had published two books of her interviews, España para ti para siempre (1976), and Cinco años de país (1982). Both collections of interviews focus on significant public figures of the Francoist period and the immediate following years.

Her celebrity as an interviewer also lead indirectly to the publication of her first novel, Crónica, in 1979. Since then, Montero has had to struggle to find time to dedicate to both writing novels and continuing to work in El País. At the same time she also collaborates on theater and television

projects, such as writing the script for the acclaimed television series "Media naranja." In addition to these activities, the author is frequently called upon to give interviews herself, participate in conferences and symposiums, and give lectures and courses on both journalism and the novel.

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CHAPTER I

CRONICA DEL DESAMOR

The publication of Rosa Montero's first novel, Crónica del desamor, was an enormous public success as evidenced by its more than 20 hardback re-editions, its publication as a paperback in 1994, as well as its translation into several languages.⁷ The good-fortune of Montero's first incursion into the world of fiction writing was surprising considering that she was not established as a novelist, and the publishing firm, Debate, that agreed to publish the book as the first novel in a new series they were just beginning was small and not well-known. As Montero herself relates, Debate's promotional campaign for the novel was very limited; basically through word of mouth (Gazarian-Gautier 210). How was it then that Montero's first novel attracted such a numerous audience over the years?

As pointed out in the introduction, by 1979 Montero was already considered a successful and well-known journalist by both the general public and critics. The principal source of

⁷Crónica has been translated into Danish, English, and Swedish. Successive novels have been translated as well: Función to English; Te trataré to Danish, Dutch, German, Norwegian, and Swedish; Amado amo to German; and Temblor to Danish, Dutch, and German.

this renown was her association with the daily newspaper El País, for which she had been writing exclusively since 1977. As Montero signals, this association was pivotal for her journalistic, and ultimately, novelistic career:

El País tuvo un éxito inmenso, además fue un fenómeno sociológico que daba la imagen del nuevo país. Ayudó y catapultó a una serie de profesionales a la fama, entre ellos a mí, que éramos también imágenes de este nuevo país. Me hice popular, me puse de moda, y ahí estaba Rosa Montero. (Estrada 18)

The aura of popularity that El País lent to its collaborators was anchored in the latter's solid professionalism and quality journalism. Montero was no exception; her well-written articles and editorial columns quickly garnered her the reputation of a sagacious, and often polemic, observer of contemporary Spanish society. But it was the very personal style of her interviews of notable Spanish and international personalities that most contributed to her reputation. Rather than adhere to the traditional question-answer format of interviews proposed by journalism manuals of the period and preferred by the El País editorial staff, Montero conceived of her interviews, as mentioned in the introduction, more as a theatrical experience, with its own rhythm and development, and the interviewee as a literary character to be portrayed. The tremendous success of this

method is illustrated by the wide public following that developed, which in turn became a potential ready-made market for her first novel.

It was this renown that actually lead to her novelistic debut. Montero was asked by an editor at Debate to write a collection of interviews dealing with feminist issues. She was given an advance, but as the months rolled by and the deadline was approaching Montero, who was extremely bored by the prospect of writing more interviews in addition to the "dieciocho mil entrevistas que escribía para El País" (Monegal 6), decided to change the direction of the work:

Estaba ya cerca de la fecha de entrega, me senté a escribir algo y empezó a salirme algo narrativo, que era lo único que me apetecía hacer. Escribí un monstruo, y nunca mejor dicho, porque era horrible, de unos 200 o 300 folios. (Monegal 6)

Montero showed her "monster" to the editor who encouraged her to continue working on what eventually resulted in Crónica.

That the book was successful is also due in part to the moment in which it was published and the types of books being read then. As pointed out in the introduction, after the death of Franco Spaniards were eager to try to reach an understanding of themselves as a people, how they had gotten to where they were, and what they were as a result. They were reading about their past and about the actual moment, centering their interest in historical and political works,

biographies of figures related to the period, chronicles, sociological and political essays, and not a great deal of fiction. In fact, the number of novels published in the first years of the transition was quite lower than the number published before Franco's death. Seen from this perspective Montero's first novel, which, although fictional is also a chronicle about these years, nicely fills this niche.

Another factor that influenced the success of Crónica is the propitious timing of its publication with the beginning of the "boom" in Spain of literature written by women. This surge in women novelists is commonly situated in the late-seventies and early eighties and is as much in debt to sociological factors as to literary ones. Thanks in great part to changes in economical structures and the feminist movement, ideas on the woman's position in Spain had slowly been changing since the sixties. However, it wasn't until after Franco's death that laws were implemented to reflect these changes and to facilitate a greater incorporation of Spanish women into the public sphere in areas such as the work force, politics, the arts, etc. Anti-discriminatory legislation, the right to hold a bank account, inherit property, travel, and the legalization of contraceptives and divorce were just some of the ground-breaking changes.⁸

⁸For further information on the changes in Spanish women's economic, legal, and social position during these years see Claudia Ottolenghi, Women in Spain, Brussels, Commission of the European Communities, 1981.

In the literary world these changes were not only recognized, but exploited as well. Spanish women writers who in general for decades had been frequently excluded or marginally mentioned in anthologies or critical articles were suddenly a much sought after commodity. Much credit can be attributed to the upsurge and, although reluctant, academic recognition of feminist criticism, that in its polemics about women, writing, and the traditional canon has helped lead to an increased sensitivity and a revalorization of the themes often dealt with by women writers.

A reflection of this new critical attention can be seen in the number of monographic issues dedicated to women novelists in journals in Spain and the United States such as Litoral (167-170, 1986) and ALEC (12, 1987). Another example of this interest are more anthologies dedicated to women writers, such as the anthology published by Ymelda Navajo, Doce relatos de mujeres (1982), that contains short stories by some of Spain's foremost women writers, among them Cristina Fernández Cubas, Marina Mayoral, Lourdes Ortiz, Soledad Puértolas, Esther Tusquets, and Rosa Montero.

On a broader social level, the increased awareness of so-called women's issues has translated into a reading public well-disposed toward literature written by women. This is aided by the fact that the majority of the Spanish reading public is composed of upper middle-class women in their twenties and thirties. Under the auspices of the socialist

government's Instituto de la Mujer, part of the Ministry of Social Affairs, this trend has been recognized and promoted, as seen in grants and awards to women writers. Consequently the publishing houses, who eagerly sensed a profitable new market for the hurting industry, began to push the publication of women writers, especially those of the younger generation. Their success can be gauged concretely by factors such as the frequent awarding of the most important literary prizes to women writers (the Planeta in 1989 to Puertolas's Queda la noche; the Heralde in 1993 to Díaz Más's El sueño de Venecia), the great number of copies of each book sold, and the increased number of publishing houses that now publish numerous women writers.

All of the above mentioned factors helped contribute to, but not determine, the success of Crónica. What did determine the triumph of the novel was its timely content and the easily accessible style in which it was written. Both of these elements are crucial because they served not only to make the novel appealing to a wide sector of the Spanish, and eventually non-Spanish, reading public, but also because they helped draw in "marginal" readers, those that might not ordinarily or only on occasion engage in this activity. The possible reader-identification factor related to the testimony of the trials and tribulations of a group of young, for the most part professional, women in Madrid in the early years following the transition was something that at the moment of

publication, and even today, has had wide appeal among contemporary society, especially among women.

An integral part of the novel's engaging style is its structure. Montero divides the narration into fourteen rather unconventionally connected chapters of unequal length. The unifying thread that links these chapters relies less on the development of a narrative line, which given its weakness has raised the question of if Crónica is really a novel, and more on the relationship between characters.

The protagonist, Ana Antón, is the center of the narrative structure. The first two chapters focus on her, introducing the reader to her world and sketchily presenting the principal themes that will be explored in subsequent chapters. Also intercalated in these first two chapters, and radiating from Ana like spokes on a wheel, are the interpersonal relationships she maintains with friends. After their initial introduction, these friends, either in groups or individually, later protagonize certain segments of the narration. Hence the focus of the chapters alternates between Ana and her story, her interaction with friends, and sections or entire chapters dedicated to the friends themselves. Examples of the latter can be found in chapters three, six, and eleven. The focus of each of these chapters centers on moments in the lives of one of Ana's principal friends. Just as in the chapters that deal with Ana's world, past and present, in these chapters the protagonist becomes a secondary

character such as Elena, Cecilio, or Candela who portrays her/his world.

This particular structure highlights the importance of the secondary characters. By transforming them into protagonists at certain points in the narration and moving Ana to a secondary position it emphasizes the collective nature of protagonism in the novel. This is clearly stated at the very beginning of the novel by the proclamation of Ana's intentions for her yet unwritten book:

Piensa Ana que estaría bien escribir un día algo. Sobre la vida de cada día, claro está. Sobre Juan y ella. Sobre Curro y ella. Sobre la Pulga y Elena. Sobre Ana María, que ha perdido el tren en alguna estación y ahora se consume calladamente en la agonía de saberse vieja e incapaz de. Sobre Julita, muñeca rota tras separarse del marido. Sobre manos babosas, platos para lavar, reducciones de plantilla, orgasmos fingidos, llamadas de teléfono que nunca llegan, paternalismos laborales, diafragmas, caricaturas y ansiedades. Sería el libro de las Anas, de todas y ella misma, tan distinta y tan una. (8-9)

This idea of a collective protagonist is reinforced by the nature of the narrative line of the novel. The latter, as previously noted, when compared to a traditional novelistic structure of a single, or several predominant narrative lines

that evolve as the novel progresses, is not particularly strong. The narrative line of Crónica is encompassed within the actual story time of the novel which spans that of one year, from January to December, during the early years of the transition corresponding probably to 1977 or 1978. During this period, which takes place predominantly in Madrid, we follow Ana through segments of her life revolving principally around family, friends, emotional relationships, and work. Within this framework are also included segments dealing with these areas that are prior to the actual story time that serve to offer important background information.

Of the principal areas of Ana's life, it is her situation at work that most contributes to form a narrative line. The initial presentation of the protagonist by the third person narrator in the lengthy first chapter occurs within her work situation. From the onset it is clear that Ana is in a subordinate position, that her situation as head of a single parent household is made more difficult by her job, and that the image of an independent professional women causes problems in her emotional relationships with men. These problems in turn trigger insecurity on her part, and the relegation on occasions of her professional obligations in order to have a romantic relationship.

The above aspects related to her job are significant because they build the emotional and professional backdrop for the initiation of the narrative line in the second chapter.

Here the specifics of the protagonist's work situation are depicted. Among other things, we are presented with a profile, both professional and emotional, of her bosses in the magazine where Ana works, the structure of power in the firm, and most importantly her position in the hierarchy, around which the narrative line will be constructed. In addition to writing for the magazine we learn that Ana occasionally performs the job of editor as well. Yet despite all her work, her sentiment of being "una más en la revista," and her length of employment, which at this point is only specified as "tanto tiempo," her official position is not one of permanent staff, but rather casual labor.

This situation affects the protagonist tremendously for several reasons, the most important of which being job security. As we have already seen, and as Ana herself declares to her boss: "tengo un hijo a quien mantener, necesito una seguridad" (44). Due to the uncertainty of her position Ana decides to confront her boss with the situation and demand a resolution. The confrontation is revelatory on more than one level, but on that pertaining to the development of the narrative line we learn that Ana is denied her request on the basis that the firm has several rules, one of which states that no one can be considered for permanent incorporation into the staff until the end of the year.

From this point on, throughout the entire novel the specter of her work situation functions as a leitmotif, and

although it is not profoundly developed, it does provide a sense of narrative structure. As months, and chapters, progress the insecurities and hardships caused by her position, such as the lack of a contract insuring employment or wages based on articles printed and not articles written, are continuously enumerated. In the final chapter, which takes place at the end of the year, the culmination of the situation occurs. Quite tellingly, the promised meeting itself concerning her conversion to permanent staff is not enacted, but rather Ana's reaction to its outcome. Her request has been denied on the non-justified grounds that it is simply impossible, although as Ana learns it was very possible to hire three others, all men, as permanent staff. There is a multiple significance to this confrontation, but in relation to the predominant narrative line it signifies its conclusion. After one year and fourteen chapters Ana ends up with the very same working conditions as in the beginning of the narration.

It is evident from this brief summary that the principle narrative line of Crónica is neither complex nor deeply developed. On one hand this may reflect a certain lack of novelistic maturity on the part of a new author, but I tend to believe that it serves to underscore an end already signaled above and stated succinctly in chapter one by the narrator: the notion of collectivity. By not conceding an overwhelming predominance to the narrative line that relates to the

protagonist, the narrative lines associated with the secondary characters achieve more significance, making them more equal in importance to the former. These secondary narrative lines viewed from a traditional novelistic structure as digressions weaken the structure of the novel. But if they are considered once again in relation to the image of the wheel, with Ana's narrative line being the center and the narrative lines of other characters radiating out from her, instead of weakening the structure they contribute to the idea of a collective protagonist. It is not Ana's particular work conditions that are unjust, but rather the discriminatory labor, economic, and social situation of women in general.

As previously noted, the combination of these various narrative lines that make up the argument of the novel are organized structurally around the characters, Ana and her circle of friends and acquaintances. These friends and acquaintances are quite numerous, over one hundred of them appear or are mentioned throughout the text, but not all of them are of equal importance. On an immediate level are Ana's circle of intimate friends: Elena, her sister Candela, Cecilio, and Pulga. Each of these characters intervene heavily in the narration, with, as already mentioned, various segments and even entire chapters dedicated to the exposition of their circumstances and events.

Somewhat distanced from the protagonist are those friends who are not, or are no longer as intimate with her, such as

her neighbor Ana María, Julita, José María, Soto Amón, and Zorro. Ana's relationship with these characters is often consequential, having been brought together because of circumstances or mutual friends, or functional, serving to represent or advance a particular theme of the narration. In some cases the intervention of these characters is less than with those of the previous group as in the case of Ana María. With others, such as Zorro, this is not the case due to his function in the novel.

Even further removed are the characters whose relationship with Ana is distant, be it time wise or in an emotional sense, or who are merely acquaintances of Ana or of her friends. Their intervention is generally limited and their function is primarily anecdotic or to serve as narrative supports. In this category would fall characters such as Mateo, Olga, Antonia, and the couple Mercedes and Tomás.

Although the number of characters who appear in the novel is quite great, Montero does not pretend that they represent Spanish society in general, but rather determined slices with which she is familiar. For this reason, coupled with the age and profession of the protagonist which coincide with those of the author, many critics have categorized the novel as autobiographical. However, although the ages of Ana and her friends, the majority of whom hover around the "thirty-something" mark, and their social status, which is predominantly that of well-educated middle-class

professionals, concur with those of the author, Montero categorically states that the novel is not autobiographical:

...más que autobiográfica, y eso lo han dicho muchas veces, es biográfica. Y quiero hacer esta distinción porque (sic) me parece muy importante. Autobiográfica es cuando puedes poner nombres y apellidos a los personajes, o puedes decir, -Esto le ha pasado a Rosa Montero, o no le ha pasado.- Pues así no es. Esto no se puede hacer con los personajes. Pero sí es biográfica en el sentido de que reproduce, imaginariamente y mezcladamente, todo lo que me ha pasado a mí y a mi gente....

(Talbot 94)

In Crónica her people, as Montero calls them, are predominantly female, and characterized from a sympathetic, unabashedly female point of view. Curiously however, although the characters form such an integral part of the novel, at this point in Montero's novelist trajectory their creation and development is not the strongest point of the novel. Once again this may be due in part to lack of experience in the genre, an idea supported by Montero herself, "Crónica...tiene mucho de diario de adolescente" (Plaza 6). It also may be in part due to professional deformation. Montero's concept of the interview and her skill in the "fictionalization" of her interviewee's, referred to previously, may have been a

convenient bridge from which to cross over into the creation of fictional characters.

This idea is supported by the similarities between the portrayal of the interviewees in Montero's interviews, and the exposition of the fictional characters in her first novel. In both instances the "characters" are first presented in a snapshot form. In the interviews of typical Montero structure, this occurs in the initial paragraph(s) which serve as an introduction to the personality, and the subsequent interview material. Within this brief space Montero combines objective material such as place of birth, family, profession, etc., with personalized impressions that result in a snapshot image, an image that will from the onset color that which follows. An example of this can be seen clearly in the interview with Tierno Galván included in España para ti...para siempre:

Enrique Tierno Galván es, qué les voy a decir, las izquierdas españolas es España por excelencia, es el socialismo superviviente por definición, es don Enrique, y basta. Nació en Madrid en el 18, aunque su familia es de un pueblo de Soria.... (37)

Generally, as Montero's interviews progress it becomes evident that their end is not the conveyance of objective information, but rather the development of the initial snapshot image, whose function it was to insinuate the essence of the interviewee from the start.

This same technique is repeated frequently in Crónica; the narrator combines both objective and personalized information in the initial presentation of the character. This method is employed with major as well as minor characters, and imparts an immediate impression of the character as evidenced in the following selection portraying one of Ana's most intimate friends:

Debe tener Candela ya los treinta y cinco o algo así, y se le notan en las abultadas bolsas bajo los ojos, en esa boca de labios finos y decididos que ha ido gestando tenues arrugas junto a las comisuras, arrugas de mucho apretar los dientes y tirar para adelante...Candela posee una estructura grande y angulosa, de mandíbula rotunda, de rostro expresivo y un punto trágico, tan pálida siempre, las cejas tan negras, las ojeras malvas, ese rostro de actriz griega, a lo Irene Papas a punto de hacer de Electra. Enérgica...Con sangrante ironía cuenta y reconstruye su barroco pasado (ex-compañero alcohólico, palizas familiares, penurias económicas, dos hijos, ex-amante suicidado....
(19-20)

An advantage of this technique is its capacity to communicate a sense of an individual in a brief space, an obvious bonus for the interview with its limited format. It can also be advantageous for the novel, especially when as

here numerous characters are involved. A second advantage is that it etches an immediate, powerful image of the individual that lingers throughout the text, which once again given the restrictions of the interview works on its behalf. In the novel this can be especially positive for characters that do not intervene frequently, they are remembered more easily, but it can be limiting for those who play a significant role because the author may unwittingly rely too heavily on the image and neglect the subsequent development of the character. This is precisely what occurs in Crónica. The snapshot image of the character is not developed, leaving overly-schematized, stagnate characters, whose anecdotes may develop somewhat, but not themselves. With minor characters this is not unusual nor unexpected, however, in the case of principal characters the reader is left wanting more. The impressive initial impressions created by the author are very promising, but one soon discovers that they do not fill-out, they remain mere teasers. Once again the case of Candela is a clear example. Although she intervenes frequently in the narration, her actions and words simply reinforce the original snapshot of her, they do not contribute to the fleshing out of her character.

Another fall-out from this technique is its evident manipulativeness. If a character is developed from its narrated actions or dialogue, instead of being described by the narrator, the hand of the author is perceived to be less

evident, more impartial. With the snapshot image technique this is impossible, the narrator's position is quite clear. While this is not necessarily a detriment, in the particular case of Crónica, a novel grounded principally in a series of ideas, these ideas then relate directly to the author, transforming the characters on occasion into mouthpieces on specific positions. Consequently, without negating the vitality and individuality of the characters, it then becomes too easy to perceive them as representative of particular types of lifestyles in the contemporary Spanish society.

This is evident with the protagonist herself, Ana is the prototypical young, single working mother struggling to maintain herself and her young son, Curro. At age thirty Ana is well into her career as a journalist, but like many working women, her position job is not secure, nor does it compensate her adequately. Due to the difficulties caused by her position in the magazine, and combined with those generated by her lifestyle, her emotional life is a roller coaster. At times, and especially in the eyes of colleagues and lovers, Ana appears to be, and often assumes the role of, the intelligent, strong, self-sufficient, idealized female role model of the period who holds down a career and yet is still able to provide economically and emotionally for the needs of her son as well as herself.

Yet as we quickly learn, more often than not, some part of this equation breaks down. The constant and chaotic

instability caused by a lifestyle that is not yet mainstream in turn causes Ana's moods to swing through cycles of rebellion, acceptance, and most frequently disenchantment, a tone that pervades the novel as the title well indicates. Accosted by the typical, but none the less poignant, professional, emotional, parenting, and personal insecurities, at times Ana's life appears to be a conservative's parody of the feminist ideal, a desolate, desperate, nonsensical existence.

Underlying this disenchantment the narrator also plays with the concept of the stereotypical "superwoman" of quiet strength, often associated with the single working mother. At moments Ana does appear a "superwoman" struggling one by one with a never-ending succession of daily crises, surviving by relying at times on her own inner strength, and at others on that provided by her circle of supportive friends. However, this superwoman never does completely overcome the crises. She experiences many moments of deep insecurities and even failures. Nonetheless, Montero does close the character on a positive note, Ana's final gesture is one of positive self-affirmation. This action reveals Ana's ultimate strength of character and contributes to form the image of a de-idealized superwoman, a projection of the author's own vitalistic attitude toward life.

Just as Ana represents an attempt to understand and to demythicize a particular lifestyle choice, so do her numerous

friends. In their majority these friends are women, a conscious choice on the part of the author to portray a specific section of contemporary Spanish, and in general terms, western urban society. Within this group of women friends three types stand out in particular: two drawn from lifestyle choices, the professional woman and the traditional wife; and one based on psychological structure, the evasionist.

In the case of the first, of the various examples two in particular are highlighted; the sisters Candela and Elena. Both women are intelligent and sensitive upper-middle class professionals in their thirties. Through reminiscences we learn that during their formative years, spent under the politically and socially repressive Franco regime, many aspects of the education that they received, especially that related to sexuality and male/female relations, were typically gender specific, directed toward women with the idea of reinforcing the myths and stereotypes of the prevailing society.⁹ A clear example of this is the Diario de Ana María y Daniel, a typical gender-biased educational book read by this group in their adolescence. In the book Ana María was subtitled with the verb "dar," and Daniel with "amar." The indoctrinating function of this was later clearly recognized

⁹For further information regarding the gender-specific education of Spanish women during the Franco period see Carmen Martín-Gaite, Usos amorosos de la postguerra española, Madrid, Anagrama, 1987.

and denounced by this type of women, as exemplified in the words of Elena:

...nos querían ir educando ya en nuestro papel correspondiente, las mujeres a Dar, o sea, a ceder, y los hombres a Amar, o sea, a perdonar, a dirigir con suave, es un decir, con suave mano paternal, a brillar como centro de la Creación.... (107)

Not infrequent to women of that era and social class, both had access to, and completed university studies. Both somewhat less typically practice their profession, but not without many of the common work-related hardships focused on in the novel. In the case of Candela these include once again the difficulties associated with the single mother, and with Elena gender-based discrimination.

Both sisters have struggled through a series of unsuccessful, and often tragic, emotional relationships with men. Scarred by these battles, their attitude toward the couple is representative of that which underscores the entire novel. They have lost faith in the couple, and view cohabitation not only as extremely difficult, but also as a threat to one's independence and self-integrity. Yet despite the fact that they consider themselves a failure in an aspect so fundamental to the structure of the prevailing society, once again the narrator plays with the notion of underlying inner strength in these women. They face their individual adversities, sometimes with determination, often with

resignation, but somehow they pull through it all, although clearly not unscathed.

The admiration that these two de-idealized types of women, the professional and the single mother, inspire is evident and declared on repeated occasions. If these two types were the only ones in the novel, despite all their misadventures, tribulations, discrimination, and repression, the novel would have a more positive tone because the individual characters, seen from the perspective of types, easily blend together portraying a collective image of strength in adversity.

However, the author also includes types that do not provoke admiration but rather pity, and quite perceptively considering the image of a collective support system, an uneasy, veiled contempt in other female characters. Forming part of the group of characters who, initially in this case, refuse to come to terms with their situation we encounter Julita, the traditional wife. Thirty-seven years of age, and married for fifteen of them to Antonio, with three grown children, Julita is the archetypical housewife, who after dedicating herself to her husband and children for almost half a lifetime, realizes upon her abandonment that everything she had done and been while married was based upon her husband, and not herself. By deserting her, her husband put Julita's very identity in question, a situation that she consciously understands, but is unable to deal with.

Interesting to note is that although there is some insinuation of guilt on the part of Julita for the breakdown of the marriage, she is presented as a victim of the situation, a victim created by both her husband and the society. This image is reinforced by her physical description:

Tiene Julita ojos ingenuos, tristes y jóvenes, es lo más bonito de ella, esos ojos sin malicia, perpetuamente perplejos, que parecen estar siempre preguntando algo...es más bien baja y tendente a la curva y la abundancia, es una mujer gordita de carnes inocentes. (100)

This image of victimization is made even stronger by contrasting the physical and emotional states of the two spouses after the separation:

Hoy Antonio parece más joven, está más guapo con sus largas barbas, sus jerseys lanudos...vaga por el mundo un poco loco, decididamente estupefacto, ansioso de vivir y de ser joven.... (102)

Julita on the other hand, even just moments before greeting her guests for a party celebrating her birthday, has the same worn-down, vulnerable appearance that has dominated her since the trauma:

Se está secando las manos en el delantal, tiene el pelo recogido en la nuca y su cara redonda, prematuramente envejecida, muestra esa expresión de

desconsuelo y añorada tristeza que últimamente es tan común en ella.... (99)

Julita's outside appearance and behavior mirrors the emotional turmoil going on inside her. While some of this is directed toward how she feels about her separated spouse, his new attitudes and new life which include a younger girlfriend, much of it stems from the quandary of her own identity. Her reaction to the dilemma, which she conveys openly to Ana in chapter five, is quite typical:

Y ahora, ya sentadas en la sala, Julita contrae su blanca y redonda cara en un puchero, "me siento, no sé", dice, sorbiendo las lágrimas con vergüenza, "me siento como perdida, como si todo se hundiera, llena de miedo, ay, ay, Ana", gime derrotada, deshaciendo su temblorosa sonrisa de defensa, "qué mal estoy, Anita, cómo duele esto.... (100)

Interestingly, the most-discussed aspect concerning Julita's identity is her sexual self-esteem, which has been especially damaged by her husband's rejection. Julita fears that since her husband no longer desires her, she could not possibly be desirable to another man. In addition, the entire process of looking for another companion terrifies her, she feels too old, inexperienced, and out of step with new customs. This association of sexuality and identity are common to women in situations of rejection, especially when their self-worth is based upon the opinion of the companion,

and not themselves. This in turn provokes intense self-doubt that carries over into other areas, such as work, where traditional housewives such as Julita are at a disadvantage because they have never held a job outside of the home.

While all the fears aroused in Julita by the separation are as normal as they are common, her inability to deal with them and get-on with her life provoke reactions of exasperation and withdraw in her friends. While in Ana these feelings are described as, "en parte de impotencia, en parte de distanciado aburrimiento" (100), with Elena they are more condemnatory. She views Julita's role of abandoned wife as "dolorosamente t3pico," causing her to associate her name with the image of the stereotypical housewife that "lava con Persil y que lo recomienda a las amigas" (105). But her principal reproach reveals interestingly that her criticism of Julita's behavior stems from her own struggle with identity, both personal and gender:

Sabe Elena que la situaci3n de Julita es muy dif3cil, y comprende su angustia racionalmente. Pero ella no ha sido nunca esposa, nunca ha perdido su propia identidad, nunca se ha dejado anular en relaci3n con un hombre. Y ante los churretes de l3grimas se siente inc3moda, como si el femenino dolor de Julita le produjera una repugnancia culpable.... (105)

The importance of confronting head-on one's problems honestly, and the negative consequences of avoiding this process are illustrated by numerous situations, as well as forming the nucleus of several characters. But the character that most tragically exemplifies this is Olga. Best friends with Ana since youth, Olga began adulthood in much the same manner as her companions, an independent working woman. But Olga soon tired of the low pay and virtual enslavement of her salaried secretarial job, as she confides to Ana:

No aguanto más esto, Ana, en mi oficina son unos hijos de puta, me explotan, me matan, me revientan, me odian porque no soy como ellos, porque tengo ojeras de vida nocturna, porque no llevo sujetador, porque estoy viva. (173)

Disenchanted by the pressures placed on her to conform and not sure of exactly what she is looking for, Olga decides to do as many other non-conformists of the period do, flee her society and its expectations by making the pilgrimage to the immortal India, "el camino común de tantos sueños" (174). Upon her arrival, still tied to the customs, obligations, and memories of her past, Olga keeps in contact with friends and family back home. But as months pass, the ties loosen and this stops; the only news of her becomes the occasional anecdote related by a fellow Spaniard returned from the journey. These chance notices however, indicate that Olga's visions of liberation and self-discovery take a dark twist. The once

rebellious non-conformist instead slips into a hole of self-annihilation, losing contact with reality, and enslaved to drugs; as an acquaintance succinctly describes it, "pasando la frontera hacia la nada" (177).

The key to Olga's failure comes in the words of Nuria, who accompanied her at the beginning of the voyage, "India es algo que te come el coco, tía, te lo come si no sabes muy bien qué es lo que estás buscando" (177). As already noted, Olga is just one of the characters that flee their problems rather than face them. Included in this group are, among others, the emotionally dysfunctional Pulga, whose fears of solitude cause her to seek refuge in disastrous relationships, Zorro, the ex-lawyer who became demagogue of the night scene in order to escape himself, and initially Julita, our abandoned wife. All of these character types are portrayed as victims of their society as well as themselves who are either unable, unwilling, or unequipped to deal with life's daily struggles. As a result they can not achieve personal satisfaction.

When compared on this level to other characters' capacity and desire to confront and resolve problems, such as Elena, Candela, and even Ana herself, a psychological hierarchy emerges, with the latter viewed as having more potential to eventually achieve a personal balance. This interpretation is reinforced by the words of the author herself:

Si llegas a saber quién eres y porqué haces las cosas, que no es baladí, que es verdaderamente

difícil porque actuamos sin saber porqué, creo que tienes muchas más posibilidades de ser feliz, de controlar tu vida para llevarla por donde quieras.
(Peciña Vázquez 17)

As we have seen, Montero's first attempt at novelistic characterization produces characters that often border closely on being types. However, this kind of characterization serves not only to reinforce the goals of the narration, as specified by Ana¹⁰, but also favors easy reader identification. By the very typicality of the characters the reader is able to easily empathize with them, and especially with their situations. This leads us to the thematic of the novel. Montero closely ties the characters to the themes of the novel, utilizing once again the former as the vehicle of transmission for the latter, as done with the structure of the novel. The author's desire to communicate the situation (emotional, economic, labor, etc.) of the particular slice of society that the characters portray is developed through the chronicle of their relationship with the immediate post-Franco society.

This chronicle encompasses a very wide variety of concerns, making it a difficult task to adequately analyze all of them. In view of this, I have grouped the concerns into two categories, which although frequently directly related and/or overlapping, best convey the essence of the themes

¹⁰Refer to the proclamation of the protagonist in the first chapter of Crónica (8-9).

themselves, and reflect the internal intentions of the text. These two groups are those concerns that are specific to the group portrayed and their particular time period, and those that go beyond these limits and are common to humankind, universal concerns.

Montero herself seems to suggest this division in the micro-structure of the first chapter. Voicing the protagonist's apprehensions that a book about life's daily frustrations would be "banal, estúpido e interminable," she immediately proceeds to illustrate just the opposite with Ana's strange midnight telephone call. In this segment particular frustrations are intercalated with what society, represented by the authority of the printed word, deems "important" events. As Ana distractedly listens with increasing frustration to a "burdo ligue telefónico," at the same time fragments of what she is glancing at in the newspaper are communicated in parenthesis. The author thus highlights the two different types of concerns, and then places them on equal footing, in effect negating the usual scorn, both societal and literary, attached to the importance of particular frustrations (especially when these daily frustrations are those related to women). This technique is continued throughout the rest of chapter one, and the thematic ground is enlarged through the introduction of particular and universal concerns that pertain to other characters as well.

One of the areas of particular concerns that stands out immediately in chapter one is that of women's reproductive issues. The author devotes almost a third of the chapter to the problems of birth control, gynecologists, and abortion, all of which lead to reflections on women's liberation in terms of sexuality. Each of these concerns is illustrated by and viewed from the perspective of the female characters, a novelty which as Biruté Ciplijauskaitė quite accurately points out, "En el año que aparece puede ser considerada como revolucionaria por presentar la mecánica de lo sexual desde el punto de vista de la mujer" (192).

The question of birth control initiates the segment. Candela, tired of stuffing herself with birth-control pills, worried about their consequences on her health, and after two unsuccessful and ultimately life-threatening attempts at employing the IUD method, goes with Elena and Ana to a "liberal" gynecologist to discuss birth control options. At the suggestion of her sister Elena, who has been successfully using a diaphragm for four years, Candela asks the gynecologist about this method. The gynecologist quickly dismisses the method, claiming that it is unreliable, "eso del diafragma es una calamidad, dentro de un par de meses te veo viniendo otra vez con una barriga" (29), and that he does not even dispense them. However, following Elena's affirmations of the diaphragm's success, he reveals his true reason for not dealing with this method - a distorted and fear-induced sense

of male sexual solidarity, "¿cómo te lo pones? ¿Cortas al tipo y le dices que se espere?" (29).

Not only is his attitude toward women's sexuality depreciative as evidenced by the language employed, it also frighteningly reflects his professional ignorance. When Elena takes her diaphragm out, the gynecologist "enrojece, su voz se agudiza en tonos femeninos, '¿qué es esto?', repite enrabiado mientras sostiene el disco blanquecino con dos dedos melindrosos" (29-30). The implications with regard to the quality of contraceptive counseling that women receive during this period are abundantly clear.

This incident leads the narrator to a series of reflections on birth control and each partner's role in its implementation. It is clear that in the novel the traditional role of the woman as the responsible party is viewed as rapidly becoming unacceptable among women themselves, due in great part to the simple fact that many are unwilling to sacrifice their health to the man's desire for convenience and his distaste for methods that implicate his participation, as seen in the following lines:

¿Ha de interrumpir el varón sus acaloramientos previos para que ella pueda colocarse el disco de caucho? Que 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.... (30)

This frequently encountered male convenience-based sexual attitude has repercussions not only on a woman's choice of contraceptive and her health, but ultimately, since the majority of gynecologists were and still are men, on her life itself. This is clearly illustrated in Candela's case. After having become pregnant three months after the insertion of an IUD, Candela goes to London to have a legal abortion, immediately after which the "efficient" British doctor inserts another IUD. One morning, several months later she is rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery. The cause, severe peritonitis incurred by, as the narrator accusingly relates, "ese aro de cobre inocente colocado sin previsión ni escrúpulos en una anatomía de reciente aborto" (27).

After observing the obvious failure of the first IUD, instead of suggesting another method of contraception that would be safer considering Candela's condition, although evidently less economically lucrative, the doctor simply attributes the failure to misplacement of the device, and does not fault the method itself. The result as we have seen is Candela's near death, whose blame should be placed squarely at the feet of the gynecologist. However, as the novel illustrates, in sexual matters it is the woman that society generally perceives as the guilty party.

This is especially true in the case of abortion. Already penalized once by the government's restrictions on abortion, a pregnant woman without the economic means to leave Spain for

a safe, legal abortion in another country runs the risk of the ultimate penalty, her life, if she resorts to illegal methods within the country. This particular scenario is complicated even further in the novel because one of the pregnant women, Juan's sister Teresa, sacrifices the opportunity to abort safely in order to finance her supposedly politically-tortured brother's departure from Spain. Teresa chooses instead the "cheaper" method, an illegal abortionist, doña Mercedes, whose place of operation symbolizes the very danger and sordidness of the situation:

...la casita deteriorada de la vieja comadrona, el olor a verdura y aguas residuales, el techo bajo y sucio, ulcerado por ampollas de humedad.... (24)

The midwife's procedure does cause Teresa to abort, but it also induces a life-threatening infection. The following morning while Juan "dormía pesadamente o se hacía el dormido" (25), Ana must take Teresa to the Red Cross where she is immediately admitted for surgery. Throughout her emotional and physical pain and delirium, Teresa begs Ana not to tell the doctors about the abortion, and with just cause as we learn when Ana goes to visit her after surgery:

Sabes, Ana, dijo bajando la voz, me han preguntado que qué me he 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.... (26)

And, as if having power over the life or death of Teresa was not enough, as Ana finishes the visit the doctor stops her in the hall and threatens her with incarceration. Ana's thoughts on the matter are made abundantly clear by the following passage:

Piensa Ana que si los hombres parieran el aborto sería ya legal en todo el mundo desde el principio de los siglos. Qué Papa, qué cardenal Benelli osaría ser censor de un derecho que pedirían sus entrañas. Los políticos preñables no malinterpretarían sus propias necesidades, como ahora, cuando mantienen que el aborto es sólo un método anticonceptivo más, exigido sin escrúpulos por las mujeres culpables. Y, sin embargo, estos guardianes del orden genital ajeno pagarán sin duda un raspado internacional a sus hijas descarriadas, mientras otras mujeres han de someterse a carniceros españoles e ilegales. (21)

If the mechanisms that surround women's sexuality are perceived themselves as problematic, it is easy to deduce that women's sexuality will be so even more. From its initiation, through its different stages of development, and to its perceived end, Crónica deals with selected moments and a general sense of women's sexuality from a female perspective.

Although some would argue that women's sexuality is more a universal concern, in this novel it is anchored in a specific historical moment and viewed from the perspective of a particular group.

For these women their sexuality is problematised from the onset by the restricted, and often erroneous, sexual education they received as youth, which leads to, as Elena realizes personally, a generation of women "educada como tantas otras en el desconocimiento y la repugnancia del sexo" (50). Their almost complete ignorance of basic bodily sexual functions and drives, in great part fostered by the previous generation of women, leads to not only unpreparedness, and hence lack of confidence in dealing with these eventualities, but also generates a fear of the sexual-unknown, the disastrous results of which in many cases will mark them for life.

Case in point is Ana's initiation into womanhood, her first menstruation. Even this basic bodily event for the protagonist is underscored by a lack of education and superstition. As her classmates each start menstruating and she still has not, instead of discussing with her mother or another adult in whom she confides the reasons for this, she questions her own normality and recurs to a wives tale ["Comía mucho pan porque le habían dicho que la miga hacía crecer las tetas..." (157)] in order to provoke its onset. When the much anticipated event finally occurs her mother proportions her the basics: sanitary towels and rules. Even years later when

Ana has learned that these rules -"No puedes tomar cosas frías, ni helados ni nada de eso, no puedes ducharte ni bañarte, no puedes ir a la piscina, no puedes tomar el sol, no puedes lavarte la cabeza..." (157)- are false, she still associates her period with prohibitions that serve to make one feel "indisposed" in relation to a normal female function.

In addition to personal repercussions, this sexual ignorance is also reflected in their dealings with society and sexuality. Ana's rites of initiation into the world of sexuality are the subtle sexual advances of a trusted math teacher who sits the more developed female students on his lap "en sus piernas temblonas y las acariciaba con cuarteadas manos de lagarto" (158), and the trembling hand of a well-dressed elderly man who fondles her buttocks on the metro. Not understanding what these individuals are doing, the protagonist in her innocence even pities the latter, believing that he must have Parkinson disease.

But through the experience that these "asaltos cruentos y cotidianos" provide, the young women learn the more sordid and aggressive aspects of sexuality (remaining ignorant of the facts) at the same time as how to defend themselves from it. Their experience teaches them to associate sexuality with war, as seen in the use of terms like assault, defense, fight, etc. They consider themselves "veteranas en esta lucha de guerrilleras" (159), and devise methods to combat not only the assaults, but also the accompanying fear and sense of guilt

provoked by the obscene words and gestures of the aggressors. One such attempt to combat verbal onslaught described in detail by the narrator is the following:

De esas sombras fugaces -padres de familia numerosa, maridos ejemplares, trabajadores fatigados, sin duda- que se precipitaban sobre ti en mitad de la calle, los ojos brillantes, susurrando palabras desconocidas y brutales, te-lo-voy-a-meter-por-no-sé-dónde, te-voy-a-llenar-de-leche, te-cogería-y-te, y ellas, que no sabían nada de eso, se encogían contra la esquina, miraban hacia otro lado amedrentadas, aguantaban la respiración mientras el aliento del hombre rebotaba contra ellas, intentaban incluso hacer sonar los oídos por dentro (como cuando en la iglesia se confesaba alguien con voz demasiado aguda, hacer sonar los oídos para no enterarte de nada y no pecar violando el secreto del confesionario)....

(159)

The language of the description reveals the curious irony of the situation. It is the sexual aggressor who is "respectable," while the innocent victim suffers the guilt. Montero's use of religious analogy in this situation is particularly revelatory, functioning on two levels. On one level, it reveals one aspect of the powerful influence of the repressive religious education of the young women by their

association of sex and guilt. On a more metaphoric level, the obscene words of the aggressors represent a pitiful and desperate confession of sexual and emotional frustration, unwillingly "overheard" by their innocent victims.

This not-completely condemnatory attitude toward the aggressor is confirmed by the mature, and more knowledgeable Ana several years later when she returns to a continuous session cinema. On this occasion the sensations provoked by the middle-aged masturbator seated beside her are quite different:

No experimentó Ana sorpresa ni asco ante este acto, tan sólo una sensación culpable que a veces provoca la miseria, y en esa eyaculación sola e inútil creyó poder reconstruir una vida de cercanos ecos, un matrimonio agonizante, una mujer gruesa, agresiva y desdichada, un coito sin placer en sábados y vísperas de fiesta, gritos y rencores....

(161)

Gone is the fear, provoked by sexual ignorance and erased by knowledge, but the intuition of frustration and the sense of guilt, albeit in a secular form, remain.

The presence of frustration and a sense of guilt are two of the most predominant aspects of the many situations portrayed in the novel. They are present in the work place, in the single-mother role, in relation to political activity, in the women's relationships with men, and even among

themselves and within themselves. They stem from a plethora of causes as we shall see, but are anchored principally in the rapid social/sexual changes of the time period, which have made obsolete the social/sexual education this group of women have received.

One of the areas most impacted by a dysfunctional sexual education is the initiation itself into the sexual world. Once the exclusive domain of "la ya bendecida cama," where ignorance was erased by wedding vows, and incompatibility was silenced, this generation of women begin to undue the ties between matrimony and sexual activity, choosing the who and the when of their loss of virginity. Unfortunately for many of them their progressive sexual attitude is still based on the traditional values they had been inculcated, resulting in little practical knowledge or experience and a schizophrenic sexual-mindset, unable to interpret sexual quandaries from either a modern or traditional perspective, a situation that often results in disaster.

Such is the case of Elena. At age nineteen, with her career just chosen and having gained personal independence by leaving her parents home, she makes the decision to stop being a virgin. Unfortunately the selected candidate, Miguel Angel, is as inexperienced as she is, and just before the completion of the act, when Elena reveals to him that she is a virgin he refuses to continue. Elena, not understanding his reaction to the news is racked with self-doubts, blaming herself and not

her deficient sexual education, "yo no tengo la culpa de ser virgen, nacemos así" (54). Later, after an excruciating period of silence and feelings of loneliness and rejection on Elena's part, Miguel Angel without a word of explanation resumes sexual overtures, but this time of an oral nature. Uninitiated, Elena's reaction is once again to blame herself:

...no sabe que hacer, está angustiada [...] opone al principio alguna resistencia pero al fin consiente, se encuentra tan torpe, tan culpable por no saber...y no entiende muy bien qué es lo que espera de ella. (55)

The final surprise is that Miguel Angel ejaculates in her mouth, traumatizing Elena to the point of making it impossible for her to have oral contact with a male sexual organ for many years.

The guilt, incomprehension, frustration, and failure that characterize Elena's first attempt at sexuality will become leitmotifs in the novel's many subsequent heterosexual as well as homosexual relationships. The reader discovers that there is not one functional sexual or amorous relationship in the entire novel, but rather a succession of relationships that end in separation, divorce, infidelity, boredom, suffocation, etc. In each case, the reasons for the failure of the relationship are different, some are attributed to personal crises and others stem from the age-old problem of individual compatibility. However, given the intention of the author to

chronicle the lives of this particular group, many of the reasons stem directly from problems created by the social changes in their society.

One of the areas most affected by these changes is gender roles. The principal female characters of the novel have rejected what they consider to be the antiquated traditional role they were educated for, and that is still being assigned to them by a great portion of the patriarchal society, but have yet to discover their niche in the new emerging society. Once eager believers in the women's liberation movement and feminist models, these too have come under critical scrutiny. The core of the dilemma is represented by the article that Elena has been working on for months, "Pares e impares," that deals with "los roles sociales, sobre un mundo hecho de estereotipos, de casilleros contrapuestos, sobre la dificultad de ser impar y diferente, de escapar al papel tradicional o al par opuesto" (108).

All of the principal female characters are confronted with the choice to either accept the constrictions of patriarchal gender-typed roles, or to suffer the consequences of being "impar" as Elena puts it. Ana's case is clearly illustrative of this situation. Due to her family's economic situation, at an early age she is forced to enter the male-dominated job market and compete with men for the same

positions.¹¹ It is here that she first encounters gender-based labor discrimination. While presenting oppositions she is informed by a fellow oppositor that, "la mitad de las que vienen aquí son algo putas" (152). During this same process Ana is solicited for sexual favors in exchange for a job by a government administrator, and on another occasion she is fired from a job because she is pregnant and unwed. The message from the Francoist society to women is quite clear: one's morality is perceived as directly related to choice of role. Those that have chosen, for what ever reason it may be, to venture out of the sexually-insulated traditional female domain are perceived as having questionable morality, and hence deserve or have provoked the treatment they receive from their male colleagues.

This treatment may take the form of sexual harassment, as we have seen, or blatant gender-discrimination with regard to merit advances. Once again case in point is the protagonist's current work situation. Because she is a single mother, one of Ana's biggest work-related concerns, as previously noted, is job stability. Her employers know this and joke about it, "-Lo que sufrís las madres, Dios mío, sobre todo las solteras-" (6), however they continue to take advantage of her, overworking her at the same time as they hold out the

¹¹For more information concerning women's employment during this period see Claudia Ottolenghi, Women in Spain, Brussels, Commission of the European Communities, 1981.

proverbial carrot of permanent inclusion in the staff that they never intend to offer.

Not only does role choice have consequences on the professional aspects of women's life, but their amorous/sexual life as well. If a woman does choose the traditional role of devoted wife and mother, as does Julita, due to the changes in society there is no longer a guarantee that her abnegation will pay off in lifelong accompaniment. If she chooses the role of the independent professional woman, the stereotypical images associated with that role, tough and self-sufficient to name two, often impede the initiation of true communication in a relationship. This is painfully illustrated at the end of the novel with the termination of Ana's ambiguous on-off relationship with the married José María. After ten years of sophisticated emotional role-playing by each, Ana realizes the tragic price, they do not even know each other:

...ella jugó durante años el papel de mujer dura e independiente, y lo representó tan bien que le llenó de miedos. Ana comprende con repentina claridad estos diez años de desencuentros y mentiras, hicieron bailar sus respectivas marionetas con tal exactitud que se engañaron mutuamente: cómo es posible conocer tan poco a alguien al cabo de tanto tiempo. Y siente que se han robado ellos mismos un pedazo irrecuperable de sus vidas. (258)

The action of stereotyping occurs not only with roles but with emotions as well. On several occasions the female characters or the narrator assign masculine or feminine labels to emotional responses. As we have already seen, Elena labels Julita's tears and pain in response to the destruction of her world as a "femenino dolor." In another instance, after Ana's break-up with Juan the narrator describes the reconstruction of her life in the following terms:

...una época dorada en la que se sintió autosuficiente y libre, fue por entonces cuando comenzó a trabajar en prensa y se sabía poderosa, marcó sus relaciones sentimentales con distanciamiento tópicamente varonil. (33)

Considering these labels within the context that they are used reveals that fact that not only is there a labeling process, but also a valuation one as well. The "feminine" release of emotion is viewed negatively whereas the "masculine" emotional distance is considered positively.

These labels insinuate the gender-dilemma that this particular group of women experienced. At the beginning of the feminist movement, women's integration into the patriarchal society was believed to be achieved through the rejection of "typically-female" characteristics, often associated with weakness, and the adaption of male ones, especially those that connoted strength and independence. This group of women came into adulthood during this particular

phase of feminism, and their ideas often reflect this moment. However, it is important to note that the women's ideas also reflect the later trajectory of feminism; a critical revision of these initial concepts, and most recently the focus on the biological uniqueness of the female. Elena expresses this revised position toward the end of the novel:

Quizá es que durante mucho tiempo ha confundido la liberación de la mujer con el desprecio hacia la mujer misma: la liberación pasaba por la mimetización con el sexo del poder, había que adoptar valores masculinos, copiar al hombre, repudiar la identidad de hembra. Elena, ahora, ha descubierto en su cuerpo el orgullo de saber que puede parir, si quiere, y que esto no es una servidumbre. Ha descubierto el orgullo de reencontrarse como sexo. (231)

However, despite their success in intellectually recognizing the roads to emotional balance and self-fulfillment, their success at putting into action in their own lives these premises is much more limited. The only character who comes close to reaching this desired state is Candela, and she achieves it at the cost of the dissolution of her last relationship. The rest of the characters struggle with their desire to combine self-actualization with a significant relationship where their personal integrity and independence are not compromised. That this desire is rooted in a need for

not sex, but rather human warmth and companionship is evidenced in Ana's reaction to her failed relationship with Juan:

...hace ya casi cuatro años de la ruptura y Ana asiste ahora al despertar en ella de los viejos anhelos. La experiencia le hace recular ante la idea de una convivencia que ella presiente fatalmente arrasadora, pero vuelve a vivir el ansia de agotar opciones, de conocer a la otra persona en todas sus circunstancias, de intentar de nuevo la pareja, aunque la tema suicida. Y así, añora el torpe y tierno abrazo de un amante dormido, más que hacer el amor, más que el propio sexo. (33)

However, despite the numerous attempts at combining the two, it is clear from the disastrous results that this is conceived of as impossible. The novel communicates an absolute lack of faith in the viability of long-term amorous relationships, be they heterosexual or homosexual.

-This lack of faith in the couple stems from the novel's basic philosophy with regard to human compatibility and the universal concerns that envelope and influence it. Although Montero's principal characters are quite likeable in themselves, as we have seen their existence and compatibility is made problematic by the fact that it is rooted not only in problems specific to their era, but also, as we will see now, in eternal universal areas of discontent, such as

communication, alienation, solitude, ageing, and death.

Montero illustrates this idea by juxtaposing, and often fusing both particular and universal concerns in almost all of the situations. This is important to note because the critical readings of this novel have often exalted the novel's preoccupation with particular concerns to the detriment of the equally important focus placed on universal ones (to a certain extent this is logical considering the testimonial nature of the novel, the gender of the author, her well-known views with respect to women's rights, and the boom of feminist criticism). However, by structuring the novel on the dialectic relationship between particular and universal problems, the author intimates that resolutions to the characters' particular problems must take into consideration the latter's universal aspects.

This is illustrated in the arena of communication, or more aptly in the novel, lack of communication. The difficulty of effective communication is repeatedly depicted in the numerous examples of failed relationships in the novel. The reasons behind it are as varied as its manifestations. Sometimes, as we saw in the case of Ana and José María, this communication is impeded by the era-incited question of role-playing, in others, as with Candela and Vicente, it springs from the universal question of the individual and the ego.

The author illustrates the broad ramifications of non-communication by insinuating it in almost every situation in

the novel, between lovers, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and the generations. The latter, which by its very typicality has been converted into a cliché, is nonetheless representative of Montero's attitude toward this testimony of human relations: their resolution is exceedingly difficult precisely because their roots are dual, particular and universal. Generational lack of communication is illustrated by the situation of Tomás and Mercedes, forty-year-old parents of two young adults who, as the narrator states, "crecieron de prisa, muy de prisa" (207). In their desperate attempt to solve this age-old problem they assume the attitudes ["fumaba porros toda la familia" (207)] and appearances of their children's generation ["Mercedes se pintó los ojos con kajal, se dio jena en el pelo y cambió su perfume de Dior por un pegajoso pachulí. Tomás colgó la corbata y se enfundó unos vaqueros desteñidos" (207)]. The fact that their recourse to purely-temporal solutions does not solve the problem underscores the premise of Montero's structure.

Another area of universal concern that affects the majority of characters is that of alienation. While the reasons for this alienation are superficially varied, ranging from gender and sexual preference to political or lifestyle choice, and the degrees to which it is experienced varies as well, its root causes point to the eternal human problems of difference and power. The author achieves this by focusing on alienated characters and their situations, and highlighting

the fact that the temporal resolutions applied to their situations may alleviate but do not solve.

As pointed out, the majority of the principal characters in the novel are women, who up to this point simply because of their gender had been marginalized by the male-dominated society. At this particular juncture in time, with Spain moving towards democracy, they too are trying to move towards integration and equality. Most of these women are working professionals who have achieved a superficial, "politically-correct" acceptance by their colleagues but underneath continue to experience a sense of alienation, a sense of not belonging fully to "the old-boy network" because of gender-difference. Elena expresses this feeling when she meditates her own professional situation:

...hay algo en su repentino éxito que a Elena le parece falso y desmedido, como si al ser mujer competitiva en un mundo de hombres se la hubiera seleccionado de mascota.... (108-109)

Although it is clear that the temporal solutions being applied to women's marginalization are officially bettering the women's lot, they do not attack the root of a problem that continues to afflict, as evidenced by Elena's words, women.

In addition to women, the author also focuses on other even more alienated characters. Chapter six is dedicated to Ana's homosexual friend Cecilio, and the extensive chapter nine centers on the social outcasts that congregate in the bar

"Toño." While their marginalization has not benefitted from the on-the-road-to-democracy-adjusted-attitudes that women as a group have experienced, all of these alienated characters share a common sense of isolation and solitude as the result of their marginalization.

This theme of solitude is so strong in the novel that it acquires a type of protagonism, it becomes a palpable presence, described even in physical terms, "los ruidos de la soledad" (35). As with lack of basic communication, it also underscores almost every situation in the novel. The characters are conscious of this, and for the most part associate it negatively, with moments of pain, unhappiness, emptiness, and failure. Despite this they also consider it as unavoidable, as a part of life in general, especially in contemporary society, with which one must necessarily deal. As Cecilio and various characters signal: "El mundo se ha llenado de personas que vivimos solos" (79).

Because of this attitude the characters associate the ability to deal successfully with solitude as a passage into the adult world. Candela illustrates this concept when after the painful disasters of her sentimental relations she expresses the desire to get her life back on track, to be able to deal alone with certain basic issues, associating this with maturity: "Sintió dolorosos deseos de alcanzar una serenidad adulta, sin rencores, serenidad ante la soledad y la muerte" (228).

However, this desire to "acostumbrarse a la soledad y ser adulta" (111), a capacity it should be noted that is denied to all the characters, generally leads them instead to fill or escape their solitude. Case in point is Pulga, a character so defined by her fear of solitude that she makes nightly rounds of her apartment in the dark, "temiendo siempre que a la vuelta de la esquina la aceche algún horror" (111). Pulga must fill her days with constant companionship, be it often reluctant friends or her young male lovers, in order to as Ana succinctly states, "llenar las horas muertas y el vacío" (117). In the characters' escape from solitude a multitude of vehicles are used, ranging from jobs, drugs, political involvement, to even emotional and physical displacement, or as Zorro labels it, the "ultimate" escape, India:

Ya no puedes escapar a otro sitio, el último lugar del mundo, ya no hay más tierra a la que huir, ningún paraíso más remoto que buscar. Cuando has ido a India, macho, ya has llegado hasta el forro del mundo, hasta el forro de ti mismo. (198)

However, the vehicle most frequently employed by the characters to escape solitude is the sentimental relationship, the efficacy of which is a dismal failure. Not only do the characters not escape their inner solitude, but the use of this vehicle leads them to behave in a manner that they themselves are later to regret. In the case of the protagonist it induces her to invent an imaginary relationship

with Soto Amón which she later understands to be a reflection of all her relationships:

Ahora Ana intuye con melancolía que ha consumido media vida inventando amores inexistentes: y este Soto Amón de la treintena no es más que un nuevo y sofisticado artificio. (216)

Unlike Pulga's momentary consciousness -"a veces, cuando se para a pensar en esa su afición por los adolescentes moldeables, la Pulga intuye que algo marcha bastante mal en todo esto" (97)- that is offset by the "ding, ding, pak" of her young lover's pinball game, Ana's realization eventually leads her to make a break in the cycle. After her much-desired/feared sexual encounter with Soto Amón that resulted in the depressingly similar scenario that she had imagined, at the last moment, instead of being beaten down by absurdity and her own inertia, she takes control through a small gesture of autonomous individuality: "No me acompañes: voy a coger un taxi" (271). By asserting herself through this unexpected move she has inserted a degree of auto-sufficiency into her life. Though she has not escaped nor overcome solitude, it appears that only through self-empowerment is this even a possibility.

Just as solitude underlies the vital situations of the characters, so do thoughts revolving around old-age and death. From chapter one onward, Montero inserts both into the daily lives of the characters through a variety of vehicles;

newspaper articles, bomb threats, aged neighbors, suicides of lovers and friends, deaths of neighbors and family members, etc. In this manner the characters are forced to confront these issues and not mentally-skirt them, a position that the protagonist herself knows to be often guilty of: "olvidando que ya tengo treinta años, que la vida se escapa, rápida y banal, hacia la muerte que llevamos dentro" (74). The overwhelming reaction to both death and old age is incomprehension, horror, and fear. In the arena of death this is illustrated by the passing of Ana's grandmother Concha, a very religious, strong woman who nonetheless in her last days of agony refuses to accept death, cursing and repeatedly murmuring "tengo miedo." Ana's family erroneously interprets this as "la muerte de un impío" (75), but Ana more clearly realizes that "era la muerte, simplemente" (75). The overpowering physical and emotional destruction of her grandmother provokes the protagonist to meditate her own future, to try and foresee as she puts it, "qué tipo de agonía le estaba reservada a ella misma" (75). That the focus of Ana's attitude toward death is centered on the earth-bound, and not transcendental consequences is evidenced by her reaction and underscored by the use of the word "agonía."

This same focus holds true for the other characters and the question of old age as well. The latter is illustrated by the narrator's description of different types of old people who gather on the park benches near her home. The description

reveals the sense of physical horror and repugnance, mingled with pity, of a thirty-year-old contemplating her possible future:

...están también los viejos caros [...] intentando mantener una dignidad ruinosa [...] adquieren una expresión algo aniñada que en contraste con su rostro destruido semeja mueca monstruosa; las viejas ricas [...] con algunas amigas tan ruinosas como ellas; las viejas que visten ropas infantiles [...] que pintan sus labios con un rouge que la mala vista y el pulso tembloroso ha distribuido generosamente a través de las flácidas mejillas.

(77-78)

Ana's only half-joking response to old age and death is to wave the magic wand of companionship: "-Bueno, cuando seamos ancianitos y no podamos valernos por nosotros mismos nos casamos" (80). But her friend Cecilio negates the viability of this position, he believes that the death that awaits them is one of solitude and agony. Ana attributes this tragic view to Cecilio's "tendencia a la tragicomedia," his "histrionismo" based perhaps on his marginalization stemming from his sexual preference. But the narrator revalidates this view at the end of chapter twelve with the death of doña Engracia, who only accidentally discovered, eerily echoes Cecilio's premonitions for his own solitary and tragic death:

...estaba tirada en el suelo como un guiñapo de trapos enlutados, y su mano izquierda aún agarraba la pata de un pesado sillón de viuda, ese sillón en donde se había roto las uñas rascando el barniz y el tapizado en un postrero esfuerzo por alcanzar la puerta. (252)

While this concludes the exposition of the major features of Crónica's structure, characters, and themes, I would like to make some final comments as to their importance relative to this particular novel, and Montero's following novels. As we have seen, it was Montero's success as a journalist that led to the publication of her first novel. This is not to say that the cross-over would not have occurred without the specific offer from Debate, but rather that this was the catalyst. It was also this journalistic mastery that influences much of the novel's form and content. As noted, the structure is comprised of fourteen chapters, or more adequately termed sections, connected primarily not by the weak narrative line but rather by relations between characters and themes. This in part reflects the author's lack of experience in the genre, but it also can be traced to Montero's initial assignment, a collection of interviews focused on women's issues from which the impetus for the novel springs. This is reinforced by the extensive attention devoted to secondary characters that promotes, as mentioned,

a sense of collective protagonism whose primary concerns on the surface are women's issues.

This particular novelistic structure is unique in Montero's trajectory. As we shall see, one of the constants in her novels is her search for structural innovation and adequacy. In this novel it is evident that there are inadequacies, such as the initial vacillation between a single or a collective protagonist, the often abrupt and frequently disorienting transitions from one chapter to another, the inadequate assimilation of digressive sections (such as chapter nine) into the flow of the narrative, and the intriguing but not developed meta-literary aspect of Ana herself as the author.

Another area in this novel that evidences journalistic influences is that of character development. As noted, the characters are initially portrayed in a manner much similar to Montero's interview style, and not subsequently further developed. This also is unique to Crónica. In the following novels we will witness a definite evolution in Montero's characterization capabilities. This is not to say that the characters in this novel, although flat as understood in terms of Forster, are uninteresting. As signaled, due to their very typicality there is a very high empathy quotient. In addition, Montero invigorates the characters with her evident skills for dialog. These dialogues, that comprise a great portion of the novel, evidence Montero's keen ear for

reproducing natural-sounding colloquial speech and careful choice of language, at once varied, expressive, and appropriate to the character and the situation. Also evident in these dialogues is a sense of humor, which is incorporated in the characters' actuation and that will be a constant of her characterization.

Another constant of Montero's novels as well as her journalism is the thematic bent. As astutely signaled by de Miguel Martínez:

Montero procede de un tipo de periodismo claramente connotado por sus tendencias críticas; que ha utilizado, pues, su pluma [...] para defender y atacar comportamientos e ideas. (50)

This aspect is illustrated by the quantitative dominance and critical tendency of the themes that deal with aspects of the society in question. Whether it be particular women's issues, political actuation, or the supposed "progressiveness" of certain sectors of Spanish society, Montero expounds on the themes from a clearly-defined critical perspective, legacy in part of her journalism practices and her indomitable personality.

However, as previously signaled, and not frequently commented upon, Montero's focus on content in this novel goes beyond particular issues and strongly incorporates universal themes, which as I insist form the backdrop of the entire novel. Themes such as love, communication, solitude, and

death are the roots of the much-discussed particular concerns, and will most clearly define Montero's thematic trajectory. However, due to the quantitative predominance of the particular concerns in the novel, it is clear that at this juncture Montero used the narrative form as a forum for a plethora of themes, both those pressing to her personally and to that society, especially the female sector, in general. This also is unique to this particular novel. As already noted, while Montero never abandons her commitment to the importance of a variety of themes, their subsequent incorporation will be achieved by a more complete integration with the narrative itself.

As for the overall tone of the novel, while it is predominately one of disillusion, perfectly reflecting the title itself, as Alma Amell points out, Montero is also often "sarcastic, tender, or melancholic" (89). Added to this must also be that small flame of hope, signified by Ana's last gesture. This same mixture of tonalities can be encountered in Montero's journalism, but it is likely that their provenience in both cases stems from Montero's outlook on life. As she herself states, her basic outlook is one of disillusion but only up to a certain point, and with a current of vitalism underneath:

...ya está bien del desencanto, que es una trampa infernal, una zona en la que no hacemos más que dar vueltas [...] y que no se puede seguir en este

encajonamiento, que hay que intentar recuperar el optimismo de las pequeñas cosas. (Torres 12)

This attitude of expressing disillusion but at the same time working to overcome it is clearly reflected in this novel and will be a constant in subsequent ones, although in the latter more profoundly developed.

A final note as to the influence of Montero's journalistic skills, which as we have seen are present in this particular novel. Characteristic of Montero the author is her desire to evolve and excel, a trait that is apparent upon examining her novelistic trajectory. With each novel Montero's narrative skills notably increase, supplanting inadequacies attributed to her journalistic roots.

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CHAPTER II

LA FUNCION DELTA

Rosa Montero's second novel, La función delta, is at once a departure from and a continuation of many elements and themes encountered in Crónica. Published in January of 1981, less than two years after the publication of her first novel, Montero's second narrative effort was also well-received by the public and once again virtually ignored by the critics of the period. The latter is probably due in part to the fact that at that time Montero was still perceived primarily as a journalist who also wrote novels, and to the general reluctance of the literary establishment, as Amando de Miguel has pointed out, to acknowledge artistic value in novelists that are widely read (67). Another factor that may have contributed to critical overlook is the genre of the novel, the fictional memoir, which has long been considered by many critics as a traditionally "women's genre," an opinion reinforced by the tremendous resurgence of the genre experienced in the decade of the seventies particularly among western women novelists.¹²

¹²For information concerning the use of the memoir by contemporary European women novelists see Biruté Ciplijauskaité, La novela femenina contemporánea (1970-1985):

As several critics have pointed out however,¹³ Montero's use of the fictional memoir is not completely traditional. Although the author continues to employ some of the genre's elements in a conventional manner, she also utilizes the genre itself to affect a subversion of several of its principal elements, and to initiate a questioning, through the use of metafiction within the memoir, about the relationship between fiction and reality. Montero achieves this by manipulating various elements of the text, and closely relating these elements to the content.

One of the elements that is key to this subversion is the structure of the novel itself. As Montero herself has pointed out on numerous occasions (Talbot 94, Monegal 8), the structure of Función responds to a conscious effort on her part to improve on the repeatedly-signaled lack of structure in the previous novel, and to construct a novel with a functioning, more-complex structure. As she puts it, "Voy a poner un marco, a hacer un trabajo de carpintería alrededor" (Monegal 8). This frame consists of twenty chapters of varying length, titled by days of the week, Monday through Sunday, or dated days of the month, beginning with the twelfth

Hacia una tipología de la narración en primera persona, Barcelona, Anthropos, 1988.

¹³See Kathleen M. Glenn's article "Reader Expectations and Rosa Montero's La función delta," Letras Peninsulares 1, 1 (1988): 87-96, and Phyllis Zatlin's paper, "The Novels of Rosa Montero as Experimental Fiction," read at the AATSP Annual Conference, Cancún México, August 1992.

of September and ending with the eleventh of December. The pattern of alternation of these two types of chapters appears irregular at first glance, but upon examination reveals to be a chapter titled by a day of the week followed by one (1 instance), two (3 instances), or three (2 instances) dated days of the month chapters, with the novel beginning and ending with an undated chapter. Although the dated chapters are more numerous, more pages are dedicated to the days of the week chapters. All of these statistics become relevant when we consider that the division of the chapters corresponds to the two levels of time that the novel encompasses, one being the protagonist's present, and the other a specific week in her past.¹⁴

Since the structure of the novel is closely dependent on the content, at this point it would be a good idea to quickly summarize the plot. The protagonist of Función is Lucía, a sixty year old woman hospitalized for what she initially believes to be Meniere's syndrome. During her hospital stay Lucía begins to write her memories of a crucial week in her past when she was thirty years old that was a turning point both in her career and her personal life. This time level corresponds to the reader's present, 1980, and is represented

¹⁴Montero's particular use of different time levels (the reader's present is the past in the novel and the reader's future is the novel's present), is not new in Spanish literature. In El Tragaluz (1967) Buero Vallejo employs a similar construction. For more information on the latter see John W. Kronik, "Buero Vallejo's El Tragaluz and Man's Existence in History," Hispanic Review 41 (1973): 371-396.

by the seven undated chapters. Lucía also keeps a diary of her stay in the hospital, roughly three months, that centers on her reactions to the progression of her illness, her relationship with her care-givers, her conversations with Ricardo, her remaining friend and interlocutor, and the realization of her impending death. These chapters are represented by the dated chapters and correspond to the reader's future, the year 2010. The final chapter takes place in Lucía's home, to where she has returned after learning that her illness is terminal. In this chapter there is a melding of the two time levels as Lucía attempts to finish her memories of the past, but the effects of her illness cause her to entangle her memories with the realities of the present moment and her imminent death.

Returning to the structure, it is important to emphasize just how great an evolution Montero's abilities at novel construction have undergone and the important role the structure of this particular novel plays. The base of the novel, as initially revealed quantitatively and structurally, is the chapters dedicated to Lucía's memories of the decisive week thirty years ago. This is reinforced, as we shall see, by the thematic structure of the novel. However, the author's novelistic intentions could not be achieved without the crucial diary chapters. It is precisely the structuring and interaction of these two levels that enables the development of the narration as well as conveyance of key ideas.

On the level of the narration, Montero has clearly stated that the structure of the novel was based upon the demands of the content. In an interview with Antonio Monegal the author declares that in Función she wished to explore two concerns that are fundamental for her, love and death. It is the latter that motivated the temporal division:

Puesto que quería hablar de la muerte, puse dos etapas en la vida de una mujer, una de ellas junto a la muerte, y que reflexionara sobre el paso del tiempo a partir de esa perspectiva temporal. (8)

While this temporal gap does dramatically underscore the differences between the younger Lucía's attitudes toward death, and that of the sixty year old Lucía, it also does the same for the principal themes of the novel: solitude, love, and old age. By structuring the novel on two different time levels, these differences are highlighted and, as we shall see, through the use of the memoir and the role of Ricardo there is also a constant reworking of the protagonist's position toward the themes.

This particular structuring of the first-person novel falls well within conventional models. As Bertil Romberg signals in Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First-Person Novel, the three fundamental types of first-person narrative are the fictitious memoir, the diary novel, and the epistolary novel. Romberg states that the first type is the most common:

Here the narrator depicts his own life -or someone else's- or parts thereof. The pattern is supplied by the authentic autobiography and the account that takes the form of a chronicle. From his epic situation the narrator sees the events in retrospect, and in the memoir novel proper we often encounter the fiction of an old man composing his autobiography at the end of his days. (35)

This is precisely the situation encountered in the undated chapters, the aging Lucía looks back to a specific time period in her past which she recounts. Montero chooses the traditional time structure, a chronological recollection, eschewing the chosen technique of many recent women novelists of this genre of avoiding linear time.¹⁵

As noted, in order to contrast the protagonist's attitudes toward life and death, Montero combines the memoir with the diary novel. The latter's structure is conventional as well; the narrator presents us with "some short, concentrated, frequent backward glances" that are very close to the events that the narrator reproduces (Romberg 43). The predominant tone of these sections is, as Emilio de Miguel Martinez points out, "absolutamente introspectivo y autoanalítico, con apenas presencia de hechos anecdóticos" (64). Romberg indicates that the consequence of employing

¹⁵See Ciplijauskaité's section on "Concienciación por medio de la memoria," p. 39.

both the memoir and the diary in a single structure is the confrontation and comparison of the two planes, resulting in illumination and reflection (102), exactly what Montero states as her goal.

It is at this point that Montero departs from convention. As just signaled, the primary conventional intent of the memoir, and in particular the juxtaposition of the memoir and the diary novel, is self-discovery. On the surface Función appears to conform perfectly to this end. As we have seen, the exterior structure of the novel is like that encountered in traditional first-person narrations of self-discovery and the following paragraphs will show how the author employs several elements of the genre to feign this interpretation.

Two such elements are point of view and narrator reliability. While Lucía's attitudes are structurally presented on two different time levels, they are not presented from two completely different perspectives. This is quite usual considering the nature of the chosen genre. With the first-person memoir, when the protagonist reflects on the events of the past there is a natural dualism, the narrator is both old and young. But it is important to remember that the events of the past are filtered through the eyes of the mature narrator, hence the perspective is not truly that which the narrator had when young. The degree to which the presence of the old narrator is perceived varies, creating several possible stances as narrator. One general classification

given by Lubomir Dolezel is: 1) the observing "I" that presents an almost objective narration, as if written in third person; 2) the rhetorical "I" that unites observation and interpretation, but who is not completely installed in the personal world; and 3) the intimate "I" that observes, interprets, and acts from a subjective conscious (Ciplijauskaité 19).

Montero's positioning of the protagonist's perspective does not fall neatly into any of these forms but rather can be considered a combination of the last two. Sixty year old Lucía believes that she is writing her memoirs from an objective distance that affords her a dispassionate and truthful perspective of the events and people involved. This "objective" distance underscores Montero's intention to play upon the element of credibility associated with a first-person main character narrator. Romberg describes this phenomenon in the following terms:

This narrative technique, whereby the main character himself surveys his eventful life, or describes particularly exciting parts of it, or else lays bare his soul to a friend, gives to the author the opportunity to take advantage of the primitive but remarkably persistent demand that the novel-reader in general makes of a narrative: namely, that it shall give an illusion of reality and truth. (59)

Hence, Lucía's memories are given the veneer of truth from the start by both her proclaimed critical distance from the events and by relying on the reader's general assumption of veracity.

Montero reinforces this illusion by playing upon conventional techniques associated with overcoming the problem of narrative distance. Romberg signals two possible stances with regard to this, either the narrator emphasizes a perfect memory, or the problem is not mentioned at all, implying the acceptance of the convention (98). With regard to the first, which Montero chooses, Romberg notes that this can be achieved in an obvious manner, stressing the perfect memory, or less obviously with the narrator admitting the uncertainty of some details with a "perhaps" or an "I think" that strengthens the illusion of authenticity (98).

Even though the use of both of these manners in one text would appear contradictory, Montero does employ both of them. However, they are used on different temporal planes and on different levels of consciousness. The indirect manner is employed in the memoir chapters by the protagonist as a recognized technique of literary convention. The first line of Lucía's memoirs begin with "Creo recordar...", thus firmly establishing the convention, and there are several instances where phrases such as "no recuerdo ya qué..." or "creo que" are employed. The fact that the protagonist views these expressions as purely narrative conventions is made abundantly clear by her unequivocal assertions of veracity in her diary.

When critiquing her memories with Ricardo, the latter questions her "memoria milagrosamente exacta" (162) and accuses her of lying. Not only will Lucía not admit any of the common pitfalls associated with the recollection of memories such as distortion, reinterpretation, or fictionalizing, she affirms that what she is relating is all true, "-Fue todo así...Me acuerdo perfectamente" (162). Interestingly, Lucía employs one conventional means of authorizing the narrative voice to reinforce the other, resulting in the creation of a reassuring illusion of narrator reliability. The interior structure of the chapters reflects this intention. As signaled, on both temporal planes each chapter is chronologically presented, with flashbacks occurring only after a clear trigger. The events, people, and the protagonist herself are described in great physical and emotional detail, once again functioning to firmly ground the illusion of a reliable first-person narrator. All of this viewed in conjunction with the conventional structure of the novel makes it appear that Función is a typical self-discovery first-person novel.

But if some aspect of these elements employed to support the illusion of a conventional use of the genre were subverted, would this affect the traditional intent of the genre signaled earlier? In Función the reader gradually senses that Lucía is not the narrator she would lead us to believe she is. The first intimations of this are revealed

when Lucía asks Ricardo to read the first pages of her memories. His response initiates the question of Lucía's reliability as a narrator:

Como novela está bien, pero como memorias es un fraude. Todo lo que cuentas es mentira, es una simple y llana distorsión de la realidad. (51)

Montero however doesn't plant these accusations until the third chapter of the novel, after Lucía's unfavorable introduction of Ricardo that is negatively characterized by phrases such as, "picajoso y pedante," "quiere tener la última palabra," "esa ridícula manera que tiene de hablar," "nadie más histrión que él," etc. By doing so, a basis for the reader's initial dismissal of Ricardo's opinions has been laid. This is reinforced by the fact that in the previous chapter Ricardo admits that a story he tells Lucía about his past was a fabrication. In addition, Lucía argues, as any reliable narrator would, that Ricardo could not possibly know more about her life than she herself, and accordingly labels his accusations as "ridículas."

Nonetheless, Ricardo's philosophy about embellishment that follows his accusations is a red flag to the reader about narrator reliability. Ricardo carefully differentiates between his "lies" and those he believes Lucía to be telling:

Yo he escogido las mentiras. Las mentiras me protegen y además habrás de reconocer que mis mentiras mejoran la realidad. En mí es, por lo

tanto, una opción voluntaria. Pero tu caso es distinto: tú quieres creer y hacer creer que dices la verdad. (52)

Although Lucía laughingly shakes off these reproaches, by the third chapter Montero has insinuated what will come to be a major issue of the novel, the reliability of Lucía as narrator.

The clarification of this depends in great part on the role of the narratee which, as previously signaled, is fulfilled by Ricardo. When speaking of an intradiegetic narratee, the conventional role is as defined by Seymour Chatman:

...he (the narratee) performs as audience for the narrator, an audience upon whom the various artifices of narrative rhetoric may be practiced...the acquiescing narratee can show that the narrator's efforts to convince, to win acceptance of his version are in fact successful. (258)

As the novel progresses it becomes very clear that Lucía is unable to persuade Ricardo to accept her version of the week. He repeatedly asserts that her memoir "está lleno de falsedades" (93). Lucía realizes that this jeopardizes her authority and there is a continual struggle on her part to undermine Ricardo's opinions, sometimes overtly by flatly denying them, and at other times more subtly, done primarily

through personal attacks on Ricardo's character generally placed near the inclusion of his opinions as if to offset them. A good example of this occurs in the first paragraph of the chapter titled "25 septiembre."

However, despite Lucía's attempts to discredit Ricardo's opinions a dramatic interchange between narrator and narratee begins to develop. Upon reading the second instalment of the memoir in chapter six, among other allegations, Ricardo contradicts the status of a secondary character's career, José-Joe, and just how Lucía came to know him. In this section Lucía writes that she met José-Joe in a boarding-house, while he was still employed as a notions salesperson, and that it was in effect her film that launched his acting career. Ricardo chides her for her "alicaídas neuronas," brags about his perfect memory, "si mal no recuerdo, y YO no recuerdo mal" (94), and states that Lucía ended, not launched, José-Joe's career, and that it was Rosa who met him in a boarding-house, not her. Although Lucía vehemently denies that she altered the reality of the episode, in the subsequent memoir chapter, titled "Wednesday," she makes a small but telling change. Without specifically naming José-Joe but rather referring to him as "un mentecato," nor rectifying anything concerning his career status, she writes that it was Rosa who met him first in "una pensión de mala muerte" (122), confirming indirectly and grudgingly, as shown by the insults, Ricardo's version of the situation.

Although Lucía makes no direct admission of unreliability, by utilizing the structure of the novel and the two temporal planes, she is able to subtly rework her version of her memories. This becomes a continual process in the novel. In the diary chapters Ricardo critiques Lucía's memoir as she writes it and Lucía makes certain revisions, generally non-fundamental changes as seen in the previous example, based on his criticism in subsequent memoir chapters. Montero's dialectical structuring of the novel thus subverts the narratee's traditional uni-directional role of audience/receptor. Ricardo's crucial, non-passive interaction with the protagonist serves to change Lucía's version of her memories.

These changes in her memoir caused by the subversion of the conventional relationship between the narrator and the narratee should logically affect Lucía's vision of herself, and ultimately raise the question of the traditional intent of the memoir cited earlier. Although the protagonist justifies the beginning of the memoir as simply "un divertimento" to pass time in the hospital, her statements and actions reveal otherwise. On a personal level, by writing the memories of a week that was both an emotional and professional crossroads, Lucía voluntarily re-lives and reviews the "Lucía" of thirty years ago and her attitude toward fundamental questions. As we have seen, the questions raised by Ricardo with regard to many parts of this memoir force the protagonist to reexamine

the "I" that she herself has constructed. Through this often painful process, while Lucía does make certain corrections in her memoir, she never admits that they were motivated by Ricardo's observations or error on her part. This is clearly illustrated by a discussion between the two toward the end of the novel:

-He observado al leer lo que has escrito últimamente que comienzas a hacerme caso. Eso está muy bien, tu trabajo está mejorando notablemente gracias a mis consejos.

-¿Qué te hago caso? ¿Dónde? -respondí picada.

-Bueno... -gesto vago-. En casi todo. Por ejemplo, al introducir tus dudas sobre si Hipólito te quería o no. Unas dudas más que razonables, si se me permite decir.

-Eres insoportable. ¿Crees que eso lo he puesto sólo por aquella discusión que tuvimos? ¿Crees que yo soy, o era, lo suficientemente estúpida como para no ser capaz de tener dudas por mí sola?

(265-66)

Although with regard to the issue in question it does appear that Lucía, although denying Ricardo's influence, has somewhat reevaluated her interpretation, and in other instances there is a reworking and a limited consciousness of her attitudes, with fundamental issues she refuses to alter the version that she has constructed. The most poignant example of this is her

relationship with Miguel, which for Lucía was not the life-fulfilling experience she likes to recall. This unwillingness of the narrator to reexamine and de-idealize crucial issues in her life negates the principal function of the memoir as self-discovery.

If the genre does not function for this end, then for what purpose does Lucía's memoir serve? Ricardo intuits one of the reasons after once again questioning the exactness of Lucía's memory. When Lucía defensively admits that she had researched a certain aspect, "un recurso normalísimo para cualquier escritor" (163), Ricardo asks her about her creative intentions:

-Así es que lo estás escribiendo muy en serio, estás escribiendo eso con pretensiones de novela, de obra literaria...

-¿Y por qué no? (163)

The protagonist's creative inclinations are not without precedent. During the period evoked by her memoir Lucía works in the advertising profession filming commercials for women's products. However, this job does not satisfy her creative needs as evidenced by her disparaging reference to it, "ese trabajo de corrupto mercachifle que pretendía ser artístico, libre y creativo" (28). Her creative energies instead find outlet in the directing of her first, and what turns out to be her only, film which is to be screened the week encompassed in her memoir.

The protagonist's longstanding dream to be a film director stems from her concept of cinema which she considers to be a vehicle capable of creating a passionate world that can envelope the spectator to the point that, "llegas a olvidarte de ti misma" (115). For Lucía the cinema is a means of escape from a reality that she repeatedly describes as monotonous, solitary, and fear-filled. Her intense need for this escape is seen in the way she constantly dramatizes episodes of her own life, viewing them from a cinematic perspective as if she were not living them but rather directing them. An example of this is seen in the following description:

Le [Hipólito] imaginé escribiendo en su casa, en esa casa que yo no conocía y que por lo tanto podría inventar a mi placer. Estaría sentado ante una mesa de despacho de tipo inglés, el sol se tamizaría a través de unas cortinas de color tabaco, en el tocadiscos giraría Mahler llenando de ecos las habitaciones vacías. (112)

At this particular moment Lucía is tormenting herself because she has not heard from Hipólito. Her frustration and imagination lead her into dangerous emotional territory as she envisions what he might be doing and with whom. However, by transforming a personal image to a cinematic image Lucía is able to distance herself from the situation, invent her own version, and thus avoid, or at least better control, the

emotional consequences. Through the act of creation she is able to temporarily escape the need to confront reality, and ultimately herself.

It is precisely this intention that underscores Lucía's memoir. On one level it fulfills her need to create, but more fundamentally it is a vehicle through which she can escape her reality. As already cited, Lucía states that she initially begins her memoir to escape the tedium of her stay in the hospital. As this stay becomes prolonged, causing the protagonist to fearfully speculate in the diary sections about the nature of her illness, the memoir becomes an unacknowledged refuge for escaping not only the illness, but those fears of what the illness might be and to what it might lead. When her worst suspicions are confirmed, Lucía then consciously uses the memoir as a means of escaping the inevitable confrontation with the final reality, death. The completion of her memoir becomes, as she determinedly states, the means to concretize her existence and to avoid death through fictional immortality:

Tengo que terminar de escribir mis memorias, tengo que conseguirlo. Para que quede algo de mí, para salvar parte de mí misma de la nada. Para fijar en el tiempo aquellos días en los que existí intensamente.... (340)

Although Lucía does question the personal importance of artistic immortality, "Aunque, en realidad, ¿qué importa todo

eso? Es un esfuerzo inútil el escribir unos papeles que no existirán para mí cuando yo no exista" (340), she still determinedly works on her memoir until the last moment, even though the tumor impedes her concentration and causes her to mix memories with present reality.

These extremes underscore the principal function of the memoir, "rescatar aquella semana del olvido de mi muerte" (364), and emphasize the protagonist's desperate need to escape reality. Thus Montero plays with the conventional function of the memoir, making it appear that through its structural interaction with the diary the protagonist's goal is indeed self-discovery, an illusion reinforced logically by her imminent death. However, by subverting the traditional narrator/narratee relationship to imply the unreliability and closed nature of the protagonist the intention of the memoir is also subverted, its primary function shifting to that of an act of creation through which the protagonist tries to avoid confronting and overcome the final reality of her death.

This subversion of the conventional end of the genre is perhaps a reflection of the author's views on self-understanding which she believes difficult to achieve:

Me consideraba entonces (cuando tenía 21 años) **una mujer con experiencia**, e incluso creía conocerme a mí misma. Esto no ocurre ahora, al contrario. Me siento una gran desconocida de mí misma e incluso me sorprendo a cada instante con mis reacciones. A

medida que va pasando el tiempo te vas dando cuenta que no tienes nada claro. La madurez empieza cuando comenzamos a no encontrar respuestas a nada; todo es inseguridad. (Tocino 17)

The author's personal philosophy on knowing one's self calls into question the fundamental viability of the genre to function as a vehicle of personal closure and self-understanding. Is the achieved self-understanding that one frequently encounters in the genre real or instead a fictionalizing of one's life, an artistic creation as in the case of Lucía?

Montero's use of a metafictional aspect in the Función appears to suggest the latter.¹⁶ As we have seen, Montero does draw attention to the use of the memoir genre as artefact, but this is not done as systematically nor as intrusively as many contemporary novels of the metafictional tendency. However this lack of obtrusive metafictional technique does not negate the metafictional aspect of the novel because the author's reason for using it is not to flaunt the latest literary techniques, but rather the fundamental issue of raising questions about the conventionally established boundary between fiction and reality. The author achieves this goal by manipulating the memoir genre and its relationship to metafiction. This occurs

¹⁶For more information on the intention of metafiction see Patricia Waugh, Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 2.

in much the same manner that Patricia Waugh uses to describe the "metafictionality" of less "radical" novels like John Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman; Montero takes as the "object" language the structures of the memoir which are then defamiliarized by counter-techniques, in this case, to undermine the authority of the author, the narrator/narratee relationship, and the conventional intent of the genre (Metafiction 13). The result is that the reader's attention is drawn to the artificial construction, the fictionalizing of Lucía's "real" world, which leads the reader to question not only the conventional use of the memoir as a true vehicle of self-discovery, but also one's perception of daily reality. Is the reality one lives also similarly constructed, similarly fictionalized? Montero's novel, true to the post-modern tendency of eschewing definite truths, does not answer this question. However, considering the tendencies not only of this novel but those to follow, it appears that the conventional separation between fiction and reality is not accepted by the author who considers rather that they have a dialectical relationship which can be effectively explored in the novelistic form.

Montero's constant push to expand her narrative capacities, so evident in a structure that plays such a major role in the formation of the novel, is also apparent in the aspect of characterization. The level of characterization in this second novel is evidently superior to that of the

previous novel, with several characters that go beyond types, touching the reader with their complexities and incongruities. This progress is facilitated by the structuring of the characters of the novel. Unlike the previous novel that was structured around the chronicle of a group of characters, this novel focuses on the memories of a single protagonist. Important secondary character intervention is restricted to the active role played by Ricardo in the narrator's present, and the recounted roles of Hipólito and Miguel. In both levels, memoir and diary, there are additional characters that intervene to varying extent, but their participation and importance is limited in the majority to specific themes. This limited number lends itself to a more equitable development of characters. Principal ones are more developed using, as we will see, techniques different from those of the previous novel, while at the same time maintaining quite effectively the use of the snapshot technique with the secondary characters.

When discussing the characterization of Función one must begin with the evident limits imposed by the narrative form. Because the novel is narrated exclusively by a first-person protagonist it is important to underline that all of the different techniques employed must be filtered through a single perspective, that of Lucía's. This obviously engenders several problems. The first of which being that the techniques employed must be compatible with the capabilities

of the narrator. This problem is solved by the profession of the narrator, that of director of films and commercials, because the capabilities attributed to her are those within the range of one familiar with working with narratives.

Second is the problem of verisimilitude stemming from the use of a single perspective. Is the portrayal of the other characters believable? Montero plays with this aspect from two angles. By firmly establishing from the start the authority of the narrator's voice, the verisimilitude of the characterization is resolved early in the novel. However, as pointed out, the authority of the narrator is gradually undermined as the novel progresses. This ultimately enriches the characterization by incorporating reader supposition as to the true nature of the characters, which in effect becomes a second perspective. Finally the problem of self-characterization arises, how does the narrator deal with this? As we shall see, Lucía defines herself through her own direct comments, the comments of other characters that she "faithfully" recounts, and the subtle inconsistencies with the above perceived by the reader in her recounted actions.

Having pointed out these problems, I would like to begin with the secondary, infrequently intervening characters. As already mentioned, with these characters Montero quite fittingly employs the snapshot technique, developed in her interviews and used extensively in the previous novel. This technique is appropriate because these characters, although

interesting, are not essential, fulfilling rather a thematically functional role in the narration. In addition, they are flat characters and do not develop, hence this technique is an excellent manner to briefly, but with great impact, convey the essence of the character. Montero excels at this particular technique as seen in the following humorous/pathetic snapshot characterization of Tadeo, "el chico-para-todo" of her agency:

Tadeo debía estar entonces rondando los cuarenta, pero la suya era una flaccidez como en conserva, de viscosa textura. Era bajo, de osamenta raquítica, con una barriguita tímida asomada sobre el cinturón de plástico que imitaba cuero. La calvicie contribuía a ampliar las considerables dimensiones de su cabeza y perfilaba la esfericidad perfecta de su cara, redonda como una hogaza y vacía de rasgos. Sa había dejado crecer los ralos cabellos de las sienes, que sobresalían como dos flequillos laterales, para ocultar con ellos su secreto, esas orejas inmensas y carnosas que él pegaba al cráneo con esparadrapo en el cándido convencimiento de que nadie había descubierto tal argucia.... (27)

With regard to more important secondary characters, a group comprised of the three men most influential in Lucía's life: Hipólito, Miguel, and Ricardo; Montero skillfully changes technique. In the case of Miguel and Hipólito, these

characters are introduced in media res by the protagonist in the first chapter; Lucía begins her memories as if the reader were already familiar with them. By using this technique it appears as if her first, and decisive, comments about them formed part of their already established character. This is key to the subsequent development and interpretation of these characters. The protagonist deludes herself into believing that her characterizations are objective by giving the appearance of letting the characters develop through their words and actions, when subconsciously she slants their characterization throughout the novel along the lines insinuated in her first comments. In the case of Hipólito, Lucía describes him in chapter one as an outwardly arrogant ["al verle llegar por la calle camino de nuestra cita, braceando como húsar en ensayo de desfile, el rostro erguido" (9)] but inwardly insecure, malicious ["la sonrisa ratonil y lista" (9)], narcissistic writer afraid of intimacy and capable of living only through his words ["en realidad era todo palabras. Palabras fluidas, palabras finamente engarzadas entre sí, un cúmulo de palabras carente de coraje" (21)].

These key images are repeated consistently throughout the novel in the encounters, imagined and real, between the two. Yet despite these defects, Hipólito also contradictorily represents for the protagonist the idea of passionate love,

and all of its ensuing games. He is the lover who is capable of making her feel the passion and sensations of a first love:

Porque Hipólito es la aventura, el amor loco de la adolescencia, la pasión. Cada vez que le veo se me acelera el corazón, me entra dolor de estómago, me dan vértigos.... (81)

Yet this image also is contradicted by the passages where Lucía attributes to Hipólito not the characteristics of the passionate lover but rather those of the refined sensitive one, characterized by a "finura de sentimientos" and a "compleja sensibilidad" (111). By depicting Hipólito with such disparate traits Lucía unwittingly likens him to a soap-opera romantic lead, a carton figure. His characterization functions not so much as to develop a probable replicate of the individual, as to be a mirror of Lucía's desires. Just as Ana in Crónica invents a Soto Amon to fill her needs, so does Lucía use Hipólito in his multiple roles to satisfy her fantasies of the moment. Thus the characterization of Hipólito, while serving several thematic functions that will be explored shortly, becomes quite significantly a window on the narrator's own personality.

The characterization of Miguel on the other hand, while evidently reflecting some of Lucía's profound needs, is allowed more autonomy. One reason for this is that his characterization does not depend as much as Hipólito's on the emotional state of the protagonist because he is not asked to

fulfil the emotionally charged needs of passionate love, but rather to represent compromise love. Unlike in the case of Hipólito, the initial description of Miguel and his relationship with the protagonist does not center on sexual aspects, but rather emotive ones. From the first moment Miguel is portrayed as Lucía's emotional savior:

Era Miguel, y al reconocerle se diluyó mi furia de inmediato. Miguel conseguía siempre, quién sabe por qué acogedor milagro, rodearme de una cálida serenidad, poner en armonía mis disparatados humores interiores. (15)

This image of the safe emotional harbor is reinforced by Miguel's physical description. While Hipólito's body is described as small and nervous, reinforced by his asthmatic condition, Miguel's is "enorme y desencuadrado" (59), a corpulence that the narrator describes as "tierna y comfortable" (139). This is underscored by the descriptive adjectives used for comparisons that emphasize the ideas of strength and security, thus his "acogedor" shoulder becomes, "ese cobijo peludo y cálido con fragante olor a madera resinosa" (59). The protagonist continually highlights the secure, homey aspects of the character as seen in his choice of clothing, his domestic prowess, and his approach to his profession -professor of mathematics- which is characterized as not the hard-edged intellectual but rather "la caricatura del sabio despistado" (60).

Although, as we have seen, the characterizations of the two lovers does make quite clear that the narrator perceives them as fulfilling two different functions, this division is again repeated explicitly in the protagonist's commentaries which, as seen in the following sample statements, try to concretize these images of the two characters:

Miguel es mi compañero e Hipólito es mi amante.

(81)

Era extraño, pero de Hipólito añoraba quizá más el sexo, y de Miguel el abrazo. (60)

Up to the very end of the novel, both in the memoir and diary sections, Lucía steadfastly insists on these initial visions of the characters. However, as the novel progresses these visions are challenged by the comments of Ricardo. His interjections serve to highlight the subjectivity and narrowness of Lucía's characterizations which he resolutely disputes ["La vida no es blanca y negra, no está compuesta por héroes y traidores" (161)], and to suggest aspects of the characters not mentioned by Lucía. Confronted with differing versions of the characters the reader must then determine his/her concept of them, taking into consideration the reliability of the source of each version and the verisimilitude of their related actions. In this manner the development of the characters is more complex than in the previous novel, and the participation of the reader is

consciously demanded, thus enriching the characterization possibilities.

The characterization of Ricardo is likewise structured around conscious reader participation, but in this instance the process is even more complicated due to several factors. As with Miguel and Hipólito, the characterization of Ricardo is also grounded in a dominant image that Lucía tries to project throughout both the memoir and the diary. As previously noted, this image is negative, summed up by Ricardo himself as the portrait of "un jovenzuelo atolondrado que no sabe hacer nada a derechas" (96). The word "fracaso" becomes a leitmotif in the construction of the character, underlying all aspects of his life; emotional, sexual, and professional.

However, as in the case of Hipólito and Miguel, this particular image is broken repeatedly. As with the portrayal of the former, it is once again Ricardo who objects to, in this instance, the portrait painted of him. He comments heatedly upon the accuracy of events and Lucía's interpretations of them. Initially, Lucía discredits his objections by dredging up related incidents that Ricardo would rather forget, leading the reader to believe that Ricardo is simply trying to soften a negative, but generally truthful, portrait. But as the novel progresses, Ricardo's commentaries begin to subtly influence both Lucía's memoir and her behavior, lending more weight to his observations. Through this interchange the character is able to influence his own

characterization, both with regard to Lucía, as seen in the changes that she incorporates in the memoir and the diary, and with the reader because the latter must revise his/her initial opinion of the character.

This influence would not have been possible if Ricardo were not directly present in both the memoir and the diary (the only character aside from the narrator in that situation), and if Lucía herself did not have her own doubts about the veracity of his characterization. This is very important because it is only with the characterization of Ricardo that Lucía even half-seriously questions her objectivity, and actually comes close to admitting an inaccurate portrayal. This questioning occurs even before Ricardo himself initiates it. In the very chapter in which she first introduces Ricardo, Lucía regrets her portrayal of him, "He releído lo que acabo de escribir y he de confesar que me siento algo culpable. Culpable por ensañarme tanto con Ricardo. Culpable por hablar tan mal de él" (44). At this point, Lucía simply attributes this regret to the fact that Ricardo is a longstanding friend, but as the novel progresses it becomes clear that this is a simplistic response. The characterization of Ricardo becomes in fact an indirect key, as in the case of Hipólito and to a lesser extent Miguel, to Lucía's own personality. The passages where Lucía writes particularly depreciatively of Ricardo generally follow an incident where Lucía herself has been emotionally damaged;

thus it is her method of venting hurt and frustration. In these passages the characteristics that she attributes to Ricardo are really those that compose her own personality.

Generally this association of characteristics must be recognized by the reader, meaning that there is a span of time between Lucía's attribution of this characteristic to Ricardo and the situation where it is perceived in Lucía herself. For example, the chapter titled "25 setiembre" opens with Lucía denouncing Ricardo's irritating "convicción de infalibilidad" (93), a characteristic that Lucía has already displayed in chapter three, and will repeatedly exhibit in subsequent chapters. On occasion the narrator herself unwittingly supplies a direct juxtaposition, making it all the more ironic and poignant as seen in the following passage, "Por lo menos poseo capacidad autocrítica, cosa de la que Ricardo carece. El se cree perfecto, sin tacha, en perpetua posesión de la verdad" (161). These particular statements by Lucía follow words of criticism leveled at her by Ricardo with regard to, once again, the veracity of her memoir and her vision of the world.

Thus the characterization of Ricardo functions, aside from its thematic implications, on two primary levels; one being the construction of the character itself, and the other as an indirect key to the protagonist. Since this is in general the same technique encountered in the characterization

of Hipólito and Miguel it becomes evident that these indirect clues relating to the nature of the protagonist are essential.

The reason for this lies in the fact that, as already signaled, Lucía is the narrator and she does construct her own image, which brings to bear the question of reliability. Lucía believes that by relying on what she considers to be an objective narration of her emotions and actions she will be able to convey the self-image that she desires to portray. Her firm belief that the narration is objective is evidenced by her insistence on the memoir's veracity. Her writing style also reflects to a certain extent this desire for objectivity in that there is a noticeable avoidance of the subjective "I am..." structure, which occurs only infrequently. However, when it does appear instead of having the effect that the narrator desires, a reinforcement of that particular characteristic, it is generally highly ironic because her actions reveal, or have revealed, that this is a characteristic that she does not possess. An example of this occurs in mid-novel when Lucía, in the midst of an argument with Ricardo declares, "me tengo por una persona bastante justa, ecuánime" (161), then proceeds to completely disprove this by unjustly attacking his character.

The above technique exemplifies the indispensable double reading of the novel because it is the fundamental means of characterization of the narrator. On a superficial level the narrator presents the reader with the image that she wishes to

leave for posterity, but this image is frequently contradicted, at times by Ricardo or another character, or by the protagonist's very actions. In this manner a characterization of the protagonist is achieved despite her attempts to construct a quite different image.

The image that Lucía desires to construct in her memoir is linked in great part to her self-perception at the moment of writing her diary. Nearing on sixty, in poor health, and interned in the hospital, Lucía's self-image and mental health are in crisis. Lucía is no longer able to recognize in herself the autonomous, intelligent, and strong image that she had strived to construct since youth. This self-image, as we see in the memoir, was based in great part on the opinions of others. As is common in women who construct their self-image based on the opinions of others, typically men, these self-images are frequently rooted in great attention to the physical image.¹⁷ Thus Lucía's physical deterioration, internal and especially external, is another factor that leads to the questioning of her identity. That it is a factor is clearly reflected in the passage concerning her recurring nightmare about aging and the horror provoked by an altered physical image that impedes self-recognition:

¹⁷Further information concerning gender structuring of identity can be found in the second chapter of Patricia Waugh's Feminine Fictions titled, "Psychoanalysis, Gender, and Fiction."

Me miro y me miro, horrorizada, intento reconocerme
bajo las arrugas, bajo la piel decrepita. (201)

The physically old woman that Lucía observes in the hospital is characterized by the consumption of fears that often take the shape of solitude, dependence, and mortality. As a response to this unbearable and negative present Lucía retreats to the past, not only as a means of escape, but also with the hope of resurrecting the Lucía that has inexplicably slipped away, a form of immortality.

The period that she chooses to base her image on is a moment that she considers to be the professional and emotional high point of her life. The particular image that she wishes to portray is of the self-sufficient professional woman who, not dependent on anyone, especially a man, is her own person; ambitious, creative, and able to deal handily with life's problems. The image is in effect the idealized superwoman image created by the feminist movement in its early years. It is based on the assertion that the differences evident between men and women were the result of social conditioning, and that inferior traits, those associated negatively with femininity, could be eliminated through education and conscious appropriation of traditionally male positively-viewed characteristics which most psychoanalytic theories consider as constituting maturity (Feminine Fictions 42). This particular image was heavily promoted during the period of the seventies and eighties by many, feminists as well as other sectors of

the society. Especially prone to exploit this image were those in the field of image construction (commercials, television, film) who cynically hoped to placate the growing anger of many women by creating pseudo-strong images of women. An example of this image falsification and cynical manipulation is seen clearly in the novel itself. The very commercials that the protagonist films have been superficially altered (the woman's postures and wardrobe) with the specific goal in mind that, "no resultaran anticuados ante las exigencias de las feministas" (30).

The fact that Lucía is conscious of this manipulation makes even more problematic the fact that she does, however unwittingly, buy into the rhetoric. This is illustrated by the fact that the older Lucía views as a loss this younger superwoman Lucía, and as the memoir reveals, the younger Lucía rails against what she considers to be a sign of lack of character the fact that the characteristics of ambition, self-sufficiency, objectivity, and strength do not come easily to her. However, despite the mature Lucía's effort to portray the younger in a manner that supports the superwoman myth, the younger's actions upon reflection clearly destroy it.

This constant undermining of characterization is essential to the comprehension of the character. One facet of it is its use as a vehicle to make a statement about the superwoman ideal. In repeated cases the characteristics that compose this image are shown to be lacking in the protagonist.

For example the mature Lucía loathes the emotional dependence of her present situation and she idealizes the younger Lucía as free of this trait. However, the actions of the younger Lucía reveal in fact that she is highly dependent upon male relationships, symbolized by the constant repetition of the scene in which the phone rings and the first thing that Lucía says is "No era Hipólito," even though she has avowed that she does not want to see him again. Thus the characterization of Lucía is based in part upon her lifelong and ultimately unsuccessful struggle to conform to an idealized female image.

This characterization is strikingly similar in certain aspects to that of Ana in Crónica. Although in Función the overt feminine issues of the previous novel are not as predominant, in both novels the female protagonists are structured around feelings of self-deficiency provoked by comparisons to the prevailing, in more progressive sectors of course, female ideal in vogue during the post-Franco years. In both cases Montero shows the problems and repercussions involved in trying to attain this ideal. It appears quite clear that the author considers this ideal to be inviable, not because a woman innately lacks these characteristics, but rather because by dividing characteristics into diametrically opposed groups such as those of male or female, an unavoidable hierarchization emerges. Montero urges instead a revalorization of all characteristics, especially those considered traditionally as feminine. In the case of Lucía we

see the reflection of this train of thought in her moments of happiness. Lucía is most content during moments of sincere, and not role-dominated, emotional connection with others where characteristics such as emotionalism and interdependence, typically associated with the female, are valued. This revalorization of feminine traits is also strongly underscored at the end of the novel when Lucía, on her deathbed, in a liberating hallucinatory state confesses to her friend Rosa:

...creo que tenías razón en muchas cosas. En tu forma de relacionarte con los demás. En tu gineceo del que me he reído tantas veces. Creo...creo que tú sí has sabido querer a las personas, y escucharlas, y conocerlas de verdad. (362)

The characterization of Lucía demonstrates that Montero considers reaching this revalorized state, what Stimpson has aptly described as, "female heterodoxy, at once independent and interdependent" (275), is quite difficult. Lucía is a volatile, often contradictory creation that although structured with relation to a feminist ideal, is far from what most feminist would consider a role model. What she represents instead is the legion of women who, assaulted by a complex barrage of societal and personal pressures to conform to one ideal or another, struggle to find a sense of self, a struggle that in the end, as we are reminded by the novel, may never reach a conscious sense of self-unity. It is for this reason, the tragic futile human aspect of the character and

not the underneath construction, that so many readers empathize so deeply with the protagonist.

This same emphasis is reflected in the structuring of the novel's themes. Although feminine issues and specific concerns relating to the time periods are present, the issues that dominate are those directly related to Lucía's emotional life and considered universal human issues. This is the opposite of the situation encountered in the first novel where clearly feminine and particular issues were foregrounded. The reason for the shift is that the primary intention of this novel is to explore fundamental human concerns through the personal experiences of the protagonist. This is clearly evident in the thematic structure of the novel and is corroborated by the protagonist herself in response to a comment by Ricardo:

-De cualquier forma me sorprende tu falta de memoria social. Quiero decir que no hablas nada del ambiente político en que vivías. Como si tú y tus malditos novios estuvierais colgando del vacío.
-¿Para qué hablar de todo eso? No me interesa nada. (163)

Although the protagonist's affirmation generally holds true, there is limited attention paid to particular issues.¹⁸

¹⁸In the chapters prior to Ricardo's commentary concerning Lucía's lack of social consciousness the occasions where particular concerns are dealt with is limited, especially with regard to the diary chapters where the society of the future would be the focus. After his comment, Lucía increasingly

Following the structure of the novel, these can be divided into those of the post-Franco society and those of the reader's future, the society of 2010. A division is appropriate because generally only in the case of male-female roles do these concerns overlap. The particular concerns depicted of the post-Franco society are of a more heterogeneous nature than those relating to the future. They range from urban contamination (119) and traffic problems (109) to Hare Khrisnas (242) and the use of soft drugs (125). However, Montero does focus slightly more attention on certain particular issues which, revealingly, are those encountered previously in Crónica. One of these is the presence of violence in daily life. Montero repeats a technique of Crónica to introduce violence into Lucía's life; the recounting of a series of violent deaths related with graphic detail over the radio inserted casually into Lucía's day. As in the previous novel, some of these deaths are random acts of violence while others give the appearance of being politically related. The latter is clearly illustrated in the unprovoked killing in chapter nine ("Jueves") of a youth, singled out for an anti-nuclear button he was wearing, by the "Escuadrón del Orden," a group not specifically explained but clearly related to the ideals of the extreme right. The effect of the struggles between conservative and liberal elements is not

mentions particular concerns with emphasis on the problems of this future society, once again illustrating the importance of the character Ricardo to the novel.

delved into in great detail, but the overall feeling of political unrest is strikingly seen in the way that Ricardo characterizes these years, "Eran los años del miedo" (163).

Another area touched upon is the structure of corporate power, embodied in this novel by Lucía's boss Fariño. Fashioned along the lines of Crónica's Soto Amón and Domingo Gutiérrez, Lucía's physically attractive, impeccably dressed, and constantly smiling boss is well-versed in the arts of power and skillful manipulation of subordinates as well as humiliation, as seen in his merciless teasing of Tadeo. Lucía has great contempt for Fariño which is evidenced by her scornful remarks about him and reinforced by noting some less than flattering elements of his physical description - transplanted hair, American made false teeth, and short stature - meant in turn to humiliate him. Yet despite her personal dislike for Fariño, Lucía is very conscious of the structure of power at work and, although resentful, bows to its imperatives as seen in her inclusion of her boss Fariño, and not her co-workers, on the list of those invited to the opening of her film.

Montero also dedicates space to the problems of homosexuality and alienation, here incarnated by Tadeo. In this case the portrayal tends toward the parodical, grotesque, and pitiful, a marked departure from the characterization of Cecilio in Crónica. Alienation is also represented once again by the elderly, who will be discussed in a later section, and

women. As previously stated, particular feminine concerns of the period are dealt with less extensively than in the previous novel, but the general direction and tone of these concerns is carried over into Función. Examples are the problems encountered by Lucía in fulfilling her dream of becoming a film director due to her being a woman, the depiction of women by the advertising industry, or simply the succumbing to social imperatives imposed on women, here symbolized by the ideal of ever-smooth shaved legs.

One concern that finds an almost identical, although more limited, repetition is the figure of the abandoned wife, here represented by an unnamed woman. As Julita of Crónica, this woman was abandoned by her husband of many years for a younger woman. Their situations are analogous, both have custody of their almost grown children, continue in their homes thanks to money received from their ex-spouses, and desire economic independence but lack the skills to achieve it due to their many years as devoted wives and homemakers. Their reactions are quite similar as well, both are very hurt by the separation and feel rejected, but most importantly both feel that their identity has been taken away as seen in the literal repetition of the lament, "me siento tan perdida" (Crónica 100, Función 132).

On the other hand, the particular concerns expressed with regard to the future are much more impersonal. They center around the political and economic structures of the future as

envisioned by a writer clearly anchored in the eighties. By this I mean that the principle changes foreseen are those that are already perceived as potentially problematic in the eighties. The primary base of these changes is the fear of governmental control over one's life. In the society of 2010 this is actualized on the political, social, and labor level by what Montero terms the micro-electronic revolution (166). It is this revolution that creates the capacity for detailed records of every citizen through the "Orwellian" COI (Central Occidental de Información) which as Ricardo states, "escupe toda tu vida, todos tus datos personales, el exhaustivo recuento de todos tus comportamientos equívocos" (167). This centralization of records knows no borders, and is especially advanced where international police matters are concerned, thus effectively neutralizing any possible dissention.

The revolution also leads to strict regulations as to the categorization and length of employment because of a subsequent diminished need for human labor replaced by automatized labor. The attainment of a leisure society where workers enjoy a year vacation for every eight months of work, previously considered utopian, is portrayed as one more area where personal choice is limited by government intervention. In addition, the availability of jobs is determined by multinational corporations who distribute production among themselves leading to increased worker displacement. This in turn creates the ultimate throw-away consumer society that

changes car, home, furniture, and even friends every year. However, the underlying key to all this change is in fact homogenization. The products, as evidenced by the description of the new cities,¹⁹ and ultimately the hope is the consumers, vary little thus facilitating control.

Nonetheless, the reception of this repressive political, social, and labor structure by the citizens is one of complacency. As Ricardo signals, "Hoy lo sano es vivir contento y conforme con este superestado policial" (166). This complacency is symbolized by the preferred activity of the vacationing worker -the television of the future- in front of which one's days are idly consumed, and upon which, the same in the future as nowadays, society's own faults are laid, "El televisor, Lucía, con toda su maravillosa extensión de videos, nos ha quemado la vida" (166).

It appears that the only element of dissent in this future society is the elderly, aptly described by Ricardo as, "la generación perdida del cambio" (167). According to him, the elderly are considered enemies of this future society and are tolerated only because they will soon be dead. Frighteningly however, the crimes of dissension that are attributed to them are those like smoking and the desire to continue living in the city and in one place, in short petty

¹⁹Lucía describes the cities as "tan bonitas, tan verdes y tan amplias, esas ciudades perfectas y absolutamente iguales que se repiten incansablemente a sí mismas por todo el mundo" (88).

crimes that go against the new norms. Ricardo believes that conformity has taken on such importance in this future society that if he were a young person his behavior would not be tolerated:

Pero si fuéramos jóvenes no nos admitirían, seríamos destruidos de inmediato. Me estremece pensar en el futuro que les espera a los jóvenes que intenten ser distintos. (167)

In Función Montero does not take up Ricardo's question. Although María de Día, the only representative of the younger generation in the novel, does express some discontent with the system, she does end up following regulations. It will not be until Temblor that Montero once again turns her imagination to a future world and the place of dissenters within. But it is probable that the incursion into science fiction in Función reinforced for the author the great possibilities of the genre to represent current problems in an entirely different light, a perspective that makes one take a second look at them, by projecting them into the future. Clearly in Función the use of the future is primarily to contrast Lucía's attitudes toward fundamental issues of her life, but precedent for Montero's use of science fiction is established, and the particular direction that this use takes will play an important role in Temblor.

As previously signaled, the thematic structure of Función centers on universal concerns viewed primarily from the

perspective of a woman. Although a number of them are present Montero concentrates on four principal ones, solitude, love, aging, and death. As in Crónica, solitude has an enormous presence in this novel, underlying almost every situation, and functioning in much the same manner. In both time levels of the novel Lucía is overwhelmed by solitude, "me sentí olvidada, sola en un buque que se hunde" (120), in the hospital because all of her friends except Ricardo have stopped coming to see her, and in the memoir level because her parents, friends, and Miguel are out of town and Hipólito is avoiding her. The attitude that Lucía adopts toward solitude is one based on conventional wisdom. She believes that solitude is a given that one must deal with, rather like a challenge to be accepted, "la soledad no nos gusta a nadie, pero es algo que está ahí, hay que afrontarla, tienes que acostumbrarte a vivir con ella" (356). Unfortunately, the concept of challenge brings with it that of success or failure. When Lucía picks up that gauntlet at the beginning of the week of her memoir ["Me propuse con loable firmeza iniciar mi encierro por la tarde; quería inaugurar la grata soledad" (61)], she finds that on conventional terms she fails.

Lucía's notion of these terms equivalates success in solitude with self-sufficiency, not needing anyone exterior to oneself, and with being an adult. When she finds herself instead uselessly wasting time, consumed by feelings of

anxiety, discouragement, and abandonment she becomes disgusted with herself, condemning her inability to be alone. Lucía locates the blame for this in her upbringing and, as the following passage evidences, she considers the capacity for self-sufficiency in solitude a masculine trait denied to women by centuries of feminine education:

Y, sin embargo, yo, que también poseía un mundo propio, que tenía mis películas, mis ambiciones, mis placeres intelectuales y estéticos, mis inquietudes plurales, sin embargo yo, digo que poseía objetivamente todo cuanto "ellos" poseían, era incapaz de contentarme con mi espacio, me asfixiaba, me sentía cercada de ausencias y estrecheces, embargada de urgencias sin motivos razonables. Como aplastada por siglos de educación femenil que hubieran robado mi integridad, mi paz, mi redondez. (62)

However, as in Crónica, the capacity to deal successfully with solitude within the confines of conventional attitudes is denied to the majority of the characters. This is illustrated by Ricardo, who at one point states that he enjoys solitude, but nonetheless populates it with human-like figures, mannequins, complete with names and human attributes such as curious contemplation.

Yet unlike the previous novel, in Función Montero offers a possible solution to solitude in the figure of Rosa. It is

this secondary character that questions conventional attitudes and most completely rejects them. After her failure to escape solitude through the conventional recourse of the couple, she does not accept that she must get used to solitude, nor does she consider herself non-self-sufficient, she simply declares, "Tiene que haber otra forma de relacionarse, Lucía, otras maneras de vivir que sean mejores. Yo no quiero vivir sola y no lo haré" (357). True to her word, Rosa develops a life anchored in female friendships and family ties, and of all the characters of the novel appears to be the most content. Thus what Montero is suggesting is a re-examination and a re-valorization of the concepts of solitude, relationships, and emotional dependence.

The consequences of not rejecting conventional attitudes toward solitude are clearly seen in Lucía's situation. One of the fundamental problems facing the protagonist over her lifetime is her inability to deal with solitude which in turn leads her to try to continually escape it. Once again her commentaries about another character in the novel, in this case Rosa, function as a window into her own soul, "Rosa sufría la extraordinaria debilidad de no poder quedarse sola. Era este miedo lo que la forzaba a mantener relaciones absurdas con hombres absurdos" (62). Although neither Hipólito nor Miguel are "hombres absurdos", it is clear that in the memoir section Lucía's principal vehicle of escape from solitude is the amorous relationship which she views as a

hedge against solitude. This is due to her concept of the ultimate solitude: "no hay mayor soledad que la que se experimenta cuando no se quiere a nadie" (17). This belief causes Lucía to compromise her own goals and divert much of her energies into sentimental relationships even though she is unsure of the sincerity of her affections for the individuals. More importantly however, it also colors the way she views the future as evidenced by the following confession to Ricardo:

Ultimamente empiezo a pensar en el futuro, ¿sabes?, cosa que antes no había hecho nunca. Y empiezo a tener miedo... Miedo a... no sé, a tener sesenta años y estar sola. (81)

This train of thought makes it clear that solitude is one of the principal reasons for Lucía's decision to concretize her relationship with Miguel. On an immediate level, after the definitive rupture with Hipólito Lucía easily convinces herself that it was Miguel she loved all along, thus adroitly avoiding a period without a companion while at the same time making an investment, as Ricardo terms it (81), in future companionship.

In the diary section Lucía's vehicles of escape are her memoir and her friendship with Ricardo. It is this friendship that highlights the perils of a conventional attitude toward solitude. During her stay in the hospital Lucía becomes very dependent on Ricardo's friendship because she realizes the great comfort it brings her. However, at the same time

because of her views with regard to solitude she resents and resists her need for his companionship. This causes an inner conflict that is represented by her behavior with Ricardo; within the space of only a few paragraphs it is possible for Lucía to at once lament his absence ["Ayer no vino Ricardo, y hoy parece que tampoco vendrá ya. Temo que no vuelva más...Sin él la rutina hospitalaria se vuelve atroz" (221)], only then to declare the opposite ["Que no venga más, es lo mejor. No quiero volver a verle. No quiero necesitar nada que esté fuera de mí" (223)]. This inner dependence-versus-autonomy struggle is a source of tension for Lucía and one of the factors for her constant arguing with Ricardo, impeding during the greater part of the novel a full enjoyment of the friendship with him. It is only after learning of her imminent death, something even more terrifying to her than solitude, that Lucía is able to reconcile her reliance on Ricardo.

As we have seen, because Lucía is unable to deal successfully with solitude on conventional terms and does not re-evaluate her concept of solitude, she opts to escape solitude, primarily through the recourse of the emotional relationship. Thus it is important to examine Lucía's concept of love in order to understand not only why it lends itself to being a vehicle of escape from solitude, but also because of the fundamental part it plays during her life. That the theme of love is central to the novel is obvious. Quantitatively

the narration of Lucía's amorous situation composes the greater part of the novel. It is also an important factor in the determination of the course of her life, and it is the aspect of her life that she most fondly recalls just before her death.

Lucía's concept of love is not uniform, it changes according to the situation, the interlocutor, and her mood. However, it can be best characterized as dichotomous, consistently represented by opposites. This can be seen in the associations that Lucía makes with love. On the positive side Lucía views love as a vital support system, much along the lines of a political or religious ideology, capable of giving some meaning to the illogicalness of life (10). It is one of the primary memories that leads her to declare at the end of the novel, "comprendí que sí, que todo había merecido la pena de vivirse y de morirse" (367). Lucía also views love as a way of temporarily overcoming death, either through the intense feelings generated by love that make one feel eternal or the illusion of being accompanied in that final confrontation.

Contradicting these positive aspects of love are several negative associations. Lucía considers love a convenient means of escaping the disagreeable aspects of one's personal reality such as fear, failure, solitude, etc. This attitude is illustrated by the protagonist of Lucía's film, who as the protagonist of Crónica is likewise named Ana Antón, and who

overwhelmed by her painful past and desperate present "decide escapar de la realidad y sentirse enamorada" (300). More important however is Lucía's own admission of employing this technique during the week of her memories:

Empecé a sospechar que ese paroxismo sentimental que había vivido días atrás no era más que un viejo recurso contra el miedo al fracaso, un refugiarse en amor y desamores para olvidar que en esa semana se decidía probablemente el curso de mi vida, mi futuro como profesional del cine. (284)

This utilitarian attitude toward love partially explains the apparent insincerity of the protagonist's emotional oscillations between the two lovers.

Another negative perspective on love is its association with conflict and struggle. As in *Crónica*, Lucía on several occasions employs terms that depict love as war as seen in the following passage where she reflects on her rupture and reconciliation with Hipólito:

era una bonita maniobra defensiva, yo avanzaba con mis tropas ligeras sobre el campo de batalla y tenía la ventaja de la iniciativa y la sorpresa. (122)

The idea of love as conflict is also illustrated by the passage on the battling caterpillars that Lucía can not decide if "la oruga grande intentaba hacer el amor o devorar a la pequeña, o si pretendía incluso ambas cosas" (187), and the

couple who for several pages publicly argue about their relationship. The couple's discussion centers on the structure of the relationship with regard to sexual parameters, the emotional consequences of the structure, and emotional honesty. The importance of the pair lies not in the thematic of their discussion, which is not new, but rather what they represent, the unharmonious relationship of a couple. As in Crónica, once again in this novel there is not one happy functioning couple.

In Función this is due to in great part to the fact that the existence of the perfect companion who will accompany one forever is considered a myth, a dream of youth and a creation of romance novels. Lucía reveals this attitude in her response to the young nurse María del Día who confides to Lucía that she has found the companion with whom she could live eternally, "Me enterneció su juventud, su credulidad aún intacta" (262). The idealistic Rosa also comes to clearly realize that this dream is just that, a dream:

A veces, en algún atardecer especialmente hermoso, me invade como una desazón, la melancolía de no tener un hombre a mi lado, de no haber envejecido junto a un compañero, junto a ese compañero idéntico a ti misma y capaz de conocerte hasta la médula. Ya sabes, ese futuro ideal que siempre deseé. Pero eso, Lucía mía, es solamente un sueño.
(359)

This dichotomous view on love illustrated by the positive and negative associations with regard to it is most clearly represented by Lucía's division of love into two categories, passion love and compromise love (211). Lucía's concept of passion love is that blinding, obsessive, illogical love for which one gives all, time, energy, emotion, even one's life. It is a love so powerful that it generates physical sensations of unease like dizziness and upset stomach. The rewards however are moments of intense all consuming passion that make one feel truly alive, invincible, but that unfortunately do not last long. This concept is best summarized by the mathematical formula described by Miguel that gives title to the novel called the Delta Function, "Es una función que describe fenómenos discontinuos de gran intensidad, pero brevísima duración" (118). Due to its brief duration one must continually re-invent passion love, consciously employ means to arrive at the desired state.

Compromise love on the other hand is based on a comforting state of companionship, of two people joining forces to support each other and to combat a world of fear, solitude, and death. This love unlike the other produces a sense of physical well-being, of warmth, and it is compromise love that is viewed as capable of lasting, of being depended upon. Although Lucía admits that the two are sometimes mixed, as we have already seen she does view them as distinct as

clearly evidenced by her classification of Hipólito and Miguel.²⁰

Ricardo believes that this distinction is based not on the dichotomous nature of love itself, as does Lucía, but rather stems from Lucía's problematic gender identification. To support this he points out that Lucía identifies passion love with qualities traditionally defined as masculine such as self-autonomy, security, and independence, while compromise love on the other hand is associated with traditionally feminine qualities like co-dependence and a need for protection and help. This creates Lucía's inner dilemma that is correctly intuited by Ricardo as a struggle between, "la mujer independiente que querías y creías ser, y la mujer 'esposa de' que llevas dentro de ti y para lo que fuiste educada" (213).

To defend the idea that this dilemma surges from the problems of viewing the world through gender tinted lenses Ricardo points to the younger generation of women, the women of 2010, who were educated in a society where gender typing, although still existent, was less marked. He claims that for them this dichotomy does not exist. At this point however Montero muddies the waters because the only example the reader can turn to is María de Día, a character about whom we know too little to effectively utilize as representative of the

²⁰To review these important passages in Función see pages 60, 81, and 137.

future generation with relation to love and gender. The little we do know about this generation is that the myth of the ideal companion, although considered ridiculous by the majority, does still subsist in some (261). This would appear to indicate that Montero considers gender typing a fundamental source for many problems confronting women, as we have seen with for example identity and solitude, but that its eradication is not going to solve all problems. This attitude is typical of Montero who refuses to allow ideas of biological and societal determinism absolve or overwhelm the importance of the individual.

This is reinforced by Lucía's opting for compromise love in the form of Miguel. Ricardo's denouncement of this action, which clearly must be tempered by the knowledge of his love and hence jealousy for Lucía, does strongly suggest that Lucía did not choose Miguel out of sincere love but rather was motivated by her own fears.

Another important aspect of the human experience that the novel focuses on is old age. As we have seen, because of the structure of the novel Montero is able to infuse the majority of the themes with a dual perspective. Nowhere is this more evident than with old age which is considered from both the outside, the attitudes of the young Lucía toward old age, and from within, the elderly Lucía actually experiencing it. Montero furthers this opposition by pairing young and old characters in both situations, in the memoir section the pair

is composed of the elderly doña Maruja and the young Lucía, in the diary section it is the sixty-year old Lucía and the young María del Día.

With regard to old age Función does not try to encompass a wide range of aspects but rather limits itself to those that are generated by the younger Lucía's contact with doña Maruja, who represents old age for the protagonist, and by Lucía's own fears about aging. The novel begins with doña Maruja's appearance at Lucía's door to ask for a favor. One of the elements that immediately stands out is her physical description. Doña Maruja speaks to Lucía with a "vocecilla feble," the fingers with which she pats her hair in place are "torpes y doblados por la artritis," her smile is tired, and her eyes "tenían ese velo agrisado de la edad" (14). This emphasis on the physical infirmities of old age is repeated throughout the novel, not only with doña Maruja, but with the majority of the other elderly characters as well. Examples range from Ricardo's aged aunt whose trembling fingers impede her from undoing her coat, to the elderly in the rest homes where Rosa performs whose deafness causes them to tragically yet comically question over and over which piece she was going to play, and whose applause is weakened by Parkinson or arthritis. Even beautiful mauve-eyed Ricardo's once attractive physique is now repeatedly described in terms of "arrugado y consumido" (45), "breve y huesudo" (278), "las carnes escurridas" (278), etc.

This accent on the physical decline of old age springs from the younger Lucía's own fears of aging, both physically and emotionally. The former is illustrated by Lucía's already mentioned emphasis on physical appearance symbolized by the recurrent nightmare where she dreams that overnight she is converted into a physically unrecognizable old woman. Emotionally it is also clear that Lucía fears the passage of time, birthdays in general are viewed as significant moments ["Yo solía sufrir por entonces esporádicos y enardecidos arrebatos de planificación, mayormente en cada marzo, en la vecindad de mi cumpleaños" (8)], and certain ones, for example the thirtieth encountered here, are viewed as negative milestones to be overcome by force of will:

Hacia pocos días que había alcanzado la treintena, y, tras unos primeros instantes de vértigo al despedirme de los veinte, había conseguido embriagarme de novedad y de futuro. (8)

One of the reasons for Lucía's fear of old age is her own confusion with regard to the elderly, she feels uncomfortable around them and she does not understand them. Lucía views the elderly in terms of a projection of her own future that she finds disagreeable and would rather not ponder (7). This is illustrated through her contact with doña Maruja and the focusing on the negative aspects of the latter's existence. From these episodes it becomes clear that Lucía associates old age primarily with negative physical aspects such as frailty,

illness, and pain. On an emotional level Lucía identifies it with solitude and isolation. Doña Maruja lives alone, her husband and several children are dead and the remaining two visit only infrequently, and her "friends" consist of the shopkeepers she exchanges phrases with when she goes out. Her isolation is so great that as she points out, "se me está olvidando hablar, porque nunca hablo con nadie" (12). In terms of self-image old age is viewed as tragic as evidenced by the fact that doña Maruja considers herself useless and simply an annoyance to others.

When Lucía is young she is repelled by old age and her contact with doña Maruja does not enrich but rather horrify her, she is not able to empathize with her situation and avoids contact as much as possible. This is unfortunate because many elements of doña Maruja's old age are visited upon Lucía. She too loses her husband and friends who, with the exception of Ricardo, no longer visit. She also suffers the physical effects of illness and an emotional sense of neglect and uselessness. The parallels of the situations are not lost upon Lucía who recognizes herself as the doña Maruja who once inspired such horror. The difference is that now Lucía experiences old age from the inside, she fumes when people equate old age with stupidity (86), and she refuses to accept the traditional role assigned to the elderly (87).

Most revealing though of the effect of the younger Lucía's refusal to confront her fears of old age is the

elderly Lucía's refusal to accept her own aging. Lucía balks at considering herself sixty, there are still five months before her sixtieth birthday, because she believes that it is the benchmark for officially entering old age. She regards her aged face as a strange mask imposed on her that she contemplates with curiosity and emotional distance. Lucía in short feels betrayed and robbed of her youth, as if an outside force had physically snatched it away. It is clear that, as with solitude and love, Lucía does not want to accept the responsibility for her own mental evasions of a lifetime upon her present situation, which makes the later all the more difficult to accept.

This same attitude holds true with regard to the theme of death. Lucía's patent reluctance to examine her attitude toward death as a young person, even when confronted directly with it, contributes to her later difficulties with accepting her own death. To illustrate this Montero employs the same basic structure utilized for solitude; death considered from an outside perspective by the young Lucía and then experienced from the inside by the dying Lucía. The use of generational-opposite paired characters to convey the perspectives is also repeated; the suicidal doña Maruja is the foil for the attitudes of the young Lucía toward death which are then reinterpreted to a limited extent by the dying Lucía's young male nurse.

To explain, or perhaps justify, the young Lucía's attitude toward death, the elderly Lucía writes in her diary that, "Cuando ya era joven, la muerte no existía. Era sólo muerte en los demás, pero yo me creía eterna y fuerte" (203). The young Lucía's direct contact with death during the novel comes with the repeated suicide attempts of doña Maruja and the politically motivated murder of a young man she witnesses while at a café. In each incidence it is interesting to note that Lucía's reactions, which she is certainly not hesitant to describe in great detail with regard to other events, are curiously repressed. I use the word repressed and not absent because it is evident that Lucía is very affected by the theme but consciously tries to put it out of her mind. This is illustrated very clearly by Lucía's reaction to doña Maruja's initial petition to assist her with her suicide. After quickly getting her out of the house, Lucía does not permit herself to think about the proposition but rather throws herself into preparing lunch. Tellingly though, while mentally organizing the process phrases from her prior conversation with doña Maruja unconsciously creep in as seen in the following passage:

Concentré mi atención en la comida. Era escandalosamente tarde y aún debía hacer la compra. Un empujoncito, sólo eso. De pronto me sentí irritada y furiosa con Hipólito, con esa cita que descoyuntaba mi mañana. Odiaba hacer la compra,

odiaba cocinar, en ese momento hubiera deseado tumbarme en bañador en la terraza, y dormir, dormir bajo el primerizo y picante sol de marzo. Para entrar al río, sólo eso (emphasis added). (14)

In each instance when Lucía comes into contact with death this structure is repeated, clearly showing her desire to avoid confronting the theme. This is due to the fact that when Lucía does even begin to consider it she is immediately physically ill, nauseated, dizzy, etc. (79, 114, 299). This would suggest the opposite of what the elderly Lucía claims; the concept of death did exist for the young Lucía and in such a frighteningly personal way that her only recourse to combat her fear was to escape it. This would explain the notable lack of empathy the young Lucía displays toward doña Maruja's situation.

The unintentional effects of her attitude toward doña Maruja are mirrored back to her in the attitude of the young male nurse who attends her briefly when she is dying. The horror that the young Lucía felt in the presence of the elderly neighbor is now directed toward the dying Lucía. This is seen in the way the young nurse avoids eye contact with Lucía and enters the room "con movimientos fantasmas y retemblor de náusea en sotabarba" (347). However, as evidenced by her vengeful reaction to the nurse's attitude, the elderly Lucía's attitude toward her death is quite different from that of doña Maruja's. The latter not only

accepted her death, but actively sought it out as demonstrated by her three suicide attempts. Lucía considers the possibility of suicide and understands doña Maruja's actions only before the fact of her own impending death is confirmed to her.

From this point on Lucía struggles to change her attitude toward death. She attempts to prepare for her death by learning how to accept it, but even the discourses by Ricardo and María de Noche about the naturalness of death, and her own brief moments of acceptance, do not alter her final conclusion that learning how to die well is something that one can never master. Instead the deeply ingrained custom of escape predominates her final days. This desire for escape is verbalized repeatedly, "Huir, si se pudiera huir. Huir a una isla interior, huir del miedo y de una misma" (341), and is manifested primarily in two forms, her pressing need to finish her memories and thus concretize her existence and overcome death, and her insistence that Ricardo accompany her in her final moments so that she does not have to face death alone. Neither desire however is fulfilled. Lucía never reaches the opening of her film, and in the last lines it appears that Ricardo is not at her side during the final moments. Tellingly the last word of the novel is "miedo."

As in the previous novel, the general tone of Función is somber, but as I am sure Montero herself would emphasize, not negative, simply realistic. The realism that Montero strives

to create is one that demythicizes certain facets of the human experience. In Crónica the focus was on particular concerns. In Función the author turns her attention to universal concerns, endeavoring to cut through the romantic illusions constructed around fundamental human issues. Montero does this by considering these issues from one person's reality, Lucía's. This character, while clearly unique, does represent on an abstract level the individual in general and his or her struggle to confront and survive his or herself and the basic questions surrounding life and death. Although Lucía does not reach a satisfying personal equilibrium during her lifetime, the principal impediment is made apparent, the power of fear and her escapist reaction to it. Although Lucía's attitudes are never condemned, the difficult consequences engendered by them are evident. As in the previous novel, it appears that Montero's goal with regard to content in Función is to stimulate the reader to consider his or her relationship to reality and fundamental issues, to reevaluate conventional mindsets, as does the character Rosa, in order to be able to arrive at a personal equilibrium. This is facilitated by the non-condemnation of Lucía which permits the reader to identify one's own fears with those of the protagonist, for example the very common and paralyzing fear of one's own death, while at the same time the portrayal of Lucía's inconsistencies are dramatic enough to provide the reader reflective distance, to motivate one to reevaluate conventional attitudes.

All this is achieved not at the expense of but rather through a narration that is clearly more novelistic. With regard to structure Montero succeeds in creating a more complex but at the same time more coherent framework for the narration. The characterization as we have seen is also more skillful, and Montero's efforts to distance the narration from her own reality and to create a fictional world, something that was less evident in the previous novel and frequently considered a defect, are equally apparent. As we shall see, the precedent established by these improvements of the author's novelistic skills will continue in her next novel.

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CHAPTER III

TE TRATARE COMO A UNA REINA

At first glance Montero's third novel, Te trataré como a una reina (1983), appears to depart both thematically and technically from the two previous texts. In this novel Montero takes leave of the generally upper-middle class, educated, female-centered worlds of Crónica and Función that had much in common with her own environment to delve into a world that has nothing to do with her own, the sordid universe of a group of characters whose lives are intertwined around a seedy nightclub, the Desiré. To convey this strikingly different narrative world Montero both manipulates tones, techniques, and language from prior novels as well as incorporates new ones to her narrative, seen clearly for example in the use of elements pertaining to crime fiction. The immediate impression caused by these changes is initially disconcerting for the reader familiar with the author's earlier novels -an effect the author is well aware of:

Ha sido para mí, efectivamente, un salto inmenso, porque creo haber entrado con ella en el mundo narrativo real. Tengo la sensación, sin renegar de las dos anteriores, que ésta es mi primera novela.

Probablemente esto se debe a que en ella hay un mundo totalmente recreado. (Fernández-Santos 28)

However, while the changes in this third novel are certainly significant, it is important to note that the underlying framework of the novel, its very core as we shall see, ultimately continues numerous elements and themes that have become a constant in Montero's narrative.

Although strictly speaking exterior to the novel itself, one of these changes is the reception of Te trataré. As with the previous two novels, the public's reception of this text was enthusiastic as evidenced by multiple re-editions. Unlike its predecessors though, with this third novel there is a notable growth of attention paid by critics. This increased critical interest is evidently due in part to what many of the critics themselves signal as the advances of Montero's narrative capacities.²¹

These advances can be found on several levels but that which is most immediately noted is the structure of the novel. As the author herself has stated, the structure of Te trataré was the focus of a conscious effort to improve upon those of her previous novels:

Antes de empezar esta novela sabía cómo quería que fuera. Quería además que fuera una novela de cajitas dentro de cajitas. Conseguir que la

²¹An example of this can be found in Suñén's article "La realidad y sus sombras: Rosa Montero y Cristina Fernández Cubas."

estructura funcionara de verdad. Lo que había intentado en La función, pero bien hecho. Que al terminar de leerla pudieras pensar otra vez toda la novela y entonces entenderla de otro modo. (Monegal 10)

Important to highlight here is the author's desire that the structure facilitate a double reading of the text which, as we shall see by the end of the structural analysis, is one of the key elements of the novel.

The framework of the novel is based on its division into twenty-eight short chapters, none of which are longer than fourteen pages, and two of which are letters written by a character. These chapters are preceded by a short article from a tabloid about a crime and three subsequent transcripts relating to that crime inserted at varying intervals in the novel. This is not the first time that the author inserts materials that break the narrative flow into a text, as we saw in Función this occurs with letters from Rosa and Hipólito. In that novel the function of the letters is on one hand to reveal additional information, but more importantly to introduce a different perspective on events and characters that contrast with or even contradict the previously established perspective. In Te trataré the use of the insertions is more complex, they are authored/transcribed by someone who is not directly a character in the narrative and each one is directed toward several different functions.

Nonetheless, the common element that unites them is their utilization for purposes of perspective.

Undoubtedly the first insertion is the most important with regard to the structure and development of the novel. The function of this insertion, like the letters in Función, revolves around information and perspective, but of a quite different nature here. In this instance the insertion does not serve to add additional information and to contrast with an already established perspective, but rather given its placement at the beginning of the novel to provide initial information about the two principal characters and to itself establish a perspective.

The subject matter of the insertion is an account by reporter Paco Mancebo for the tabloid El Criminal entitled "El extraño caso de la asesina fumadora." In the account the reporter relates how a man, Don Antonio Ortiz, is attacked in his apartment by a woman, Isabel López, who tortures him then subsequently throws him out a fourth floor window. By beginning the novel with a published article the author takes advantage of reader conventions with regard to the printed word, which because of its very nature is often assumed to be objective and truthful. In this manner the events narrated and the characters described are thus presented under the guise of veracity from the start.

However, the title of the magazine and especially the language employed in the account quickly arouse reader

suspicions. Although the reporter utilizes journalistic conventions such as including hard facts (dates, addresses) and eyewitness comments to convey a veneer of objective investigative reporting, the style of writing reveals a different agenda, that of sensationalism. This is evident from the very first sentence of the account where the crime is described as "el extraño y salvaje suceso" (9). This intent to sensationalize the crime is evident throughout the account but nowhere more than with regard to the dichotomous portrayal of the victim and the attacker. Victim Don Antonio is portrayed by reporter Mancebo as a respectable bureaucrat who, as described by the residents of his building, is the model neighbor, quiet, courteous, and never bothersome to anyone. There is a slight hint of rarity in his description ["Parecía un cura o algo así" and "era un poco misterioso, porque nunca se le veía con nadie" (9)], but this is counterbalanced by the fact that he was to soon marry a "bella y honrada" young woman.

Don Antonio's attacker on the other hand is not presented with the courteous title "doña" (used even with the neighbor identified only by her initials who witnessed the attack) but rather that of "la asesina, Isabel López" (9), and then repeatedly referred to by an alias, a practice that suggests she has something to hide, of "La Bella". Nor are there any character references for Isabel, simply a mention of her profession, nightclub singer, which she exercised, as

pointedly signaled by the reporter, in a club located near the red-light district.

After this suspiciously unequal presentation of the two the reporter then describes the events of the encounter. It is during these passages that the reporter's bias toward the two is clearly revealed. Mancebo plays upon the traditional gender-specific images of strong male attacker and weak female victim with the ironic actual role-reversal of the crime itself. It is Don Antonio who is seen to act as the stereotypical woman victim, he is unable to physically defend himself, he cries and screams, and he even begs his attacker for mercy. However, although he does not behave in a conventional "manly" fashion, Don Antonio is not condemned but rather sympathetically referred to as "el desdichado" and "el infortunado."

This is not true for the attacker who without grounds is subjectively described as "una energúmena...sin principios morales y capaz de todo tipo de ensañamiento" (10). Constant reference is made to her unfeminine physical size and strength, and her lack of a stereotypical feminine attribute, pity. She is further sensationalized by referring to her exclusively by her alias or subjective/inflammatory terms such as "la bestial homicida," "la mujerona," and "la asesina fumadora," and not once using her given name after the initial mention. Isabel's "criminal" deviation from the feminine norm is further highlighted by the description of her behavior, for

which Mancebo does not try to discover any justification, but rather simply terms crazed and "verdaderamente anormal."

The results of this portrayal of events function on several levels, the most evident being Mancebo's lack of objectivity and journalistic professionalism which Montero turns into a parody of investigative reporting. Stemming from this is the particular direction of Mancebo's bias, which indicates that his prejudice springs from his male perspective combined with gender-role expectations, a theme that will be repeated during the course of the novel, and that is reinforced, as Glenn points out²², by his telling last name. In spite of Mancebo's obvious personal slant on the article, when combined with the power and authority of the printed word (the particular format notwithstanding), serves to create a dramatic initial impression of both characters in the mind of the reader, much along the lines of Montero's previously mentioned snapshot technique, but unlike the latter, as the reader slowly learns, one that is clearly distorted.

This distortion is gradually revealed as the narrative progresses. One of the keys to this revelation is the structure of the chapters and the latter's relation to and interaction with the first insertion as well as the subsequent ones. The underlying structure of the chapters is

²²See page 192 of Kathleen M. Glenn's article titled "Victimized by Misreading: Rosa Montero's Te trataré como a una reina."

superficially reminiscent of that of Crónica. The first chapters serve to present the primary characters, give a sketch of their world, and initiate each's particular narrative line. For example chapter one revolves around Antonia, the second around Bella, and the fourth around Antonio. One problem with structuring a novel around character presentation as seen in Crónica is the abrupt transition between chapters that can weaken narrative coherence. Montero overcomes this in Te trataré by carefully overlapping characters from the start. An example of this is the transition from Mancebo's article to chapter one, which as already signaled revolves around Antonia who is not mentioned in the article. This jump at first appears disconcerting, but the reader quickly learns that Antonia is Antonio's sister, thus establishing a link between the article and chapter one.

The same is done with the remaining initial chapters; while focusing on one character others are mentioned so as to begin facilitating the piecing together of the narrative jigsaw. This gradual assembly is aided by chapters whose primary function is to tie together relationships. Once again Montero starts this early in the novel so as to create a cohesive narrative world. A good example of this is the short chapter three which serves to confirm a relationship between Antonia, Bella, and Antonio.

Once the characters have been presented, the focus of the novel shifts to the development of the principal characters

and their narrative lines. As with character presentation, the development of the narrative lines alternates from chapter to chapter. For example chapter eight initiates Bella's dream to escape to the Tropicana, nine the beginnings of Antonia's relationship with Damián, and ten Antonio's illicit adventures with pilot's wives.

As with character relations, Montero is careful to early on tie together the narrative lines. The key to their intersection is the first insertion -the account of the crime- because without it the link between narrative lines would be much more tenuous, based primarily on the coincidence of the characters in the nightclub Desiré. The first insertion creates a more pressing link based on intrigue. This intrigue begins to develop when an Antonio, who is quite alive, is mentioned in the first chapter. The logical impulse is to associate him with the supposedly murdered Antonio of the article, thus placing the narrative time of chapter one prior to that of the crime. This supposition is reinforced when an unincarcerated Bella, undoubtedly the bolero singing Bella of the article, protagonizes the second chapter, and is confirmed by the latter in chapter three when she mentions that Antonio frequents the Desiré. In this manner the structure of the chapters determines that their narrative time is prior to that of the crime, despite the evident reticence of the narrator to confirm this.

It is this unwillingness to clarify ambiguity that creates an aura of intrigue, that in combination with certain elements of the novel many critics, and the author herself²³, have associated with the novela negra. Before discussing any further Te trataré's relationship with the novela negra it is important to clarify the use and limits of this term. Although in Spain its use may encompass almost any fiction that is centered around crime as Patricia Hart signals (175), and terms such as detective novel and crime novel are often associated indiscriminately with the novela negra, since the seventies critics have made serious attempts to more clearly define not only the scope of this particular term, but also the classification of the entire genre of what is commonly termed literature of intrigue.

Although not unanimously, critics who deal with the delimitation and evolution of the Spanish novela negra²⁴ tend to coincide with the principal critical tendency in the genre of literature of intrigue in differentiating between two important categories, the detective novel and the crime novel, the latter of which the novela negra forms part. The difference between the two forms, the subject itself of numerous critical works, in general terms can be viewed as

²³For a clarification of Montero's opinion of the labeling of Te trataré as a novela negra see page 11 of Monegal's interview with her.

²⁴For the origins of the term novela negra see Amell p. 192.

that of an evolution; the crime novel, whose initiator is generally considered by critics as being Dashiell Hammett (1894-1963), evolved from the classic and highly-formulaic detective novel as a means of more adequately expressing the tumultuous social, political, and ethical changes in Western, and specifically American, society of the period between the two world wars.²⁵ Thus while the two forms share certain elements, these elements are employed for different ends. As Julian Symons points out in his quite useful comparison of the main features of the two types (162-164), patent differences can be observed in areas such as plot, construction, characterization, setting, and social attitude among others. These differences point to the dissimilar end of each type; the goal of the detective novel is to create a puzzle for the reader that is to be solved through the use of logic and reason, while in the crime novel the value of the puzzle is of secondary importance.

In the crime novel characterization, setting, and social attitude take on primary importance. As Symons signals, while in the detective novel "only the detective is characterized in detail" (163), in the crime novel the characters are "the basis of the story. The lives of the characters are shown continuing after the crime, and often their subsequent behavior is important to the story's effect" (163). Similar

²⁵For further information concerning Hammett's role see Raymond Chandler, The Simple Art of Murder, New York, Valentine Books, 1972.

transformations occur with setting, which often takes on an integral role, and social attitude. With regard to the latter, as numerous critics have signaled (Amell 193; Rodríguez Joulia St.-Cyr 81; Symons 163;), one of the frequent goals of the crime novel is the denouncement of social injustice and corruption from a perspective outside the official version, an element that marks a clear departure from the detective novel which is generally conservative in its upholding of the law and order of the status quo.

It is precisely the element of social criticism that brings us to the novela negra. While some critics do consider the crime novel and the novela negra as interchangeable terms, here the novela negra will be considered a subgenre of the widely-varied grouping of crime literature. What makes the novela negra a subgenre apart is the fact that, while sharing many elements with the crime novel, here one finds, due in great part to its link to its historical context²⁶, a special emphasis on the element of social criticism linked frequently with a specific ideology. As critics have signaled [Amell (194-95), Coma (42), Carlos Martini (25)], the novela negra is at once a socio-political chronicle of and a protest against the crisis of contemporary society.

²⁶For further information on this aspect see Javier Coma, "Proyecciones críticas de una novela de género," Camp de l'arpa 60-61 (February-March 1979): 40-45. This is further amplified in Coma's book La novela negra: Historia de la aplicación del realismo crítico a la novela policiaca norteamericana, Barcelona, El Viejo Topo, 1982.

It is due to this aspect that the much commented "boom" of the Spanish novela negra did not occur until the mid to late 1970's. Although there did exist a limited tradition of detective and crime novels in Spain since the late 1800's (Hart 163-168), it is the termination of the Francoist regime and the subsequent process of transition to democracy that provides the opportunity and incentive for the novela negra (Schaefer-Rodríguez 137). The opportunity evidently refers to the fact that the novela negra's openly critical portrayal of contemporary reality was not possible during the Francoist period, and the incentive stems from the concept held by many practitioners that the genre was particularly adequate with regard to ethical and economic aspects. The novela negra was considered a vehicle for socio-political commentary that moreover, due to its enormous popular appeal, was able to reach a large group of readers (Amell 194; Schaefer-Rodríguez 137).

The success of the genre during and following the transition can be observed on one level by the dramatically increased number of writers who dedicated themselves to this genre (Juan Madrid, Andreu Martín), who wrote numerous novels in it (Manuel Vázquez Montalbán), or who had simply made one or two incursions into it (Eduardo Mendoza, Lourdes Ortiz) or appropriated elements from it (Juan Benet, Juan Marsé, Marina Mayoral). Montero falls somewhere in between the last two categories. Clearly Te trataré does not adhere as closely to

the structures of the novela negra as does for example Ortiz's Picadura mortal, but I believe that Montero's motivation for employing the genre goes deeper than just the desire to adorn the novel with certain characteristic elements.

Superficially, as Montero herself has signaled (Monegal 11), many elements employed and the basic structure of Te trataré are similar to those of the novela negra. Some of the more characteristic elements easily observable are the setting, which typical of the genre depicts "a tawdry world which conceals a shabby and depressing reality beneath its painted façade" (Grella 111), the character types which range from a morally and officially corrupt police detective to an hermetic and mysterious matón to a sexually deviant bureaucrat, and the abundance of cruelty and violence in the novel. The structure is also archetypical as it is constructed around the occurrence and subsequent investigation of a crime. This investigation however, unlike in the typical novela negra, is not carried out by the police or a detective, but rather by a secondary character, the reporter Paco Mancebo. Nor is the investigation the focus of or the primary vehicle for advancing the narration, here it is limited to the interviews conducted by Mancebo that comprise the three insertions that run parallel to the main narrative of the chapters.

However, despite the fact that the investigation does not follow the common structural lines of the novela negra, it

does play an important role in the novel. The interviews that comprise the investigation are quite revelatory on several levels, such as that of characterization, but their primary importance is structural. Through the placement of the interviews, the information conveyed within them, and the critical information suppressed the interviews set up an opposition with the main body of narration that stimulates intrigue. For this reason I agree with Glenn's contention that these fictional documents are not the weak point of the novel as Suñén suggests in his review of Te trataré but rather are crucial to the novel.²⁷

A brief overview of the insertions quickly brings this to light. The first interview is with Vicente Menéndez which falls between chapters nine and ten. The interview centers on Menéndez's relationship with the accused, his personal opinion of her, and what he believes to be the motivation for the crime. As in the first insertion, the portrait painted of Bella is certainly not favorable. Also similar to the first is the impossibility for the reader to definitively calculate the amount of truth in the portrayal. In this case it is

²⁷Suñén states that Montero "debiera prescindir de apoyaturas digamos objetivas, como son los fragmentos de reportajes-lo más débil de la novela-y darles a los personajes, a la acción misma, la posibilidad de que ellos mismos expliquen también eso" (5). Glenn's response, although emphasizing an aspect other than the one I speak of here does underline the importance of the interviews, "Suñén, it would appear, has read as a man. I submit that the fictional documents are a crucial component of the novel, for it is by means of them that Montero dramatizes most vividly the defenses and distortions of male readings" (197).

because up to this point Menéndez has not been sufficiently developed as a character, and what little is known about him contrasts with what he says about himself in the interview. However, because the comments in the interview are made by the character himself, a notoriously subjective position, and they are so self-serving as Glenn points out (194), the reader tends to distrust his perspective. This is reinforced by the fact that by the ninth chapter the portrayal of Bella by the narrator in the main body of narration has begun to stand in contrast to the depiction of her in the insertions. It is in this manner, by planting what appear to be incongruent perspectives, the author creates narrative intrigue.

In this insertion Montero also uses another technique that exists in the novel of intrigue, the veiled anticipation of an event yet to occur (in this case in the main body of narrative). Toward the end of the interview Menéndez gives Mancebo an enigmatic tip for which he does not wish to be credited, and about which he refuses to give further information, urging the reporter to investigate. The tip is couched in ambiguous phrasing [que la víctima tuvo algo que ver con la...con la horrible desgracia que sucedió antes de que Bella decidiera tirarle por la ventana (95)] that the reader at this juncture is unable to decipher, serving to create greater mystery.

One last note with regard to this insertion is that at the very end Menéndez states what he believes to be Bella's

motive for the attack, jealousy. While this particular motivation will be espoused again in the interviews, it stands in notable contrast to the motivation that gradually surges from the narration, once again setting up an opposition between the insertions and the main body of narration.

The next interview with Antonio's underling Benigno Martí, located between chapters twenty-three and twenty-four near the end of the novel, focuses primarily on the characterization of the latter. It is similar to the preceding interview in that Benigno's characterization is achieved through the contrasting of the insertions and the narrative. Also similar is the continuance of the assumption that Antonio has been murdered, here by employing phrases that point in that direction without ever concretely confirming it. Benigno refers to Bella as "esa criminal" and, concretizing the passage of time, states that he has been alone in the office since the crime, six weeks ago. This impression is reinforced by the following key sentence:

Con la defenestración de mi jefe he perdido a las dos únicas personas que llenaban mi existencia: a don Antonio, de quien me consideraba amigo, en mi modestia, y a su señora hermana, doña Antonia, a quien no he vuelto a ver desde que tuve el placer de conocerla.... (203)

By qualifying his loss of Antonia as one of contact it makes his loss of Antonio appear permanent. Montero also plays on

word meaning with the use of defenestración; on a cultured level signifying to throw out a window (but once again not necessarily implying death), and in a more modern sense implying the ruining of one's professional career, both of which the reader at this point knows to be true with regard to Antonio.

Also employed again is the technique of anticipated action, but in this insertion the anticipated event has now become plural, Benigno refers to "desgraciados accidentes" associated with Antonio. However, unlike the prior insertion, here Benigno denies what Menéndez has insinuated, stating that Antonio had nothing to do with these events. In both interviews the speaker tries to authorize his particular version by simply calling upon his own integrity, and in both instances the reader is unable to accept this. In the case of Benigno this is due to the detailed nature of the information regarding his relationship with Antonio that precedes the interview which in turn causes the reader to discard his version. The result is a growing sense of reader mistrust with regard to the information contained in the interviews.

The sense of intrigue and deception, fomented by the apparent contradictions between the information of the insertions and the narrative, proves to be certain. The final insertion is an interview with the very much alive victim himself, making evident that the outcome of the crime insinuated in the first insertion and maintained in the

subsequent ones was misleading. The placement of this insertion is crucial. It follows the chapters that reveal the mentioned "desgraciados accidentes," Antonio's proposal of marriage to Vanessa, the termination of Antonia's and Damián's relationship by Antonio, and the crumbling of Bella's dream in the second to the last chapter; in short the finalization of the narrative lines.

It is the accumulation of personal frustrations, as well as those of others, that is the catalyst for Bella's revenge on mankind, of whom Antonio is a convenient and culpable representative. Chapter twenty-three ends with Bella's departure for Antonio's apartment to carry out this agenda. However, her demeanor at that moment stands in marked contrast to that attributed to her during the attack in the first insertion. As Bella leaves for Antonio's she is outwardly serene. These contrasting demeanors again underscore the contradictions between the two levels of narration. While the attack itself is not described from the perspective of the primary narration, and hence the reader can not be absolutely sure of the exact progress of events and emotions, it has become quite clear by the final insertion that the account by Mancebo was distorted.

When the reader learns in this final insertion that Antonio is in fact still alive the extent to which the first insertion was misleading becomes evident. This moves the reader to re-evaluate, or confirm suspicions about, the

information contained in the interviews, provoking the double reading that Montero spoke of as her goal. It also changes the readers perspective on the information contained in the final insertion.

The latter revolves around the concretization of Antonio's characterization, the revelation of his opinion of his attacker's motivation, and the consequences of the attack. Due to the reader's reevaluated perspective Antonio's words serve not to confirm what he says but rather to undermine it. This is apparent as he tries to arouse sympathy for his condition. He enumerates the destructive physical as well as mental results of his fall, emphasizing that the worst aspect is the loss of his prized sense of smell, a loss he considers on the same level as castration. His words however, while arousing a limited rational sympathy for the victim, tend to underscore the hysterical, tragic/comic aspect of the situation. One experiences an undercurrent of satisfied revenge in the taking of the most prized attribute of a man who so cruelly treated his fellow beings.

Structurally however the most important function of this insertion is that of a surprise ending -the revelation that Antonio is not dead- and the subsequent deduction of the deceit of the insertions. The reader realizes that the author has employed an element typical of the novela negra, the investigation, in a manner that is as once characteristic and different from the norm. The investigation terminates in a

surprise ending, which although frequent in the novela negra, is unexpected due to the lack of emphasis on the puzzle value of the narration. More interestingly though, the author employs the investigation, a typical element of the genre, to set up an opposition between the insertions and the primary body of narration to achieve a misreading/re-reading of the entire text. This re-reading emphasizes aspects such as gender-specific writing and reading as Glenn has signaled (197), the potential of multiple perspectives, but also the playful use of the genre itself. The investigation leads not to the resolution of a murder, but rather the revelation that the murder was never committed. It is the use of a well-known structure, that of the novela negra, that misleads the reader to assume murder because, as a re-reading points up, the narrator never definitively states that a murder was committed. Thus, on one level Montero employs elements of the novela negra to play with reader expectations.

However, there are other elements of the novela negra present in Te trataré that are used along more traditional lines. One of these is the question of criminality. As Schaefer-Rodríguez signals:

...the *novela negra* calls into question the idea of "crime" itself as well as the possibility of a "solution." After the Franco era's denial, suppression, and manipulation of crime for its own ideological ends, the narratives in question

rehistoricite and relative the concept. "Criminality" is treated as a specific social phenomenon within boundaries of place and time, as opposed to an ahistorical category into which "official" criminality must fit (the ghetto, the economically marginal, etc.). [...] the *novela negra* implicitly seems to present crime as an index of frustration—the criminal's as much as the victim's—and often times even as a safety valve 'permitted' by society to release some of the frustration that otherwise could accumulate and possibly be directed against the state itself (a de-politicizing of crime). (137)

This relationship between the genre and crime may be one of the reasons the author chose it as a form of expression. Te trataré, although set in an unnamed city, is specifically urban and contemporary in nature. The crime that Bella commits is clearly triggered by multiple frustrations that are a result of her inability to fuse the expectations fostered by her traditional upbringing with the actuality of her situation. She becomes an unconscious metaphor for the women of her generation who, just as in previous Montero novels, are caught-up in the struggle to meld their traditional education with the changing post-Franco society. This reflection of the social crisis that is the root of Bella's frustrations is the heart of the novela negra, and as Schaefer-Rodríguez signals,

is especially adequate for reflecting "many of the diversities, ambiguities, and uncertainties of postmodern' civilization into which Spanish society 'transits' after 1975" (136-37).

Another element common to the novela negra that Montero incorporates is the question of private justice versus public discipline. Unlike the traditional detective novel that aligned itself unquestioningly with the laws of society, the novela negra looks at the underside of crime, the motivations and the not "officially acceptable" justifications for it, leading quite often to the implication of society, and not the "criminal" in the crime. As Coma points out, one of the key functions of the novela negra is to reveal the truth surrounding the crime:

Del mismo modo, un delito deja de ser por definición la obra de un malvado al que debe extirparse de la sociedad; muy probablemente, parecen apuntar muchas de estas obras, lo enfermo es el cuerpo social y no su tumor. (45)

This is clearly observed in Te trataré. Although in the eyes of society and the law Bella is the guilty party and is duly taken into custody, the feeling that emerges from the narration is that Bella is not the victimizer but rather the victim. Her attack on Antonio appears to be justifiable revenge considering what the latter, viewed as representative of the patriarchal order, has made her go through.

Thus it is apparent that Montero's use of multiple elements of the novela negra goes beyond the facile decision to ride the wave of a trend popular in Spanish literature during the period. Quite possibly the format helped broaden the appeal to certain readers, but the author's intentions evidently lay in the ability of the genre to convey her vision of reality in a manner quite different from that she had used previously. Also it must be added that despite the integral part that the novela negra based elements play, Te trataré is not a novela negra, it is just one, albeit important, tonality of a rich and varied work.

This richness is easily observed in the novel's characterization. Here, as in the structure of the novel, the author manipulates extra- and inter-diegetic perspectivism which plays a fundamental role. With regard to the first, as signaled at the beginning of the chapter, the characters of this novel are quite different from previous Montero characters. The familiar thirty-something, upwardly mobil, predominantly women professionals have been replaced by a heterogeneous group, men and women of varying age, education, and social background, that have in common only the fact that they all function on the fringes of society and, while wrapped in vain illusions, are in the end without hope for the future -marginalized losers. As Montero has stated on several occasions, this decided change with regard to characters was desired and had an explicit purpose:

Lo que quiero decir es que los personajes de mi novela no tienen absolutamente nada que ver conmigo y lo hice a posta...Precisamente para que tanto mi identificación superficial como la de los lectores fuera lo más difícil posible para intentar llegar a sentimientos más profundos, como el de la derrota o el patetismo de esa Antonia que viaja en tren.
(Tosantos 36)

This goal of distancing the reader in order to have a more objective perspective on the characters, one not tinged with facile empathy, and as a consequence able to reach a more complete understanding of them, as we shall see is achieved with almost all of the characters.

Within the text Montero plays with internal perspectives in the different manners of characterization. Vary rarely does the author allow the narrator to directly present a character, unless it be a secondary character. Characterization is achieved primarily through the words of other characters, the interaction of characters, or the actions of the character itself. However, while the characterization of Te trataré is in many ways similar to that of preceding novels, the utilization of insertions in this novel as discussed in the preceding section does provide a new and different opportunity.

Montero uses this to the fullest with the characters Antonio and Bella, and to a lesser degree with Vanessa. As

already signaled, the first insertion of the novel provides the reader with an initial characterization of both Antonio and Bella that as the reader ultimately learns is a distorted one. The narrator however does not immediately undertake the task of correcting these distorted images but rather allows them to remain as base images that will be gradually eroded through the narrator's perspective. This gradual contrasting-perspective characterization is not unlike that of Función as it serves to arrive at a more complete understanding of the character, but in this novel it also has an important secondary function of maintaining intrigue.²⁸

The case of Antonio clearly illustrates the contrasting-perspective method. In the first insertion Antonio is portrayed by Mancebo for the most part in positive terms. As mentioned, he is an upstanding individual who, although not the stereotypical model of manhood, is nonetheless seen as an unfortunate victim of a brutal and unprovoked attack that leaves the reader with a sympathetic predisposition toward the character. Antonio is next mentioned again with relation to his sister in chapter one. Although the emphasis is on Antonia, through her thoughts an image of Antonio also emerges. Unlike that of Mancebo, this image is one of

²⁸Glenn also signals the narrator's undermining of Mancebo's characterization, but sees as its primary purpose, "the liberation of Bella from the role of character in a male text which is clearly a fiction and absolves her from the charge of monster" (193). I do not necessarily disagree with this view, but rather its importance to the novel.

fraternal domination, in words as well as actions. This is seen on a domestic level in the way that Antonio interferes in the management of the home, traditionally the reign of the woman. Antonio forbids his sister to clean the frying pans, insisting instead that she leave them greased so that food won't stick. This prohibition stems not from domestic practice, as Antonia mentions that she has never seen her brother fry anything, but rather from a pattern of patriarchal domination. "Es la misma manía que tenía padre" (14), indicates that Antonio is mimicking his father's orders to his mother.

That Antonio transfers this traditional pattern of spousal domination onto his fraternal relationship with Antonia is clearly seen in the casualness of his actions with regard to his sister. Antonio, when it is convenient for him, comes to lunch at his sister's home where she waits on him hand and foot like a submissive wife, preparing his food, regulating his naps, and even shining his shoes. Even at this point in the novel it is apparent that Antonio takes these services for granted, he does not even bother to call his sister when he does not plan to come over. This attitude, considering the gender-specific social education of Antonio's generation, is not so unusual as to imply a negation of the image portrayed by Mancebo, however it does add early in the novel an element of inconsiderateness not conveyed by Mancebo's portrait.

This subtle and indirect manner of describing facets of Antonio's personality not included by the reporter is employed masterfully in the third chapter. In a short interchange between Bella and Antonia that takes place in the *Desiré* the narrator is able to elaborate on Antonio's relationship with his sister and to reveal another unmentioned facet of his personality:

-¿Sabes que tu hermano viene mucho por aquí?

-¿De verdad?

-¡Pero mira que eres boba! Deja de volverte para todos lados, que nunca viene por las tardes.

-Ah...

-Suele asomar las orejas a eso de las doce... Y además, ¿qué importa que te vea? (37)

It is clear from Antonia's reaction that she is worried that her brother see her in the club; another indicator of fraternal control but this time in a new arena, the personal. We also learn something new about Antonio's personal habits, he frequents the *Desiré*. This is significant because it follows the quite graphic description of the club in chapter two, its poor location, decayed physical conditions, sordid ambiance, and questionable clientele. Obviously this choice of club does not fit well with the image of a man compared to a priest. Yet once again it does not directly contradict it, but rather insinuate facets not mentioned.

These disturbing subtleties lead into chapter four where the characterization of Antonio becomes more direct and really begins to take root. In this chapter the narrator provides the base for Antonio's characterization by introducing the principal traits of the character that, as the novel progresses, will be expanded upon and whose motivations will be revealed. These traits, as we shall see, are of a diverse and contradictory nature, an aspect reinforced by the differing commentaries encountered in the insertions. Thus the development of the character is based upon the contrast between the gradually emerging narrator's point of view, comments made by other characters, and the differing points of view exposed in the insertions, especially the first.

As insinuated by the diversity of traits, the character Antonio is one of Montero's most complex creations at this point in her novelistic trajectory. He is also one of the most odious. This is due to the fact that the character is defined by a large number of truly disagreeable traits. As the novel progresses it becomes clear that Antonio is a manic-obsessive, male-chauvinistic deceiving womanizer, who believes himself superior to those who surround him based on his distinctiveness, exemplified by his "gifted" sense of smell. This combination of charming traits evidently stands in marked contrast to the Antonio described in the first insertion, the one revered by Benigno in the third, and the pitiful Antonio of the last, which is exactly the narrator's intention, the

undermining of these perspectives. However, unlike previous male Montero characters who are at times rather simplistic, in Te trataré the reasons behind Antonio's behavior are also disclosed, thus revealing the character's complexities, his inner contradictions, and a side of the character of which those around him are not aware.

Antonio's personality, as mentioned, is structured around a series of unappealing traits that initially appear to be heterogeneous in nature, obsessive meticulousness, fraternal domination, exaggerated sense of superiority, compulsive need for sexual conquest, etc. As the novel progresses however, we learn that these traits all flow from a common source, Antonio's problematic relationship with reality. This relationship is characterized by revelation and division and is formed during his childhood. Although always a sickly child, at age twelve Antonio suffered a severe illness accompanied by fevers. It is during this illness that Antonio's perception of reality was altered, he discovered that reality was not a unified, coherent whole as he had previously thought, but rather comprised of pieces that, as he put it, "navegaba a su aire...en el magma de la nada" (143). It was up to the individual to try and patch these pieces together, to create coherence out of chaos, all of which Antonio views as an interminable struggle destined ultimately to failure because one can never recreate the original, unbroken reality:

Pero todo fue distinto desde entonces, porque Antonio sabía ya que la realidad estaba rota y que vivir era zurcir interminablemente esos fragmentos.
(143)

It is from this concept of reality that Antonio's personality springs. Antonio divides his world into that of pre- and that of post-revelation, the former being the realm of his childhood in which "él era el hijo del cacique y todas las cosas parecían tener su razón de ser" (143), and the later his present, a chaotic world that "estaba en contra suya" (143), and against which he must wage a "larga lucha en solitario" (142). Antonio's primary weapon in this war is that of control. In order to maintain a semblance of unified reality Antonio must control all aspects of his world.

An example of this is seen clearly in his obsessive meticulousness with regard to objects that surround him. His belief that each object has its particular place in this world, a reflection of his fight against chaos, causes him to organize the objects with which he comes into contact. This habit, that from an outsider's perspective appears to be as Bella terms it "chinche y maniático," from his is simply a survival mechanism.

His evident problems with regard to women and intimacy also stem in great part from his need for control. Although in this arena there are also clearly other elements that come into play such as learned patriarchal models of male-female

relationships, just as important is his fear of sharing his intimacy. In a key paragraph the narrator describes Antonio's method for protecting his fragile inner-self from the dangers of the exterior world:

Antonio sabía que para domesticar la vida había que mantener el control, la disciplina; se defendía del mundo exterior compartimentando el cotidiano: no mezclaba ambientes, no dejaba resquicios por donde pudiese entrar el azar a destruirle. (146)

Antonio separates home, work, and sexual conquests from his private inner-self, an inviolated space that is symbolized by his apartment where no one but himself has ever tread. Thus while Antonio's sexual conquests are easily understood on one level as a representation of the macho ideal of a female trophy collection and another means of emulating his father, his sudden rupture of these encounters functions on an entirely different level, one that reflects his fear of intimacy and of women and his attempt to overcome this through control.

Antonio's exaggerated sense of superiority also stems from his reality revelation. Antonio's pre-revelation concept of self worth was based on his family's social position, Antonio was the privileged son of the town cacique, his emblem of distinction. This position however inexplicably changed for him sometime during his youth, around the time of his grave illness from which his gift of smell emerged. This

gift, which for Antonio comes to represent his distinctiveness, thus supplants the loss of his social status. However, this new emblem of superiority is not common exchange on the status market, so his lack of social status, exacerbated by his financial inability to attain a status-conferring university degree due to his father's erotic follies, continues to haunt him, causing him to be even more aggressive in displaying his superiority. The latter is clearly evident in the type of women Antonio chooses to conquer and his motivation:

Mujeres de lujo en sus casas de lujo. Señoritingas orgullosas, envueltas en ropas de seda y pañuelos de firma...Creyéndose las reinas del mundo y sin embargo desgraciadas. Desdeñosas al principio, como Julia, y luego derrotadas, rendidas a sus pies, con todo su dinero, su estatus, sus casas ostentosas.... (73)

Many other elements of Antonio's personality are also grounded in his concept of reality, however, the fact that these traits are a product of this childhood revelation does not annul their disagreeableness. Nor does the inclusion of passages, such as the following that is a result of his insensitive behavior toward his sister, that evidence Antonio's sense of guilt after he carries these traits to an extreme absolve him:

Antonio hizo una inhalación profunda, porque se sentía ahogado; ya estaba ahí, de nuevo. Ya estaba ahí el arrepentimiento, la angustia, atravesada en el pecho como un dolor, devorándole de culpabilidad como si fuera un cáncer. (76)

Due to the nature and vivid portrayal of these traits the reader is intellectually capable of understanding their provenience, but still is unable to rid him/herself of the images of extreme cruelty that Antonio inflicts on those who surround him. It is ultimately the accumulation of these images that most completely undermine the initial portrayal of Antonio, and to such an extent that the last insertion, Antonio's litany of sorrows, is perceived emotionally as just deserts. With this character Montero certainly achieves her goal of distancing the reader to realize a more profound understanding of the character by effectively blocking even an ounce of empathy.

The development of Bella on the other hand, while superficially constructed in the same manner as Antonio (utilization of contrasting perspectives within the narration and with the insertions), proceeds from a different angle and incurs a different degree of intimacy, resulting in a prolongation of character intrigue and a loss of critical distance between character and reader. As previously signaled, the intention of the narrator's perspective is to undermine the image of the character established in the first

insertion. In the case of Antonio we saw that this process begins almost immediately by insinuating a dark side of the character that does not fit well with the image portrayed by Mancebo. With Bella on the other hand the narrator proceeds quite differently, initially reinforcing the negative image of the first insertion. This is seen clearly in the first reference to Bella after Mancebo's account, the first line of the second chapter, "Está muerto -se asustó Bella" (25). The use of the unspecified masculine adjective immediately brings to mind Bella's attack on Antonio, the description of which is terminated in the moment that he is throw from the window. Although as we quickly learn the line does not refer to Antonio, the incident and image have already been recalled.

This desired connection between the insertion and the character is further intensified in this early chapter. In the space of a few pages several aspects of the character commented or insinuated in the insertion are brought up again; her unusual stature, her experienced verbal responses, her sexual relationships, and most importantly, her presentation is tied to the sordid atmosphere of the *Desiré*. All of this functions to strengthen the veracity of the initial image. However, while at this juncture nothing is included that would contradict that image, parallel to it's reinforcement another image also begins to emerge, that of a vulnerable, lonely, disillusioned woman.

Throughout the next several chapters the narrator continues to refer to aspects of the character that could corroborate Mancebo's image, but a different light is subtly thrown on these aspects as the true nature of Bella begins to emerge. The latter materializes through the narrator's characterization of Bella which, as in the case of Antonio, revolves around a single focal point, in this instance that of disillusion. While Bella's disillusionment pervades many aspects of her life such as her career, her physical appearance, and her future, its point of origin resides in her amorous disappointments, which in turn negatively color the other aspects of her life.

As Antonio, Bella divides her world in pre- and post-revelation, but her revelation centers on her concept of love. The pre-revelation period is characterized by a traditional belief in the existence of the ideal companion and eternal love along the lines of the novela rosa. This period is associated with Bella's adolescence and includes her relationship with Antonio. The moment of revelation, unlike in the case of Antonio, is not specified nor does it appear to be a moment but rather to be the eventual fruit of her unfortunate experiences with men after her arrival in Madrid. This period, which includes the present, is characterized by not only a loss of faith in men and in the existence of the happy relationship, but a fear of men as well. Yet despite this negative perspective, as Antonio, Bella is not able to

forget the original dream and at the slightest indication, real or imagined as are the instances narrated, is overcome by the fantasy of reconquering the illusion.

This aspect is represented by Bella's attachment to the bolero. This style of music, basically a love ballad, got its start in the late nineteenth century in Cuba and became immensely popular in the Spanish-speaking world in the forties and fifties. As Zavala points out, the heart of bolero music is the lyrics, with the musical score serving primarily as background. These lyrics are based upon a world governed by courtly love, a world in which the illusion of love and desire are represented by the passionate search of the lover for his/her soul mate. The ideal result of this search, as Zavala signals, is "la seducción, con la promesa de un *siempre* (4).

As we have seen, Bella is associated with the bolero even in the first insertion. This association enriches her characterization on several levels. On that exterior to the lyrics, the fact that Bella continues to interpret a style of music popular in the 40's and 50's in the post-Franco period conveys the anachronistic aspect of the character; Bella, like the music she sings, is outmoded. It also sheds light on the extent of the character's world. The fact that Bella has little sense of the actual state of Cuba, which she continues to imagine an island paradise, associating it with the glory days of the Tropicana and the pre-revolutionary period of the bolero's popularity, reveals that Bella's contact with the

world outside the Desiré and her boleros is very restricted. Her reality is emotion- and not chronological- or event-based.

However, the tie between Bella and the bolero is much more than just professional association. The bolero serves Bella as a means of self-expression, functions as an escape from her sordid reality, and represents her concept of love. The first is seen frequently in passages where Bella desires to express a feeling or a thought related to emotions. Instead of formulating her own phrases she employs lines from boleros that convey the idea. At times this mechanism is employed simply as a type of mental and verbal shortcut, because she has sung the boleros so often the feelings and ideas that she associates with the lines come to mind immediately. But at times it appears to function almost as a spell. Instead of verbalizing a wish in her own language, a language tied closely to reality and disillusion, if she communicates it with a bolero line, the language of illusion, its materialization is somehow indemnified from reality. This is seen clearly in the passage where Bella first allows herself to dream about Poco's proposal of going to Cuba.

Bella also employs the bolero as a hedge against the squalid reality that encircles her. When she interprets the boleros she is removed from what she ironically terms "un público selecto," comprised mainly of "viejos nostálgicos, jóvenes drogados, adultos solitarios y borrachos" (29), and transported to the idealized world of the bolero, perfectly

summarized by Glenn as, "tropical breezes, palm-lined beaches, moonlit nights, and [exalt] love as the be-all and end-all of existence" (199).

Very clearly Bella's choice of boleros reveal the novela rosa bent of her concept of love. Bella dreams of a passionate, highly-emotional relationship like that described in the bolero, "Lo nuestro es alma, es risa y llanto, confianza y celos, es noche y luna, es lluvia y fuego, porque lo nuestro es amor"²⁹ (29), in which the man fulfills the idealized image portrayed in romantic novels, "La cáscara dura y el corazón jugoso, como una nuez" (178). For Bella this ideal companion, a man capable of being strong and protective as well as being loving and sensitive, becomes the focus of her dreams as evidenced by the constant repetition of the bolero refrain "Necesito un corazón que me acompañe."³⁰

Unfortunately, because of the impossible expectations this image fosters it not only becomes the source of Bella's

²⁹The spelling changes reflect Bella's pronunciation which she alters when she sings boleros to give them a chic and tropical effect. This is especially notable in the often repeated line "Necesito un coraz/són que me acompañe." When Bella is thinking this line the z is utilized whereas when she sings it the s is substituted.

³⁰This line is followed by the telling lines "...que sienta todo, que sea muy grande, que sienta sobre todo lo que siento" (115) "...que me acompañe hasta el final de nuestra vida original y que me quiera de verdá, que me quiera como yo también lo quiera, que dé su vida por mi vida entera, que llene de caricias mi ternura, que diga que me quiere con locura" (31) that clearly express her concept of the ideal companion. Bella constantly refers to this bolero, in moments of illusion (152) and moments of deception (221).

amorous deceptions, causing her to choose unsuitable companions that inevitably disappoint her, but also leads her to dangerously disregard her own intuition. This is seen clearly in her relationship with the mysterious Poco. Bella, so desirous to recapture the illusion of the ideal companion, disregards the clear warning signs of the dark side of Poco's nature, and instead creates a Poco that conforms to her illusion. The latter is clearly seen in the passage where Vanessa is assaulted by two low-lives (181-184). Bella twists her gut-interpretation of the cold and cowardly inaction of Poco into that of wise behavior. In this manner Bella, as Ana with regard to Soto Amón in Crónica, plays an important role in the setting-up of her own heart-wrenching disillusion.

These disappointments however, unlike in the previous case of Antonio, are sorely felt by the reader. Bella's character, although certainly less than perfect, is not developed through traits that distance the reader but rather with those that allow reader empathy. Her need for the illusion of love is a basic human need, thus her tendency to make judgement errors in the pursuit of this illusion is easy to sympathize with. This is evidenced by the feelings aroused by her final series of disappointments. The latter occur so close together, and are so painful, that her attack on Antonio not only is comprehensible, but appears justifiable if perceived abstractly as an attack on the cause of Bella's disillusion.

Bella though, is the only character of Te trataré that escapes Montero's previously signaled goal of distancing reader and character. The remaining characters are developed more along the lines of Antonio, through an exaggeration of specific traits that lend themselves to interesting and unique characters, but that are easier to intellectually understand than with which to empathize. Antonia is a clear example of this. Although she is obviously a pathetic victim of her tragic situation, the manner in which her personality is developed, the traits attributed to her, and the vehicle of her rebellion, effectively annul a great portion of the possibly-high empathy factor due to their comic and ridiculous aspects.

The characterization of Antonia revolves around the stereotypical image of the old maid, middle-aged, unmarried and chaste, but underneath seething with frustrated desires. Montero however does not let the stereotype remain on a formulaic level, she provokes instead a more profound contemplation of it by incorporating causes and ramifications of this state. These aspects though are not presented in a doctrinaire manner but rather "esperpenticados"³¹, reflected through the twisted mirror of El Callejon del Gato so that the ridiculous, absurd, and tragically-comic aspects

³¹As Hart points out in "An Introduction...", elements of the esperpento tradition are not uncommon in the Spanish novela negra (179). For further information see her book The Spanish Sleuth. The Detective in Spanish Fiction, Rutherford NJ, Farleigh Dickinson UP, 1987.

are fore-grounded, deforming the stereotype in order to rediscover the original image, a technique that conforms perfectly to the authors goal's of distancing the reader to arrive at greater understanding.

This is clearly seen in the passages that deal with Antonia's sexual frustration and her rebellion against her indoctrinated conventional sexual upbringing. Because she conforms to the moral and religious sexual conventions expected of a spinster, Antonia must also confront the resulting sexual frustration. Montero ties Antonia's response to religious beliefs, and in one of her infrequent jabs at organized religion, comically exposes the reason for her giving in to her body's natural desires:

Su atrevimiento coincidió con el traslado de su antiguo confesor y su sustitución por un cura más viejo. Tan viejo que el hombre era más sordo que una piedra y siempre imponía la misma penitencia, al buen tuntún, cuando juzgaba que la pecadora de turno había consumido un tiempo prudencial para la exposición de sus miserias. (21-22)

The comical and ridiculous aspects of Antonia's masturbation are furthered by the manner in which she performs them. Believing that touching herself with her hand would be "guarrería muy grave," Antonia employs a stuffed animal that she has had since childhood, Lulu, whose backside is unplushed from constant use and who Antonia reprimands

afterwards for her "dócil complicidad." Before allowing the act to commence, Antonia carefully sets the scene, turning away the photo of her brother but not that of her mother because as she says, "la pobre estaba casi ciega" (22). Antonia also carefully controls her sexual fantasies, permitting herself only what she believes to be less sinful, the rape fantasy, because as she states: "la aceptación del sexo, siquiera imaginaria, debía ser un pecado tremebundo" (22). The ridiculousness of the scene is furthered by Antonia's rape fantasy, that appears lifted out of True Confessions, and the language employed in the passage as seen in the following short extract:

El timbre de la puerta, ella que abre, un hombrón que asegura ser el fontanero, ella dejándole pasar con inocencia, él que se abalanza sobre ella bruscamente, que le agarra los senos (ay, las tetas), el perro de peluche bailotea por las pecosas protuberancias de su cuerpo, ella se resiste, él le arranca los botones de la bata, ella implora, él la arroja sin piedad sobre la cama... (22)

Although Antonia's sexual transgression is portrayed in a ridiculous light, the tragic undertones remain intact. It is clear that the combination of her social, moral, and religious education has created for her a sexuality crisis with which she is unprepared to deal. As a result Antonia

considers herself crazy for having these desires, and guiltily torments herself after an auto-indulgence of them. However, Montero once again lightens the situation in the final lines of the passage with the revelation of Antonia's secret observer, who will become the vehicle of her final sexual transgression, the gawky, cross-eyed, under-developed adolescent Damian.

The remaining characters in Te trataré are patterned along a mixture of the comic, ridiculous, grotesque, and tragic elements to achieve the goal of understanding through distance. With each the presence of differing perspectives within the principle narrative and/or with the insertions is a major component of their development. In the cases of Antonio and Bella we have seen that this technique also creates and prolongs a sense of intrigue. Interestingly though, with the character that is almost a standard of the novela negra, the matón Vicente Menéndez Rato, "Poco", Montero severely restricts the use of multiple perspectivism and does not make use of the insertions at all. Poco is characterized almost exclusively from the perspective of a single character, Bella.

This is quite logical however considering that the element of mystery constitutes a large part of the character; Poco's sudden appearance at the Desiré, his unknown origins, his refusal to reveal his real name, and his secret past and present all function to create this aura and would be

destroyed with added information, an almost inevitable result of added perspectives. In order to reveal the duality of the character without mitigating the sense of intrigue Montero cleverly creates a dual perspective on Poco from the single character vision. Poco is first presented from the perspective of the un-enamored Bella, then from that of the enamored Bella, a technique that results in two very different Pocos that the reader must synthesize in order to arrive at the character's true nature.

Once again the complexity of this male figure is a testament to the advances of Montero's characterization capacities. Initially Poco is perceived by the un-enamored Bella as unsettlingly secretive, cold and inexpressive, fear inspiring, and with clear tendencies toward violence. This however changes almost immediately when Poco reveals a philosophical side with which Bella identifies. In Bella's eyes Poco quickly becomes the victim of a secret and tormented past that causes him to cover his sensitivity and compassion, so evident to Bella in his verses and gestures, and to isolate himself in a protective shell, symbolized by the closet in which he resides in the *Desiré*.

The truth as we learn at the end of the novel resides in neither version, but somewhere in between. Not the victim, but rather the victimizer of his tormented past, Poco was clearly a dangerous and violent man, as evidenced by the brutal, senseless beating of Vanessa and the abandonment of

his wife and child. However, sensitivity, disillusion, and despair also formed part of his personality as indicated by the well-worn volume of Bécquer's verses and his final suicide. The latter though, once again, are not sufficient to eliminate the images of Poco's brutality that forcefully distance the reader, as in the case of previous characters.

As evident from the preceding summary of the characterization in Te trataré, Montero does achieve her goal of distancing reader and character in almost every instance. This critical distance does result, as desired, in the clear comprehension of quite complex characters and their situations. But, because of the striking peculiarities of the characters, it is very difficult to view them as representative, as in previous Montero novels, of types of individuals or behaviors that surround us and with which we can empathize. These characters, more than any previous Montero characters, pertain to a consciously fabricated narrative world that although anchored in realism, conceives of this realism in an expanded sense that emphasizes an exaggeration of particular elements, in this case the grotesque; what Montero terms as "hiperrealismo" (Tosantos 37). This construction of a consciously fabricated narrative world is an important step in Montero's novelistic trajectory. Its influence, while noted in the next novel, Amado amo, becomes crucial to the understanding of the direction that the fifth novel, Temblor, undertakes.

While the characterization of Te trataré pertains to the realm of hyper-realism, the principle themes of the novel are clearly anchored in what has become by this third novel "Montero-reality", a world structured around a very particular vision of recurring fundamental themes such as those of solitude, love, communication, and failure. In Te trataré the essence of these themes follows the general line exposed in previous novels, but what does set the themes apart in this novel is their treatment. Unlike in previous novels where a number of characters were highly conscious of their emotional and mental relationship with the fundamental issues of their lives, which in turn became the perfect vehicle for the exploration of these themes, in Te trataré the characters do little theorizing about the relationship they maintain with their reality. Instead they are involved in an exhausting, monotonous, yet generally unconscious, struggle to simply survive from one day to the next. Due to their lack of consciousness with regard to their reality this struggle is ultimately a losing one because, as we have seen exemplified by Soto Amón in Crónica, this approach to life leaves no chance for understanding oneself and ultimately life.

It is from this angle that the themes of Te trataré are approached, the characters do not deconstruct/reconstruct their reality as in previous novels but are left rather to hopelessly swim around in an already familiar thematic sinkhole without the means to safely arrive at shore. This is

seen clearly with the theme of solitude. As in the previous novels, solitude in Te trataré is envisioned as an unavoidable, and particularly problematic part of life due to the absolute necessity of coming to terms with it.³² Every character in this novel due to different reasons is filled with solitude in one way or another, and each tries to resolve it not by confronting or reformulizing it but rather through some form of escape.

In the case of male characters the surface reasons for solitude are varied, ranging from old age, insecurity, and dysfunctional matrimony to disillusion, but one common vehicle of escape tends to be work. This is quite evident in the case of Benigno who, in a heart-breakingly candid admission, reveals to Antonio that work is his refuge:

Es que figúrese usted, don Antonio -le explicaba-. Los fines de semana, en casa, no tengo nada que hacer. No veo a nadie, no hablo con nadie... No es que me queje, válgame Dios, no me puedo quejar, pero... A veces, por la noche, cuando me acuesto, no encuentro nada en qué pensar antes de dormirme. Porque durante el día no ha pasado nada, ¿sabes?,

³²The portrayal of solitude in Montero's novels very much reflects repeated statements with regard to her own personal philosophy toward the question as seen in the following interview quote: "La soledad es absolutamente necesaria... todos tenemos que aprender a estar solos. Sentirte adulto, tener una idea de lo que eres y un mínimo control de tu vida" (La mujer feminista 9).

es una cosa así como un vacío... Y en la oficina, en cambio, es otra cosa. (140)

The desperateness of Benigno's intended escape from the emptiness and solitude of his existence is magnified by the miserable treatment he receives from Antonio at work. Yet, typical of Montero is the failure of recourses outside oneself to definitively escape solitude; when Antonio is hospitalized Benigno is once again condemned to solitude.

In the case of female characters the common vehicle of escape from solitude is the now well-familiar recourse of love. Although the women themselves do not consciously recognize their amorous expectations as such, their behavior is clearly illustrative of the author's repeated statements with regard to this question:

Cuando la gente se enamora, lo que hace es más o menos conscientemente, inventarse esa historia para salvarse del miedo, para escapar de la soledad.
(Villan 23)

As evidenced by the preceding chapters, this is not a new area of concern for Montero. In both Crónica and Función the female protagonists are active, and to varying degrees, conscious participants in illustrating this tendency. In Te trataré however the issue is approached from the opposite direction, neither Antonia, Bella, nor Vanessa are conscious of employing love as a recourse against their evident solitude. For this reason the outcome of their amorous

adventures takes on tones that range from the ridiculous and grotesque, to the tragic, and unlike their predecessors there is absolutely no glimmer of a satisfactory resolution.

The case of Antonia is a clear example of this. Trapped in a world regimented by traditional conventions, fraternal domination, and her own lack of self-esteem, Antonia's life is so empty that she invents relationships with men whom she has come into contact with only casually. Antonia patiently and persistently constructs these relationships around purely innocent encounters to which she attributes hidden meanings, and from which she saves any physical evidence in a special drawer.

One of the most serious of these "affairs" was with a neighbor, Rafael, whose comings and goings she obsessively observed each day through the peephole of her door in hopes of catching a glimpse of his profile. Not satisfied with the distorted image the peephole provided, Antonia would go to the extreme of waiting hours on end, prop in hand, at the door in order to simulate a chance encounter with the object of her fantasy, with whom she would end up exchanging a few banal words invariably related to the weather.³³ The highlight of this intense relationship was the day that a pipe broke in Antonia's kitchen and Rafael, "con una galanura que hubiera

³³As the narrator comically relates, Antonia's lack of skills in the art of amorous subterfuge ironically leads Rafael to believe that Antonia has some special passion for the weather instead of for him.

bastado para derretir corazones más curtidos que el de ella" (17), came to her rescue. After heroically resolving the emergency ["bajo su fuerte mano (ay) la llave de paso cedió con docilidad de mantequilla (17)], Antonia invites him to a cup of coffee after which she draws several conclusions, the most important of which being that Rafael, "a pesar de su timidez y su silencio" (18), loves her. When he moves two months later without saying a word to her, Antonia maintains the illusion by attributing this to his fear of revealing his emotions. In a grotesque parody of the dried rose pressed in an album convention, Antonia lovingly keeps the cigar butt Rafael smoked with his cup of coffee in her treasure drawer, and during moments of boredom she nostalgically reviews this and other mementos dreaming of the invented relationships they represent.

The pathetic ridiculousness of this ritual is emphasized by the type of mementos Antonia collects (a match that the fruit vendor used to pick his teeth, a gas bill from the neighbor, a prescription written by her doctor, etc.), the fantastic nature of her illusions, and her puritanical reactions to her lovers' imagined advances. But more than just signaling the absurdity of Antonia's fantasies, Montero is criticizing once again the conventions of romantic love. Although the author believes that we are all products to a certain extent of these conventions, she views its ramifications as very harmful:

A mí me parece que es [amor romántico] una de las cosas que más nos ha esclavizado y que más nos ha destrozado la vida. A las mujeres mucho más, porque se nos ha educado sólo para que el amor sea el centro de nuestra vida. El amor es alienante, un amor que aleja el centro de tu vida de ti misma, y que lo coloca en otra persona. (Mujer Feminista 9)

Bella exemplifies this view of romantic love. Nearing fifty and still single with a string of unsuccessful romances behind her, Bella tries desperately, but unsuccessfully, to convince herself that she is, if not happy, at least content with her life. She reasons that she has a home, a steady job where she can sing her boleros, and can permit herself certain small pleasures like sitting in the club chatting with Poco over a cold beer; "Hay muchos que están peor" (83) she reminds herself. But it is evident that these things do not really suffice to make Bella feel complete; she has a negative self image, feels her career as well as herself has no future, at night suffers attacks of fear and insomnia that bring to mind those of la Pulga in Crónica, and is frequently overcome by an intense sense of disillusion.

The major component of this disillusion is the lack of that special companion idealized by the conventions of romantic love, the man who is understanding ["un corazón que sienta sobre todo lo que siento" (30)] as well as strong and

protective because as Bella believes, "El mundo no estaba hecho para mujeres solas..a pesar de todo lo que dijeran las feministas esas" (31). Yet the reality for Bella, as well as for the overwhelming majority of women as Montero leads us to understand, is that this dream individual has not, and will not appear. The unfortunate ramifications of this for women who refuse to see the fantasy for what it is are double; they feel incomplete without the other³⁴, which in turns leads to a desperate search for anyone who might suffice.

Montero's opposition to women's slavery to the conventions of romantic love is evident in the tragic outcome of Bella. Despite her experience with the realities of relationships, Bella's need for the fantasy and her sense of incompleteness overcome her faith in her own good judgement. As soon as the slightest glimmer of "the companion" appears in the form of Poco, Bella seizes it and makes it into what she desires. Not only does Bella transform Poco into "the companion," but she transforms herself as well, manifested physically by paying more attention to her dress and make-up, and on a much more dangerous level mentally, by modifying her own ideas to resemble his and suppressing the warning signs of

³⁴Montero has repeatedly signaled the role of societal indoctrination with regard to the conventions of romantic love as a major culprit of a woman's sense of incompleteness without a man, "se nos ha educado para ser medias personas, el énfasis, la plenitud de nuestra vida se ha puesto siempre en el hombre. Y seguimos dependiendo en lo fantasmal de la presencia del hombre que sería el que nos completa a esa media persona" (Vanidades 23).

her intuition. The outcome of her self-treason is disastrous. When Bella learns that Poco was deceiving her, her disillusion is so great that it becomes the catalyst for her self-destruction.

Another theme dealt with in the novel that also has been central to previous novels is that of lack of communication between the sexes. Montero's often repeated opinion that "las relaciones entre hombre y mujer se separan por abismos terribles de desconocimiento" (Villán 23), is in Te trataré once again the foundation for male/female relations. This is seen clearly in the sexual aspect of these relations, fertile ground for exposing how lack of communication leads to mismatched and unfulfilled expectations. Montero, working from several common myths concerning sexual expectations of both men and of women, reveals through individual situations the power, quite often fallacy, and ramifications, at times comical and at others sad, of these myths. Although this is done on an individual level, the results are easily extrapolated into more general considerations.

The foundation for one such example of demythification is laid in chapter ten where Antonio and García debate the sexual expectations of women. Two classic approaches, both of which are based on what Men believe Women desire and are designed to facilitate conquest and not communication, are championed. García is partisan to the deeply-ingrained male myth that what women crave is sexual prowess, "Donde esté un buen polvo que

se quiten las florituras. Eso es lo que les gusta a las mujeres, un buen macho" (101), while Antonio on the other hand proclaims to defend the romantic approach, "No se trata sólo de follar. A las mujeres les tienes que dar dulzura, y mimos, y atenciones. Hay que tratarlas como si fueran reinas" (100). Montero's goal is not to reveal the superiority of one approach or the other, although for men the seductiveness of the sexual prowess myth is apparent, but rather to expose both as myths, which as such do not promote communication but rather inhibit it by objectifying and generalizing the woman.

To achieve this Montero illustrates the approaches in different situations, with different participants, and significantly with different results. This is seen most dramatically, and at times comically, in the case of the myth that women are satisfied by sexual prowess which is portrayed in the situations of Bella and her young macarra and Antonio and Vanessa. In both instances the men first objectify the women; the macarra views Bella as a body to sexually satisfy in order to obtain money, and Antonio views Vanessa as a myth, "la legendaria e inagotable voracidad de una criatura de dieciocho años" (172), that he must sexually dazzle. Next they attempt to fulfill the myth; the macarra it appears does so with technical success ["era experto y eficiente. La tocó toda y era como un pecado" (221)], and Antonio, from his point of view, does not, having to ration his "asaltos" to one a night resulting in a sexual brilliance he considers only

modest. In both cases however, their partners react in a manner contrary to what the myth would suggest. In the case of Bella technical expertise does not lead to fulfillment ["se quedó con hambre de hombre" (221)], but Vanessa on the other hand is quite pleased with Antonio's performance, interpreting it ironically altogether contrary to what he imagines:

Hay que ver qué mundo tiene Antonio, qué elegancia...Ahí estaba, durmiendo en su cama, tan señor, y no como los hombres que ella había conocido, unos animales que no pensaban en otra cosa que en follar...Esto era lo que le convenía a ella, un caballero que la cuidase. (176)

In each case the reason for these "unexpected" reactions lies in the fact that the men relied on myths that generalized women and their expectations to govern their behavior with them instead of communicating with each as an individual to discover her own particular expectations.

Clearly however, male characters are not the only ones guilty of lack of communication, the female characters in Te trataré are equally culpable. Unfortunately, in the case of the latter this lack of communication and subsequent misunderstanding of the opposite sex at times results not in simply a damaged ego but in physical harm for the woman. The repeatedly used theme of random, de-personalized violence in prior novels in Te trataré becomes a highly-personalized one-on-one violence directed in its majority against women. This

is not to say that Montero considers women guilty of the violence committed against them, a point made perfectly clear by the unprovoked and unavoidable rape of Puri (79) that illustrates the capacity for violence and cruelty of some men, but rather that women may predispose themselves to being victims without realizing it by engaging in things such as role-playing, myth-building, and romantic idealizations that do not foster true communication. As Montero illustrates, all of these strategies tend to impose an ideally-constructed set of traits and/or behavior on the man that the woman searches to recognize, in the process obscuring the true nature of the individual.

Obviously this re-construction can be quite dangerous if the man has violent tendencies. This is seen clearly in the two cases of violence against Vanessa. In the first, Vanessa in her inexperienced and mindless zeal to embody the myth of the vamp, dangerously underestimates the expectations of her "victims," "dos guapos del Barrio Chino" well-versed in sexual games and not accustomed to playing without bringing the game to what they perceive as its logical termination. When Vanessa finally realizes that her two "guapos" are not following her script, she tries unsuccessfully to talk her way out of the situation. The two "gentlemen" will have none of it and resort to force against Vanessa who is saved only by the courageous action of Bella, herself a victim of male violence.

As lethal as the situation could have been, Vanessa does not take advantage of its lesson. In the second incident Vanessa's judgement of men and danger is shown to be completely inadequate, she is so caught up in her own perceived powers of attraction and feels so secure in her newly acquired role of upstanding and untouchable fiancée that these override her own intuition about Poco whom she has feared since they met:

-¿No me invitas a pasar?

La muchacha le miró, dudosa, y luego se encogió de hombros con desgana. Se dirigió al armario de luna y comenzó a cepillarse la melena.

-Pasa si quieres, Poco. Pero te advierto que ahora mismo viene a buscarme mi prometido. (206)

So convinced is Vanessa of her physical attraction that it is not until the first blow rains down that she understands Poco is going to beat, and not rape, her: "Así, temiendo ser besada, recibió el primer golpe" (208).

In all the cases of violence against women in Te trataré the men employ this recourse as a means of personal control and power or of revenge. As we have seen, the theme of male violence is not new to Montero's narrative, in prior novels it is also men who commit the random acts of violence for generally the same reasons as mentioned above but on a different, more impersonalized level, with victims that are both men and women. In this novel though the one case that

initially appears to escape this pattern is Bella's attack on Antonio. However, upon closer examination it is clear that while the form may change the content does not. After repeatedly being the hapless victim of male assaults (amorous deceptions, physical violence, Poco's lies, the young macarra's pimping, and the ruining of Antonia's affair which Bella feels as if it were hers) Bella adopts the male strategy of violence to carry out her own revenge on Antonio, whom she has converted into the symbol of male oppression. Thus Bella's recurrence to violence represents her method of empowering herself by quite logically employing the method of those who possess power.

The theme of power, personal, managerial, and societal, observed in the prior novels also has a palpable presence in this novel. Several of the characters in Te trataré struggle to maintain an illusion of power over their lives. They do this either by eliminating from their lives what they associate as the root of disorder, of failure, as in the case of Menéndez and his abstinence from alcohol, or by trying to control every aspect of their reality, as we have seen in the case of Antonio. But in both cases Montero clearly illustrates that one can not structure life diametrically between order and chaos, absolute control over reality and/or the exclusion of disorder is impossible, random occurrences over which one has no control can and do erupt into one's nice orderly reality bringing with them chaos.

Nonetheless, given the impossibility of absolute control over one's life, it is also evident that Montero does not condone an absolute resignation to powerlessness. This is seen clearly in the case of Antonia whose complete submission to the control of others (family, society, and church) determines even her final, illusory attempt to break free. Unable to assume even a modicum of responsibility for change by planning her flight she instead relies on chance, or her subconscious, to guide her choice of train, which turns out to be not the train to freedom but rather that to the origin of her powerlessness, the train to Malgorta. The hopelessness of this outcome is emphasized symbolically in the closing lines of the novel:

Y al borde de la noche y de los montes, el tren expreso alcanzaría un Malgorta inexorable, el pueblo de su madre, como siempre. La tarde se había gris y sucia y la locomotora silbó con lamento de buque entre la lluvia. (245)

Thus Antonia closes her life circle by aptly returning during the night to the place that formed her, doomed to repeat the powerlessness of the previous female generation in part due to her education, but to a great extent stemming from her own inability to empower herself.

Of all of the characters of the novel, only Bella does at the end take a step toward self-empowerment. Unfortunately, unlike Ana in Crónica, Bella's gesture is considered by

society as a negative one and she lands in jail. It is evident from the outcome of each character in Te trataré that the inability to arrive at a balance with regard to the issue of personal control is condemned by the author, resulting in a marked artistic distance to these characters:

No estoy cerca, pues, de ninguno de los dos personajes (Bella and Antonia) ni de ninguno de la novela, aunque algunos te caen mejor que otros, pues son perdedores, miserables y sin ningún control sobre sus vidas. (Tosantos 36)

Yet the issue of control for Montero does not limit itself to a purely personal level but rather extends itself into a managerial level as well. This aspect of power was touched upon in the two previous novels, but in Te trataré the author weaves to a much greater extent the personal and the managerial in one character, resulting in what must clearly be the breeding ground for the following novel, Amado amo. Antonio, in an evidently limited fashion, is a microcosmic representation of the future Cesar, of men who due to their inability to succeed in the desired area of success come to rely on their job as a means of personal identification, a dangerous crutch in a society that equates personal success with professional success. Hence when they fail in this arena it is logical that they connote it as a personal failure.

In Te trataré this situation is illustrated by the promotion of a younger colleague of Antonio, "un universitario

analfabeto, un zafio ejecutivo, un arribista" (141) as Antonio considers him. Ortiz's promotion to a new job in the new building triggers in Antonio a dismay so great that it manifests itself physically. The root of this dismay however is not specifically Ortiz's promotion but rather Antonio's own feelings about his job combined with his identification of self with job. Thus when he considers his job useless ["una delegación ministerial tan inútil que hasta su propio nombre era un absurdo" (142)], he is considering his life useless, and when he associates his job with the decaying building in which it is lodged ["el viejo edificio, que se hundía pesadamente como un ballenato arponeado y que le arrastraría en su decadencia estrafalaria y fantasmal" (142)], he is clearly considering his future as dead-end.

Having no power to change the path his career has taken, Antonio exercises an illusion of power by controlling his underling Benigno. This exercise takes on special significance because Benigno represents for Antonio his possible future ["Benigno era la representación de este inframundo burocrático, era un espectro de la miseria, un mensajero del fracaso." (144-45)], thus his power over him, both professional and personal, represents a win in the battle against professional, and hence personal, failure. As we shall see, Cesar also resorts to the manipulation of a subaltern's career to maintain the illusion of professional (i.e. personal) success.

Montero also clearly integrates the theme of power into the societal level. Several critics have signaled the inequities of power between men and women in Te trataré. With regard to the structure of the novel Glenn has interestingly pointed out the use of writing by males within the novel as a way of wielding power and controlling the narrative. Gascón Vera points out the relationship of Te trataré with French feminist theories regarding communication between the sexes and inequities of power. The majority of these studies concentrate on the oppressive aspects of the patriarchal order on women, who do clearly suffer if not always directly male oppression, indirectly through indoctrinated education that reinforces the patriarchal order.

But the keepers of this power can also find that they themselves are victims of the necessity to exercise it. Antonio's situation with Benigno is a clear example of this. Because he is the boss, Antonio knows that he must always have orders to give to Benigno in order to reinforce his superiority over his underling and to maintain his position in the hierarchy of power, as well as support the concept of the hierarchy. Unfortunately, due to the futility of his job Antonio often finds that he has no orders to give, there is simply nothing to do, in which case he finds himself in the obligation to invent orders to sustain the illusion of power. Inspector García also suffers a similar threat to his power in the burned cat incident. In both cases the men find that they

are unable to exercise the power expected of them in their position, subsequently suffering personally from this. Although their suffering is not portrayed as being as profound as that of the women, it does make clear that the negative effects of power affect both sexes, and sets out a warning for those who desire to ascend to power. Admittedly this message is secondary to many others in Te trataré, but it is important to note because the effects of power, both those that empower and those that impoverish, will be a central issue in Montero's next two novels.

When reviewing Te trataré with regard to Montero's two previous novels it is clear that this novel marks a turning point in the author's narrative trajectory. Montero, while maintaining many techniques and themes from prior novels, departs from this trajectory in several areas. These changes as we have seen are most apparent on a structural and technical level, and less so on the thematic.

Known for her desire to improve upon the structure of each novel, that of Te trataré is no exception. The structure of the novel is carefully constructed upon a primary narrative that is intricately intertwined with a series of extra-diegetic insertions placed at key intervals during the narrative. The first insertion is the pivot around which the entire novel revolves, providing the connecting point for the characters and their individual narrative lines as well as creating and maintaining the intrigue of the novel. The

primary narrative, although structured around character presentation as in Crónica, has avoided the problems noted in the first novel by establishing early on in the narrative clear relationships between the characters, thus strengthening the coherence of the novel. The integration of these two levels, although questioned by some, is evidently tight and ultimately crucial to the success of the novel because as we have seen it is the product of these two levels, the intrigue, that maintains the interest of the novel, forwards the narration, and ties together all the individual narrative lines and characters. This particular structure, although combining certain structural elements of prior novels, as a whole is quite unique in Montero's trajectory and, while functioning well in Te trataré, will not be repeated.

As for the characterization of the novel, it is clear that the techniques utilized, aside from the contributions that the insertions facilitate, are based on those encountered in prior novels and here have been honed to provide a more experienced portrayal. Nonetheless, the emphasis on the "esperpentization" of characters, encountered only to a limited extent in prior novels, in this novel becomes very important to character construction, transferring these characters to an entirely different plane of reality. This combined with a cast of characters drawn a world quite different than that of previous novels (there is some similarity with the marginalized characters of the bar Toño in

Crónica) and a more complex development of the characters results in unique and memorable personalities.

This uniqueness however is built upon an exaggeration of undesirable traits that impede to a great extent reader empathy in almost every case, a situation desired by the author who wanted the reader to be able to reach an understanding of the characters based on intellectual more than emotional comprehension. The one character who escapes the confines of this technique is Bella. Whether this was desired by the author or not is unclear, but this "slip" in characterization does affect the reader's response to Bella's attack on Antonio. By being allowed/able to empathize with this character, and not at all with her victim, the reader is certainly more predisposed to view her attack as justifiable, something that the other observers within the novel, Antonia included, do not see.

With regard to the themes of the novel, as we have seen despite the innovations in the areas of structure and characterization, the basic thematic of this novel follows very closely that of prior novels, creating what I have termed "Montero reality." This reality is structured around themes that are clearly universal concerns -solitude, love, communication, and power- but considered from a very particular perspective, that of the author. The basic concept of these concerns does not vary from previous novels rather they are examined in conjunction with new characters' points

of view, which brings out different nuances, and as we have seen at times entirely new aspects, on the original theme. As we shall see, while many structural and technical aspects of the author's work will change, it is the thematic trajectory that will remain the most constant element of Montero's narrative.

Thus the major difference constituted by this novel alluded to earlier, while based on changes in structure and characterization, is the author's success in distancing her world from her narrative world. In Te trataré Montero fulfills not only her goal, but what she considers to be the ultimate ambition goal of every author, -"poder crear un mundo" (Talbot 95)-, by stepping out of a reality based on her own experiences to enter in a consciously fabricated fictional world. This world, while based she acknowledges on an incident from her reality, is fabricated from her imagination. It is this emphasis on fantasy and imagination that sets the novel apart from prior novels and marks a clear path for the novels to come.

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CHAPTER IV

AMADO AMO

After a five year absence Rosa Montero returned to the literary scene with another immediate best-seller, Amado amo (1988). For Montero's readers, accustomed to the author publishing a novel every two years, the five year hiatus between Te trataré and Amado amo seemed an eternity. For Montero, who considers writing an act of passion³⁵, it was also an anguishing period that she explains was due to a frustrating case of writers block:

Cuando terminé Te trataré como una reina, tenía pensado otra novela. Estuve tomando notas un año con una idea muy bonita. Al cabo de un año, me senté a escribir y no me salía. No me la creía. No creía en los personajes ni les entendía. Me parecía toda una estupidez. Estuve tres mese intentando escribirla y la abandoné. Entonces estuve cuatro años sin poder escribir. Estaba

³⁵In interviews Montero has revealed that she considers the process of writing similar to that of falling in love, "El escribir es lo más cercano a la pasión amorosa; es alienante como la pasión amorosa. Cuando estás enamorada pasas todo el tiempo pensando en el tío. Al escribir, estás pensando en la novela. Es desesperante como la pasión amorosa. Te sientes, como en la pasión amorosa, al borde de la maravilla. Siempre estás esperando el éxtasis. Te sientes muy viva" (Porter 4).

completamente bloqueada. Era terrible. No se me ocurrió nada. Empecé a pensar, a ver si me escribo un cuento para salir de este bloqueo. Escribí un cuentito, lo guardé, escribí otro cuentito y el tercero o cuarto cuento que escribí se convirtió en Amado amo. (Porter 4)

The wait however was well worth it; this novel, as previous novels, was well-received by the public. It was also highly acclaimed by many critics as Montero's best written novel to date, an assertion that the following analysis supports as well.

The reasons behind this success are no secret. Montero once again weaves an interesting story into a well-structured and carefully thought out framework. For the narrative line of Amado amo Montero returns to a world well-known to her, the creative end of the world of big business, here portrayed in the advertising agency Golden Line. The story, divided traditionally into chapters, revolves around the figure of César Miranda, an aging advertising executive, and his relations with the firm where he works, referred to tellingly by the employees as the Casa.³⁶ These relations are narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator which, on the surface, stylistically returns us to the first and third novels. But the many thematic, stylistic, and structural similarities of

³⁶As Brown points out, in Spanish the word casa also signifies home. (252) As we shall see, there is a definite irony in the use of Casa for the firm.

Amado amo with prior novels are counter-balanced by the author's continuing desire for change and evolution, resulting in a novel that, like prior novels, is at once familiar and different.

The structure of the novel is an example of this. As mentioned, the novel is divided into chapters. These chapters are ordered in a carefully planned alternation; a structure that as we have seen is common to Montero's narrative. In Amado amo however, instead of alternating chapters centered around characters as in previous novels, the alternation revolves around chapters centered on the protagonist's changes of local. This structural change though is not one of pure form but rather a change that functions to interweave more tightly the form and the content of the novel.

On an immediately recognizable level, by organizing the novel around the protagonist's movements the author very clearly emphasizes that it is César who is the focus of the novel. The major components of César's life are also delimited by these changes of local. Although there are a total of nine chapters, there are only five different locals in the novel: César's office, his home, the home of a colleague, a church, and a doctor's office. Of these locals, only two serve more than once as a backdrop for a chapter, his office and his home which are both used three times. Structurally this reinforces the idea suggested by the

narration itself, that these locals are the two centers around which César's life revolves.

The organization of the alternation also very subtly reinforces this idea as well. The novel opens with César's arrival at the office, the next chapter takes place at his home, beginning with his waking up, the third occurs at his principal rival's home, the fourth returns to the office, the fifth occurs at his home again but this time beginning with the night, the following in the church, then the doctor's office, with another nocturnal return to César's home in the eighth chapter, and terminating the novel -as well as symbolically César's life- in the office at the end of the work day.

As easily seen, the structure of the novel is very clearly not haphazard but carefully planned to support the governing ideas of the narrative. The novel begins and ends in the office, making this the main support of the structural framework. This local is always alternated with César's home, thus highlighting the importance of the latter, but more importantly setting up a dichotomy between the two areas as well as indicating through placement that César's home takes a secondary position with regard to importance. These two primary locals are separated by the other changes of local which function to set-off the importance of work and home in César's life as well as to build a pattern of alternation that functions as a thematic organizer; as César changes local in

each chapter the thematic focus of the chapter, which is tied closely to the local, also changes. For example chapter four, which takes place in the office, reveals certain aspects of the internal functioning of the Casa, while nocturnal chapter five in César's home centers on César's love life.

Although it might appear from these examples that the thematic transition from chapter to chapter is abrupt, as had occurred in earlier novels, in this novel there is an artful yet subtle weaving of connections between chapters. Evidently by maintaining a single narrator, César, and constructing each chapter around this character there is already a great deal of coherence built into the narrative. Montero however furthers this by forging connections between chapters that at first glance are not immediately apparent. Sometimes these connections are based on a key phrase placed strategically at the end of a chapter, as occurs between chapters one and two. At the end of chapter one, which is a presentation of César by means of a comparison with a colleague, César comments with regard to this same colleague, "por lo menos debo evitar convertirme en un ser tan patético" (17). In the chapter that follows however, the author shows César to already be quite pathetic, thus although the link between the two chapters is not immediately apparent, the phrase at the end of the first chapter functions as a lead-in to the following chapter.

Another technique employed to build chapter connections is the continuance of a specific idea or action from one

chapter to another. An excellent example of this occurs between chapters three and four. At the end of chapter three which centers on César's relationship with his business colleague Nacho, one-time friend and now chief rival, the idea of the look takes on primary importance. César, at first the observer, becomes upset because Nacho and Paula, whom César considers to be his girlfriend, are intimately looking at each in front of everyone during the party. His irritation, which springs less from jealousy for Paula than from the fact that it is Nacho at whom she is gazing, causes him to kick Nacho's dog which has been amorously pursuing him all evening. This action attracts the attention of everyone, most importantly his superiors, turning César into the mortified object of the look. Montero reinforces the idea of the look by the constant use of the verb mirar in these paragraphs as seen in the following excerpt:

En medio de toda la gente se miraban [Paula and Nacho]. César pegó una patada al teckel, lo lanzó volando por los aires a más de un metro de distancia. Smith miró, Quesada miró, la señora Smith miró, Pittbourg miró, Miguel miró, Morton miró, incluso Matías miró.... (69)

At the beginning of chapter four however, César's anguish at being the object of the look at the end of the previous chapter is immediately transformed into torment over the lack of the look from his boss, "Lo peor era la manera en que le

había mirado. O mejor dicho: el que no le hubiera mirado en absoluto" (71). By repeating the verb mirar in the first two phrases of the chapter Montero skillfully links the two thematically different chapters. In addition, in this particular instance the link is further developed by a repeated reference in chapter four to the dog incident from the preceding chapter ("Menudo la armaste con el perro" [72, 75, 77, 78, 98]), reference which functions as a spring-board for the principal theme of the chapter, the hierarchy and functioning of power in the Casa.

Another structural element that tightens the coherence of the novel and mirrors the content is the chronological structure of the novel. Time, which is a key element of the content, also has an interesting role in the structure. As already signaled, the novel begins with César's arrival at the office. This idea of commencement is reinforced by chapter two which begins with César's waking-up. The intermediary chapters alternate between evening and day (3-evening, 4-day, 5-evening, 6-day, 7-day) producing a sensation of passage of time. The final two chapters (chapter eight begins just past midnight and chapter nine takes place at the end of the business day), by occurring at the end of the day, finish the cycle by creating a sense of chronological closure. This carefully planned chronological closure is illustrated clearly by the almost literal repetition of the opening paragraph of chapter two, which as just mentioned describes César's waking

up, in the final paragraph of chapter eight where César is finally going to sleep after a night of insomnia:

(Chapter 2) Al abrir los ojos observó que la luz se agolpaba al otro lado de las persianas bajadas, empujándolas, se diría hinchándolas, casi reventándolas con ese sol que se filtraba a presión por las rendijas. (19)

(Chapter 8) Llego la hora de dormirse...se despertaría como siempre demasiado tarde. Tan tarde que la luz se agolparía al otro lado de las persianas bajadas, empujándolas, se diría que hinchándolas, casi reventándolas con ese sol que se filtraría a presión por las rendijas.... (186)

This circular chronological structure is in effect a mirror image of the content which by this point has also come full circle, thus reinforcing once again the thoughtfully conceived mutual dependence of the structure and content of Amado amo.

Another technique the author employs to further narrative coherence is the repetition of the novel's circular structure in the construction of the individual chapters. On this level though the foundation of the circular structure is not based on time but rather the repetition of key phrases and/or ideas. This structure can be observed in the majority of the chapters, a clear example being seen in chapter six. The opening phrases of this chapter begin with a reference to the

fact that César had witnessed the tears of one of his superiors, Quesada:

En realidad Quesada, Miguel y los demás no eran tan malos. ¡Pero si César incluso los había visto llorar como personas! Lágrimas reales, lagrimones de agua. Quesada lloró el día que murió el señor Zarraluque, el anterior propietario de *Rumbo*, su primer jefe, su mentor. (123)

The remembrance of this instance serves as a lead-in for the thematic core of the chapter which springs from the commonplace planted in the above passage, that the ability to cry, to demonstrate feelings, is proof of the existence of redeeming personal qualities.

César initially bases his thoughts on this commonplace, then proceeds to recall events that reveal the personal side of several of his colleagues in their rise to power in the firm. His hope is to convince himself that these colleagues "no eran tan malos," a phrase repeated at key points in the chapter, as he believed them to be, and to absolve them, and ultimately himself, of guilt in the suicide of fellow colleague Matías. The repetition of this key phrase and of the idea of his colleague's tears are the axes around which the chapter is built, every few pages the narration returns, literally or in spirit, to one or the other as the springboard for a new remembrance. The ending of the chapter seals the

circularity of its structure by returning to the opening subject of the chapter:

Y en ese instante comprendió que, cuando vio años atrás a su subdirector bañado en lágrimas, Quesada no estaba llorando el fallecimiento del señor Zarraluque, sino la muerte ya remota de su propia inocencia. (152)

Clearly though, Quesada's tears are no longer considered in the same light as they were at the beginning of the chapter. César, through a mental process that on the surface appears to digress constantly but in reality as we have seen circles obsessively around key ideas, reaches a new understanding of the/se idea/s. In this manner the circular structure of the chapters contributes to the examination and subsequent redefinition of the key themes of the novel, once again reinforcing the connection between structure and content.

The link that most importantly forges this connection however is that of narrative point of view. Although the novel is narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator, the narrative point of view throughout the text is that of César's. This is achieved in part grammatically by the absence of quotation marks. In this manner the narrative voice, César's voice and thoughts, and the reported speech of others which are undifferentiated grammatically create the effect that the text flows from César's consciousness. This is reinforced by the fact that the narrator's commentaries,

which often serve to establish the independence of its particular point of view, in this novel reflect instead the protagonist's state of mind at the moment.

This technique is employed early in the text as seen in the following sentence from the second paragraph of the novel, "Y el hombrecillo del mono se encogió de hombros, despectivo" (11). The narrator is describing the parking attendant's reaction to Matías's evident anger and bewilderment over the fact that his permanent parking space in the firm's garage has been unbeknownst to him taken away. Although the adjective despectivo would traditionally indicate exactly this, that it is the attendant's attitude, the sentence follows a passage that insinuates what César thinks of Matías:

Porque César callaba que su caso era distinto, que en realidad a él nadie le había quitado la maldita plaza. César no tenía horario fijo, era una de las estrellas de la Casa, poseía una situación privilegiada. (11)

That César does consider Matías disparagingly is confirmed two paragraphs later, "Pobre infeliz, se dijo César. En cierto modo se merecía la derrota" (13). Thus the narrator's commentary matches César's thoughts. This situation is repeated consistently throughout the novel, transforming what could be a coincidence in one case into a deliberate narrative strategy. That it is a strategy is reinforced by the fact that the events narrated are limited to those actually

experienced by the protagonist himself. This also holds true with regard to characterization; what is known about other characters is limited to what César knows about them. By associating the narrator's point of view with the protagonist's point of view Montero establishes César once again as the structural as well as thematic center of the novel.

In addition, with this strategy the author is also able to establish a middle ground of intimacy with the reader. Unlike the very intimate first-person narrator of Función and the following distance-inducing third-person narrator of Te trataré, in Amado amo the author combines the advantages that the other two stances offer. The author utilizes the inherent distance and flexibility of a third-person narrator to initially insinuate objectivity while at the same time mitigating this objectivity and establishing a subjective intimacy with the symbiosis of the third-person narrator and the protagonist's points of view. This narrative play between objectivity and subjectivity is one of the keys to the novel because it reflects perfectly the protagonist's actuation, César's obsessive reviewing of comments and events alternately from what he himself considers to be objective and subjective stances. It is the definitive example of the author's carefully planned strategy to unify the structure and the content of the novel.

The centrality of the protagonist to the novel, without a doubt confirmed by the structure, is reiterated with regard to characterization. Although Montero does include numerous other characters in the novel, their importance lies not in being individualized, well-rounded creations, but rather in their functionality to the protagonist and to the central themes of the narration. This is evidenced by their development which is non-existent; the secondary characters of the novel are static characters. As such Montero fittingly employs a modified version of her practiced snapshot technique for their characterization which, as discussed in chapter one, creates an immediate impression of the character that is filled out accordingly as the narration progresses.

The first secondary character introduced, Matías, is a good example of the general structure of the novel's characterization with regard to these characters. Presented in the first paragraph of chapter one, which reminiscent of Crónica also presents all the major players of the novel, Matías's initial description functions as an outline of what he will be to the novel. As seen with structure, the characterization of Amado amo is also carefully orchestrated, every detail is significant to the narration and nothing is superfluous. This is evidenced in the first mention of Matías which is a physical description, "una coronilla rala, unas mejillas blandas y enrojecidas, unos ojos hinchados" (9). This suggestive description is expanded as the chapter

progresses with several more relevant phrases pertaining to his appearance as well as his physical condition:

...las venillas moradas de su nariz parecían el mapa de una cuenca hidrográfica... (10)

De un manotazo peinó hacia atrás sus grasientos y escasos cabellos. (11)

...Matías resoplaba y jadeaba quizá por el esfuerzo de las escaleras; se llevó una mano al pecho, como si le doliese. (13)

As expected from Montero's snapshot technique, these short phrases create an immediate vivid image of the character, as well as insinuate details that will be revealed later, such as in the case of Matías his alcoholism. However, unlike in previous novels, the physical description of the characters in Amado amo plays an additional role; Montero employs this element of description as a stepping stone to thematic issues. All the primary secondary characters of the novel are described physically, and this physical description is used as a means to compare characters with each other, and specifically with César. The intention of this comparison is not to hierarchically rank the characters aesthetically nor to characterize them in terms of physical well-being for health's sake, but rather to illustrate the relationship between one's -physical appearance and performance as judged by contemporary society.

This topic, much discussed in recent years with regard to women, here focuses almost exclusively on men. Montero subtly depicts in the principal male characters the influence one's physical presence has on interpersonal relations and one's career. Two such examples are Matías and Nacho. The first, as we have seen, is not by society's standards a physically attractive man; he is aging, balding, overweight, and out of shape. Nacho on the other hand is the ideal physical specimen; young, attractive, intelligent, and full of energy.

The reactions that these two physical types inspire are seen quite fittingly through the protagonist who, although at times fights against it, is thoroughly embedded with society's precepts. When César interacts with Matías in the first chapter, one immediately notes that the latter's figure does not command respect but rather incites pity, and to a certain extent, disdain. Cesar's relations with Nacho however are governed by completely different emotions, he is at once jealous and awed. Although these reactions in both cases are clearly not exclusively attributable to the physical presence of the characters, the author puts much emphasis on linking the physical with the reactions of others. This is done so as to illustrate the existentialist undercurrent of the novel, that one is judged by, in this case specifically, one's presence and not one's essence. The author intends that both characters physically represent what they are considered

professionally - Matías the executive in decadence and Nacho the ambitious rising star.

Montero repeats this technique with another aspect of characterization, the introduction of details related to the character's family life and background. These details, which present an insight into the personality and intimate side of the particular character, are utilized primarily however as a means of comparison and as a representation of the character's capacity to succeed professionally. An example of this can be seen in the case of Matías and his daughter. In the first chapter the reader learns that Matías has a mentally retarded daughter who, when the firm changes buildings, he brings to show the new facilities. The apparent reason for including this segment in the first chapter is to show that César's colleagues are capable of being nice to Matías even though he is already on the professional decline at the time of the incident. However, the inclusion of this incident in the first chapter, which as we have seen is an introduction to the character Matías, suggests that it is also intended to characterize the latter. Along these lines we see that Matías' attentiveness and consideration with his daughter reveal that as a family man he is caring and nurturing, a successful parent. However, when his family life is compared with that of his colleagues' the mere existence of this "imperfect" child suggests something quite different with regard to Matías's "inherent" ability to succeed.

This inherent, or more correctly inherited, propensity toward success is demonstrated with Nacho who, as César points out, comes from a long line of wealthy, successful industrialists. Nacho's characterization by means of the description of his golden, privileged youth, his studies and travels, and even the composition of his family serves to highlight César's idea that the rich have an enormous advantage over the poor with regard to professional success because since birth they are conscientiously exposed to the elements that promote success.

Another important characterization technique is the situation in which the character is initially presented. Though all of the characters are telling presented in the work environment, the particular nature of the situation, positive or negative, will symbolize once again the success quotient of the character. As for Matías, the reader meets him as he enters the firm's parking garage only to find someone parked in his space. As a result he must back his car out and doing so scrapes the side of it. The unannounced loss of his assigned parking space in a garage that is filled to capacity comes to represent Matías's loss of footing on a professional level. In addition, the destruction of his car, triggered by events in his professional life, preludes his final self-destruction which is in great part due to his loss of professional status.

The aforementioned elements of characterization are present in the remaining characters of the novel as well. By employing these particular elements, which are intentionally a reflection of those that society in general uses to judge individuals, Montero handily disposes the characters to a division between those who are winners, established or potential stars of the business world such as Nacho, and those who are losers, declining or finished players like Matías. In addition, this particular characterization structure brings up the question of the fairness of this division, a thematic issue.

From these examples it is evident that Montero's techniques for the characterization of secondary characters in Amado amo function not only to build an image of each individual character, but also to provide a springboard for thematic issues. This conscious effort on the part of the author to closely link the major elements of the novel is also evident in the characterization of the protagonist. In this case however, theme as well as structure are united.

To do this Montero employs many of the same techniques utilized in the creation of the secondary characters. Fundamental to César's characterization are details regarding his physical appearance, his family background, his home life, and the nature of the situation in which his initial presentation occurs. However, these elements do not function for the characterization of the protagonist in exactly the

same manner as they do for the secondary characters. As one examines them, it is evident that they do create an image of the character and they are lead-ins for thematic issues, but they do not easily lend themselves to the classification of the character as a winner or a loser as in the case of the secondary characters.

The reason for this is due to the fact that the author purposely presents the secondary characters from César's point of view, a point of view that one, as mentioned, is heavily influenced by society's precepts, and two is distanced from the object (person) being judged. Thus César's division of the characters into winners and losers is a reflection of his society's own classification of them and as such and is considered objective. However, when the point of view moves from this "objective" stance to one that is subjective, César applying these same standards to himself, the process changes. It is at this point that the characterization process for the secondary characters and the protagonist diverge. Whereas in the case of the former the techniques, in conjunction with the point of view, lead to static characters that could be divided according to their success quotient, in the case of the protagonist this same combination creates a character in flux.

This is due to the fact that the techniques filtered through the first person point of view create a dilemma for the protagonist. This dilemma, which is used to build the characterization of the protagonist and allows him to develop,

stems from César's application of society's standards to himself. When the protagonist considers himself against the same standards he employs to judge others he discovers, or more accurately as we shall see refuses to discover, that he has more in common with those deemed losers than with those typically considered winners. His dilemma then encompasses questions such as: Are the results the truth? Are his characteristics really similar to those deemed losers? Or are the standards themselves at fault, and if so can they be changed?

The process employed to illustrate this dilemma begins early in the novel and follows a discernable pattern that is repeated throughout the text, with each incident revealing a new level of the protagonist's character. An examination of chapter one reveals much about the process because it is through the presentation of Matías that the general pattern is established and the early stages of the process are illustrated. The process itself is anchored in a constant alternation between the narration of events and the thoughts of the protagonist. This alternation, which more accurately could be described as a series of interruptions, is important to highlight because due to it events or trains of thought are not presented in their logical entirety, but rather left constantly unfinished, open-ended. As such, these events and thoughts that ultimately function to characterize the protagonist are subject to be taken up again and reexamined,

thus leading to a characterization that is based on circularity and that reflects the very structure of the text.

As signaled, this entire process of characterization develops along a repeating general pattern that begins with a casual comment, sometimes critical other times not, made by the protagonist. This comment reveals the protagonist's initial, unreflected-upon reaction and/or judgement of a situation or a personality trait of another character.³⁷ In chapter one this is seen in the comment, "Está acabado" (10), César's gut reaction to the news that management had eliminated Matías' parking space. After uttering the comment the protagonist next generally associates the situation or trait in question with one of his own. In the first chapter this occurs immediately following the protagonist's initial judgement of Matías. César tries to console his colleague and convince him that the incident is not that significant by telling him that the same thing had happened to him, and that he in fact found it to be more convenient.

Always linked however with this association is an immediate disavowal of the similarity to the protagonist's own situation. Significantly though, this disavowal is not verbalized but rather internalized by the protagonist, the reason for which will become quickly apparent. In the case in question, César believes that he is magnanimously keeping

³⁷As the process becomes more complicated this initial comment may deal with a situation or personality trait of the character himself.

quiet the fact that "su caso era distinto, que en realidad a él nadie le había quitado la maldita plaza" (11). To reinforce both his initial comment ("Está acabado") and the dissimilarity between his and the other's situation, the protagonist then proceeds to display evidence that supports both. This evidence generally takes the form of César's own comments and, as if he felt these were not sufficient, those of others. In this particular case, César first mentally points out that it was because of his privileged position in the firm ["era una de las estrellas de la casa" (11)] that the director suggests he give up his space. He then includes comments of other colleagues, significantly those that have important positions in the firms such as Miguel, Quesada, Nacho, and in a telling order of ascending importance, that signal the decline of Matías.

At this point in the process it appears that the protagonist has firmly established the validity of his initial comment/opinion. However, the open-endedness of the alternation pointed out previously now comes into play. In the bulk of the supportive evidence included to justify the protagonist's position one notices words and phrases that insinuate more than what the protagonist reveals at the moment. In this case for example the inclusion of the word "maldita" in César's affirmation of difference, or the particular phrasing of the director's suggestion to César to give up his space, "¿No te importa que otra persona ocupe tu

sitio en el garaje? Como tú vienes tan poco por aquí es una pena desperdiciar así el espacio..." (11). The protagonist also has noticed this because just as he appears to have passed final judgement on the situation -"En fin, concluyó despiadadamente César, viéndole [Matías] alejarse pasillo adelante, hundido y cabizbajo: En fin, que se fastidie" (14)- he returns to the association of the situation with his own.

Next, despite all the evidence previously exposed, César begins to reexamine his situation, or trait, and consider the evidence as supporting quite the opposite, as underlining the similarities. To do so he brings up the key words or phrases used to affirm distinction now to confirm affinity. In the incident in question for example, Morton's comment about him coming so infrequently to the office ceases to support the idea of his privileged situation and instead becomes an accusation of unproductiveness. To this César adds additional condemning evidence which at times is supplied by the comments of others and at others is simply amplified by his own fears and suspicions. Once having pushed the evidence in this direction however, the protagonist, as expected, becomes very uncomfortable with the idea of affinity and once again reverts to denial.

This vacillation between one position or the other never comes to a definitive conclusion in the eyes of the protagonist but rather remains an open-ended process that he re-works obsessively. However, it is clear that César

continually fights against categorizing himself with those that society would lump him, the losers. The degree to which the protagonist's situation or trait appears to reflect those of that group depends on the stage of self-discovery in which he finds himself, because, as the reader soon realizes, César's examination of situations and traits of others is in reality a self-examination.

At the beginning of the novel César denies that society's standards, when applied to him, place him on the losing side. His statement at the end of the first chapter makes it very clear that he does not consider himself in the same category as Matías, "por lo menos debo evitar convertirme en un ser tan patético" (17). However, as the novel progresses and this process is repeated again and again, the character's vision of others and himself slowly and agonizingly undergoes a change. The more César compares and analyzes his situation, the more convinced he becomes that these standards point to his inherent deficiencies. This results in the amplification of a personal crisis that has already been initiated by lack of recent professional success. This crisis, which is enormously detrimental to his personal as well as professional life, does however result in moments of clarity during which César is able to see that he has been programmed to think a specific way by a system of values that are not a reflection of THE JUST or THE GOOD, but rather his society's economic structure.

César even comes to question this system's power over the circumstances of himself as well as others.

These moments of emotional maturity and independent thought however are fleeting. The underlying structure of the characterization process symbolizes the fully developed character, César is a product of, and will ultimately uphold, the standards of his society. As such, and having been classified for some time as a winner within these parameters, when the protagonist is presented with an opportunity to maintain his threaten position, although the method is just as morally reproachable as the situations and actions he has been denouncing, with little vacillation he seizes the opportunity and even attempts to justify it. As a result, he will remain technically classified among the winners as evidenced by the awarding to him of the coveted invitation to the company's annual meeting.

Before proceeding with the thematic issues that in their majority are tied to the characterization of the novel, it is important to examine another issue that is linked very closely to the structure of the characterization just discussed. Amado amo is composed almost in its entirety of male characters. The reasons for this on one level are evidently in part due to the author's already discussed desire to distance herself from the characters, to reach a more objective stance that results in more profound characterization. In this particular novel however the fact

that the majority are male is also strongly linked to the dichotomy of the characterization. As we have seen this dichotomy is based on the success or failure of the character primarily in the business arena. Because men have traditionally based their self-esteem to such an extent on their professional success, using a man and not a woman to depict the results of professional failure enables the author to underscore the full tragedy of this posture. As Montero herself states:

I purposely chose a male protagonist who fails in his profession as well as in his personal life. Had I chosen a woman, it would have been less tragic and pathetic. We [women] have been trained to accept defeat since the beginning of time.
(Gazarian Gautier 213)

As noted, the primary themes of the novel revolve around the axes of success, failure, and power in the corporate world. These particular issues are not new to Montero's narrative, they have been present in one form or another from Crónica onward. However, in Amado amo it is their centering in the business world and from a male perspective that makes their treatment different. This, as has been underlined since chapter one, is typical of Montero's narrative; on the thematic level the author works from a group of issues that reappear constantly in her work but that take a modified form in each novel.

This can be easily observed in some of the issues that, although crucial to the interpretation of the protagonist, run somewhat tangential to the main narrative line: death, the role of women in the corporate world, and male-female relations. The issue of death in Amado amo incorporates three of the basic forms observed in previous novels: accidental deaths, suicide, and terminal illness. As first observed in Crónica, Montero likes to incorporate notices of deaths that are external to the narrative line itself. In this case it is the unexpected deaths of a worker in the neighboring apartment and an old friend of César who is mentioned only for this moment. The primary function of both of these deaths is the same as in previous novels, a shock, generally graphic, introduction of death into the daily, mundane life of the character that makes he or she step out of the routine and confront for a moment the basic issue of existence.

In the case of the worker's death, César morbidly speculates that it could have occurred at the same time that he and Clara were making love. This sets the stage for a possible tragic irony -the extinction of one life at the moment of the conception of another. A different direction however is chosen, one that better illustrates the final attitude toward death, the reduction of the tragic to the level of the mundanely ironical, as seen in César's thoughts on the moment:

Había sido ahí, pared con pared; quizá sucedió mientras Clara y él hacían el amor; quizás escucharon su último estertor y lo confundieron con un estornudo. (174)

This attitude is reiterated with the death of César's old friend who, as he notes, was a "hombre obsesionada por la salud que había muerto atropellado por un borracho" (200). The attitude resulting from these confrontations with death remains consistent throughout the novels, and in this particular novel is voiced by the protagonist himself, "Era el horror que escondía en las horas vulgares" (175).

The second form of death included in Amado amo is that of suicide. In this particular case, the suicide of Matías, not only is the basic theme repeated from previous novels but also several aspects of the theme. One of these is the description of the act. As in previous novels, the manner in which Matías commits suicide, by drinking a bottle of bleach, is recounted in graphic detail:

Previamente había que hacer unas gárgaras de aceite para que el líquido cáustico no achicharrara la boca y la garganta, porque la quemazón impediría tragar una cantidad suficiente y uno correría el riesgo de no matarse del todo. Con el sencillo y útil truco del aceite, en cambio, la solución corrosiva resbalaba fácilmente por el gárgate abajo y, si uno bebía muy deprisa, se podía trasegar casi

un litro de lejía antes de que se encendiera el infierno en las entrañas, antes de que las vísceras se quemaran, se pegaran, se fundieran, se perforaran y desaparecieran al fin, disueltas en el fuego químico del líquido. Eso fue exactamente lo que Matías hizo. (138)

This description serves to not only communicate how the act is carried out but, as in the case of the "Gobernador" in Crónica, to underline the full determination and premeditation of the person doing it. Matías' suicide is no accident as many in the firm, including César, would liked to have believed.

The preceding is important to note because due to the particular structure of the novel, the fact that the protagonist relates all incidents narrated to his own situation, the theme of suicide in Amado amo takes on a dimension touched upon only lightly in prior novels, that of the reaction of others in relation to the act. César relates the emotional process that he and others in the firm go through upon learning of Matías's suicide, their initial incredulity and sense of horror, later their irritation, and finally their defensiveness that takes the form of macabre jokes about his suicide, "Que cuando bebía la lejía estaba como una cuba y seguro que se creyó que era un vaso de ginebra" (130).

Montero uses each of these emotional steps to illustrate the degree to which César and his colleagues are programmed by society to respond. Through César's recounting of the ordeal during the funeral it becomes apparent that none of them experiences Matías's death as a true loss, they simply assume the mask that society, and especially the firm, demands of them. Yet one emotion is sincere enough to penetrate the mask, that of anger. This anger is founded upon the fact that, as César states bluntly, "Las gentes decentes no se mataban. Los compañeros de oficina no se suicidaban" (131). Especially the latter, because when they do the finger of guilt is often pointed toward the other colleagues.

By the sixth chapter in which Matías's suicide occurs, enough details of his professional degradation have been related to logically assume that it played an important role in his decision to take his life. Nonetheless, César as well as his colleagues find it more convenient to attribute the motivation for his suicide to his wife, from whom he had recently separated. Despite the fact that César believes that the roots of the separation possibly stem from his professional failure, the wife remains the figure upon which the guilt is placed. Evidently though, this tactic does not suffice to ally César's own guilt because he subsequently engages in a type of defensive behavior similar to that of his colleagues' derisive jokes. César finishes his thoughts on the subject by insulting Matías, saying that suicide is too

ridiculous an act for one so common, and that surely it was in the end the accident of a drunk as they claimed.

Thus Matías's suicide on one level functions to illustrate the defensive mechanisms implemented by society to absolve itself of any guilt in the suicides of members who fail to thrive within the system. The very insignificance of Matías's final act to those in the system is mirrored in the structure of the chapter itself. Once the ultimate responsibility has been attributed to the victim himself ["a fin de cuentas se mató bebiendo" (139)], the event is not mentioned further in the rest of the chapter which at this point is only a little more than half finished. Thus the chapter centers not on the suicide of Matías, but rather uses it structurally as a spring board for other themes.

One last aspect of the theme of suicide found in previous novels is that of the pairing of the person who will commit the act with another character upon which the act will have significant consequences. In Crónica we saw this pairing with Candela and her husband, in Función the unsuccessfully suicidal Doña Maruja and Lucía, in Te trataré the pairing is dual, the persons most affected by Poco's suicide are Bella and Menéndez, and in this novel it is evidently Matías and César. Logically, although the particulars of each of these relationships are distinct, the primary thematic function of each pairing is closely tied to the gender of the participants. In Crónica and Te trataré's Bella and Poco

where the pairing is of opposite sexes the primary theme deals with affective relations, but in the same sex pairings the tie is like that of a mirror effect, the suicidal person represents a possible future of the other.

In Función we saw that this possible future was based upon aging, one of the primary themes of the novel, here it is also tied to a primary theme, professional success. Matías serves as a warning to César of the possible result of professional failure. César recognizes Matías as such because, as much as he would like to deny it, both have experienced some of the same humiliations in their professional lives, such as the relegation to a less important position in the firm, as well as in their personal lives, both are quite alone. César even verbalizes this recognition with the words, "debo evitar convertirme en us ser tan patético" (17), that refer directly to Matías. For César, Matías embodies professional failure.

Matías's humiliating descent into professional scorn, of which César had been an intimate witness, and Matías's reaction to it stand as a red flag to César of the dangers of failure. The latter, who sees himself on the brink of having his failure sealed as well, decides that at all costs he must avoid it. Ironically though, the ending of the novel insinuates that César's desperate attempt to avoid failure is in reality a confirmation of it. In the end, his treacherous act makes him more of a failure than Matías.

The last form of death incorporated into Amado amo is that of terminal illness, observed in César's mother. The description of her illness, although limited to only a few pages, recalls several of the aspects employed in Función. Although the terminal illness of César's mother is never specified, it appears to be cancer as was that of Lucía. Similar also is the description of the physical suffering of the person, the slow and inevitable physical decline and the increasingly insufferable pain. All of this is witnessed by the individual closest to the person dying, although César unlike Ricardo is a reluctant companion.

Two additional aspects that echo those of Función are in Amado amo reversed. The first is the issue of the acceptance of death. Unlike the situation of Lucía and Ricardo, César's mother calmly accepts the reality of her death and it is César who is unable to confront it. Like Lucía, César at first simply tries to avoid the issue by not going to visit his mother and hiring a nurse to accompany her. But even the occasional visit unnerves César to such a point that during one of these visits toward the end of her illness, it is his dying mother who must comfort him. As seen in the following passage, this scene reveals much about César's relationship with his mother. It occurs during one of his occasional visits during which César becomes increasingly panicked over the prospect of his mother's death. As he uncontrollably and senselessly babbles on about things they will do in the

future, his mother reaches out and comforts him on a level as she had not been able to do for years:

Tranquilízate, hijo, decía la madre mientras le acariciaba blandamente. Tranquilízate, hijo, no es tan terrible, no debes tener miedo. Y así, cobijado en el sólido hueco de las manos maternas, mientras el lobo perseguía a los cerditos en el televisor y la tarde moría en la ventana, César sintió que traspasaba una puerta, que penetraba en un espacio interior en donde, rescatada a través de la distancia, resplandecía intacta la magia poderosa de su madre. Y, lo mismo que cuando era un niño chico, César se dejó apaciguar por su sabiduría y se supo a salvo de lo desconocido y del misterio. (185)

From this passage it is clear that the man who summed-up his mother's existence as being as wasteful, and unconscious, as that of an "animalito" (178), at one time believed her to be a powerful and knowledgeable figure, "un personaje formidable" (179) as he puts it. How then did the all-powerful, all-knowing Mother of early childhood become the useless and scorned Mother of later years? The disturbing answer is a result of César's passage from a matriarchally centered world to a patriarchally centered one. As César grew into adolescence he left behind the world created by his mother, a world that could transform squalid misery into magic

kingdoms and in which he could do or become anything his heart desired, and entered the world that society called real. It is from contact with this world, with its totally different system of values, that César gradually came to believe that not only had his mother lied, but that moreover she was impotent against the true reality of life, as evidenced by the unjust and degraded life that she led.

As César himself admits, by age fourteen this realization leads him to devalue his mother and to treat her humiliatingly, a lesson learned at his father's knee, "César empezó a tratarla del modo dictatorial que la trataba el padre" (180). César's concept of his mother does not improve over the years, if anything it becomes worse due to his assimilation of the values of the patriarchal society. This is evidenced by César's final reflections upon his mother's life. Unlike in prior novels where this is done by the person dying, here it is the witness who comments on the other's life, a perspective that intentionally reveals more about the speaker than the person dying. From the manner in which César describes his mother's life, the reader realizes that César has fully assimilated the lessons of the group in power:

...lo que en verdad llenaba a César de zozobra era la absoluta inutilidad de la vida de su madre, su existencia gris y sin sentido, ya sin redención posible frente al cercano fin. (178)

Because her life did not conform to inculcated patriarchal patterns of success, César finds nothing redeeming in it. Even her attitude toward death confounds him because the qualities that his mother demonstrates in her final hours, tranquility, acceptance, and stoicism, are not those lauded by a competitive society. What does shine through though is César's complete lack of understanding of his mother's existence and his total disinterest in trying remedy this.

The ideas that César adopts during his formative years with regard to the judgement of his mother carry over into his later relations with other women. This is evidenced in his relationships with Clara and Paula whose influence upon, and importance to, César is governed in great part by the sphere in which the relationship is primarily based, either private or public. In the case of Clara the relationship is clearly directed toward the private sector, so much so that the reader does not learn that Clara is a brilliant economist until César mentions it in passing toward the end of the novel. From the description of the relationship it is clear that César considers Clara to have wielded enormous power over many crucial personal aspects of his life such as self-esteem, happiness, love, sexuality, and reproduction. In César's eyes, Clara's behavior determined the success or failure of each of these aspects. Her pensive look could build or crush his self-esteem, her sexual rejection could devastate his sense of manhood, her presence brought him happiness, her

decision to leave destroyed him, and through her unconsulted abortion she controlled whether he would have offspring or not.

In the description of all of these aspects the language that César employs reveals an evident resentment of this power. For example when César describes the way Clara observed him he likens her glance to that of the entomologist examining an insect, "sopesaba, calibraba, escudriñaba, analizaba, descuartizaba" (105). When he speaks of her anger he describes her as "un dragón colérico" (105). But nowhere is this resentment of female power more evident than with regard to the capacity for gestation that César labels, "la dictadura femenina de lo maternal" (23), and that is described in the following manner:

...qué poder tan abusivo y repugnante. Ahí estaban ellas, decidiendo tiránicamente 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. (23)

This resentment on one hand stems from César's own fear of inadequacy with regard to the exigencies of female power. This is evident in the passage about Clara's entomologist-like look, which ends by César imagining Clara discovering that he was not a butterfly but rather "una simple polilla algo panzona" (105). On the other hand though, it is apparent that resentment is generated simply by the fact of women possessing

power, be it as limited as that that César concedes. Moreover, it is particularly ironic that César chooses to emphasize the issue of female reproduction which for centuries has not been an issue of female power but rather of subjugation. César's final reaction to this issue underscores his general attitude toward female power, "Nunca podría perdonar a las mujeres su prepotencia de ser madres" (23).

Although clearly Montero does not intend César's ideas to be representative of all men, just as in other novels female characters do not represent THE ideas of women, they do help explain César's, and quite possibly the other men's, behavior in the novel toward the few female characters. The resentment and fear expressed by César toward female power in the private arena would make more logical the treatment of women who enter the public sphere, i.e. the world of business. The discrimination observed against these women, in this novel in the case of Paula, reflects a defensive posture on the part of the male colleagues to preserve their own power and to limit the acquisition of any new power by women.

In the business environment of Amado amo this is achieved by the belittling of female ambition and by negating the female capacity to perform to standard. This can be seen in the situation of the experienced secretary Conchita, whose professional trajectory is tied not to her own abilities but rather those of her boss, and in the situation of Paula. In the case of the latter, clearly both belittlement and negation

of capacity characterize her career trajectory as seen from the following passage:

...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. Quizá Paula tuviera razón, y además César se apresuraba a condeérsela para calmar sus ánimos; 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. Porque el que Paula no fuera ascendida a fin de cuentas no era una injusticia tan enorme. Las mujeres carecían de ambición. (67-68)

This lack of comprehension regarding women's professional desires is also evident in the managers of the firm who severely underestimate those of Paula. Although they have for years consistently passed her over for promotion, they are caught off-guard when word reaches them that Paula plans to expose their discriminatory policies. It is thanks only to the old-boy network that do learn of it, and their response illustrates the lengths to which they will go to defend their order as well as their determination to deny power to a woman colleague. Instead of examining their promotion policy and the possibility that Paula does deserve one, they immediately

decide to fire her. In addition, through coercion they assure that the firing will be final by having César sign a document stating that he will testify against her in court if necessary. Thus even when the assumptions about women's professional desires are proven incorrect, the result is not a questioning of the patriarchal power system but rather a retrenching of the order, after which punishment is meted out to those who dare to try and breach it. Clearly, although women's issues are not the principal focus of Amado amo, it is evident that Montero never entirely leaves them aside, even in this male-centered novel.

The fact that Amado amo is narrated from a male perspective creates new possibilities for a theme that is a constant in Montero's work, male-female relationships. These possibilities however are severely limited by César's general incomprehension of women. Thus this area of concern is primarily a repetition of aspects already elaborated in previous novels, but viewed in conjunction at times with the world of business. As with prior novels, at the base of male-female relationships is the belief of a basic incompatibility between the sexes as seen in the following passage:

...a veces César pensaba que hombres y mujeres pertenecían a especies animales diferentes. Por ejemplo, ¿qué futuro podía tener la relación sentimental entre un pulpo y una pájara? ¿O la loca pasión entre una ostra y un camello? (108)

This incompatibility shows itself in all aspects of the relationship, the reason for initiation, emotional closeness, sexual relations, professional desires, and daily coexistence. In all three of César's relationships that are discussed, the reasons behind their initiation foretell the outcome; he sleeps with the young journalism student out of boredom, fear of solitude and old age, and because of the admiring and envious glances of other men that boost his ego. The relationship with Paula is commenced because he is on the rebound from the loss of Clara. Even his relationship with the latter, the most serious of his life, is based on pure illusion:

César quería que Clara fuera una mujer a la medida de sus deseos, y Clara quería que César se comportara como el hombre de sus sueños. Aparte de esta ambición inane, poco más tenían en común.

(105)

With such unstable bases it is no surprise that coexistence, emotional bonding, and sexual compatibility are impossible. Examples of this are evidenced in all three of the relationships: the boredom César experiences from his sexual encounter with the journalism student drives him to drug her to sleep so that he does not have to deal with her, the lack of emotional closeness in his relationship with Paula is illustrated by the fact that after five years she has only conquered the right to keep a toothbrush at his apartment, his

difficult coexistence with Clara is symbolized by the sad fact that they only felt free to express their feelings when the other was asleep.

As Montero has shown before however, blatant incompatibility is not sufficient grounds to stop the relationship from continuing. This is because the basic need that underlies all of these relationships, the desperate desire to escape solitude, is so strong. It even overcomes, as repeated from previous novels, the convictions that solitude can be positive. César, once proud of his unattached status which he considered "un principio creativo y un producto de su voluntad y de su sentido ético" (120), now envies his colleagues who have formed families. His untimely desperation toward the idea of losing Paula stems simply and egotistically from his fear of ending up alone:

Si Paula le dejaba, no habría nadie en el mundo que se preocupara de verdad por él; nadie a quien volver de regreso de un viaje; nadie capaz de recordar la fecha de su cumpleaños. (121)

In Amado amo, as in previous novels, Montero's convictions with regard to the subject are clear; the fear is realized, and César does end up completely alone.

As signaled before examining the secondary issues of the novel, the core of the thematic centers on the issues of success, failure, and power in the corporate world. These issues, which are the very root of César's crisis, are tightly

intertwined in the novel, with each having a great influence over the other. Nonetheless, in order to systematically examine the main aspects of each it is necessary to temporarily separate them.

Although the novel opens and closes with the issue of failure, I would like to begin with the examination of success because failure is defined in opposition to it. The foundations for success, as viewed by César, are laid before an individual ever enters his profession.³⁸ As signaled in the characterization section, César considers that one's background plays a more significant role with regard to succeeding than one's self-determination. Thus the wealthy, who can cultivate a child's propensity toward success from birth, have an inbred advantage over those less economically privileged. From César's point of view this theory is proven correct by simply examining the backgrounds and the levels of success of those in the firm; those whom he considers to be truly successful, Nacho and Morton, are both products of privileged families. Quesada, Miguel, and himself on the other hand, although having attained a certain level of success, must pay a high price for that success, and will not achieve the highest level. César is convinced that this is because in their own minds they do not believe themselves truly worthy of it due to their inferior backgrounds.

³⁸All references in this section are masculine because the perspective is that of the protagonist, and he considers success, failure, and power as the domain of men.

Although in César's mouth these observations sound like excuses for not having attained the highest level of success, his basic premise, that the corporate playing field is not completely level, is correct. Montero has signaled this in previous novels, especially Crónica. New in Amado amo though are the references to the effects of the Civil War as one source of these inequalities. Although limited, they can be observed in César's description of the economic hardships he suffered as a youth. Because César's father was associated in some form (never directly specified) with the Republican cause, at the end of the war he suffered the consequences of being on the losing side. He was imprisoned until 1942 and never recuperated his health nor his former profession, manager of a newspaper, after the war. Due to his father's poor health and the low pay of his post-war job, shoe repairman, the family's economic situation was quite desperate.

When César's upbringing, which is clearly influenced by the effects of the war, is compared to the golden childhood of Nacho, the son of wealthy industrialists, it is evident that the amount of material difficulties that each must overcome in order to succeed is quite distinct. Moreover, the difficulties are further differentiated by the fact that the professional preparation of each was influenced by a difference of time periods and their corresponding political situations. As César points out, because his preparation

occurred during the post-war, when in Francoist Spain "no había nada" (67), he had difficulty just in obtaining works on contemporary art or design. Nacho's formation on the other hand evidences a later more liberal and affluent political moment, he speaks several languages and had the opportunity to live and work abroad.

Although it is clear that material-wise a person of Nacho's social and economic stature certainly has more advantages than one of César's, the final analysis of the issue depends ultimately on the frame of reference. If one considers success from the perspective of the conventions of competitive society then yes, Nacho, Morton, and their type do triumph. The author however is clearly not contemplating them from this perspective because the overall impression of the novel is that all of them, César and Matías as well as Nacho and Morton, are losers.

This is easily observed in the treatment that the material symbols of success receive and in the displacement of the human figures of success. With regard to the former, the novel abounds in examples of the corporate world's material symbols of success, ranging from parking and office space, to invitations to specific corporate functions, lunch companions, and wives. Instead of revering these symbols as does the corporate world, Montero pointedly highlights the ridiculousness of attaching great importance to them. The vehicle utilized for the task is none other than César, an

ideal choice because he has experienced first hand the loss of many of these symbols. Due to this, César is theoretically better able to distance himself from them in order to critique their artificial importance.

And so he does on numerous occasions, making sarcastic jabs at his colleagues' or even his own reactions to the loss of one or more of these symbols. An example of one of these can be seen in the following passage concerning Matías's reaction to losing his parking spot, "Además, no cabía la menor duda de que el asunto era ridículo. Tanta tragedia por una menudencia semejante, por unos metros cuadrados de garaje" (14). There is no doubt that César is indicating the absurdity of affixing importance to such a minor affair. The author's true critique of these symbols however resides in the revelation of just how deeply ingrained is the concept of their importance. Although César mouths criticism of the symbols, and during fleeting moments is able to see them for their true value, incentives to propagate the business status quo, inside he is tormented by their loss. This is seen in the way he consistently points out that his losses are different from those of others, that they were of his own choosing or that he sincerely did not mind them. Unfortunately his sensitivity to the comments of others, his physical discomfort upon discovering new losses, and his continual dwelling on the subject reveals the contrary.

The irreverent treatment of these institutionalized symbols reflects the novel's underlying attitude toward success, that it is provisional and subjective, "Porque a la postre todo se olvida. Incluso el éxito; o sobre todo el éxito" (28). There are several examples of this in the novel but one that clearly illustrates both aspects is the case of Constantine. A pioneer in the field of Spanish advertising, Constantine was highly regarded by his colleagues, César included, during the peak of his career. Nonetheless, years later when Constantine is fired by the firm even César corroborates the decision, "Claro, era ya bastante mayor; venía de Rumbo, y sin duda había perdido por completo la comba de los tiempos; hacía años que ya no servía para mucho" (125).

This provisionality is highlighted even further by a chance encounter between a young executive of the Golden Line and a now several-years retired Constantine. The latter, proudly speaking of his years of success in the firm, is not only not taken seriously but in addition is made fun of by the young executive who has never heard of him. Even the foundation of his success, his advertising knowledge, in later years has become so outdated that it appeared that he "no tenía ni idea de lo que era publicidad" (190), as the young executive depreciatively states.

Thus, due to the particular nature of success, building one's life around its attainment is a dangerous endeavor. Nowhere is this more clearly illustrated than in the dramatic

case of Matías. But not even going to those extremes, the consequences of the pursuit of success on one's mental and emotional well-being can be quite perilous as observed in the constant humiliations suffered by Quesada, the very high stress level that Miguel endures to perform the firm's dirty work, and César's loss of integrity due to his final treachery.

Although the consequences can be hazardous, worse still is failure if one does not manage to extricate oneself from competitive society's value system. There are numerous examples of failure in the novel, Matías, Constantine, Paula, Pepe, Conchita, and the protagonist himself. Although the case of each is distinct, a common thread that runs through all of them is the question of responsibility. What causes professional failure, the individual or the firm? The debate over this question manifests itself in the protagonist who vacillates between the two answers, at times supporting one then later changing his mind to support the other.

The primary reason for this vacillation is that César is not free to examine the issue in an unbiased manner, he is greatly influenced by the corporate world's stand. They quite logically attribute the failure of an employee to the employee him/herself, to weaknesses in his or her abilities, or inherent character flaws. This stand can be observed in all of the cases of failure previously mentioned. Although the firm never makes public the reasons for not advancing an

employee, not-so-casual comments made by management reveal the reasons; Matías failed because he was an alcoholic, Pepe and Paula because they simply were not bright enough, Conchita because of her disloyal aggressiveness with regard to Matías's demotion, etc.

César's position on the issue depends on his emotional state at the moment of judgement. When he is irritated with the individual, feels defensive about his own position in the firm, or is struggling to differentiate himself from someone considered a failure, he upholds the stand of the firm. An example of this can be seen in César's thoughts on Conchita. Because the latter considers César a factor in Matías's downfall, when she is assigned as César's secretary her revenge is to be a physical representation of the fact that César no longer contributes to the firm, so she simply sits and stares at the wall all day long. This behavior irritates César to no end and triggers the following commentary:

Conchita, por ejemplo. Una buena secretaria. Y veterana. Incluso demasiado veterana. Porque estaba llena de manías, desde luego. ¿No era ridículo que una persona se empeñara en contemplar la pared durante horas? ¿No resultaba comprensible que una empresa moderna no confiara en semejante ser? (91)

But at other times César does question whether or not the firm is somehow implicated in an individual's failure. When

these moments are triggered by thoughts regarding his own case they are generally short-lived due to the fact that César believes they stem from his feelings of inadequacy. This can be seen in the case of Pepe. Because the idea that the firm had something to do with Pepe's behavior ["¿O quizá Pepe no era antes así y se había ido embruteciendo en el castigo?" (90)] is provoked by César's thoughts on his own situation ["No merecía él, César, un trato más afable." (90)], his questioning of the firm's role in Pepe's lack of advancement is brief. The passage ends with César's pronouncement that "Sí, seguramente la empresa tenía razón y Pepe no mereciera otro destino" (90).

At other times though César's questioning is motivated by his own reasoning based on evidence observed in the daily functioning of the firm. The case of Matías is a good example of this; César returns time after time in the narration to consider the role of the firm in Matías' suicide. He points out that his demotion was more draconian than usual; when Matías was relieved of his position instead of simply the usual ceremonial reduction of office space, he was moved to a section of the firm designated for those whose careers were over. Then there were the additional degradations associated with the demotion, the loss of the parking space as well as his secretary, his exclusion from executive meetings, and the ultimate insult, his exclusion from the firm's annual meeting.

What most provokes César to question the firm's role in the affair though is their casual and callous treatment of Matías's illness, his alcoholism. The firm simply treats it as a character flaw, and when Matías can no longer keep it under control writes him off. Even later, when Matías informs a firm executive of his resolution to stop drinking the latter responds with a flippant suggestion that "tendríamos que tomar unas copas para celebrarlo" (94). It is as a result of this incident that César finally mentally concludes, "No, no era culpa de Conchita, ni de Matías, ni de Pepe. Era culpa del sistema" (95).

Despite the fact that this realization is based on an accumulation of evidence though, it is no match for the powerful combination of the protagonist's self-doubts and the years of indoctrinated belief in the system. Within two paragraphs César has once again returned to the stance that if the individual fails it is his own fault:

Hola, César, qué tal, había dicho Morton; y su tono no era irritado, ni somnoliento, ni indiferente. Era mucho peor: era una voz compadecida. Morton sabía que César carecía de futuro; había dejado de confiar en él. El, César, le había decepcionado; y su decepción le entristecía, del mismo modo que un padre se entristece al ver cómo se pierde su hijo preferido. (96)

That this stance dominates in the particular case of César is undoubtedly due in part to his observed lack of self-confidence. Yet it is also clear that César's lack of faith in himself has only come about in recent years, before that he was a successful, confident, rising corporate star as well as pop artist. How did the protagonist pass from one position to another so diametrically opposed? The narration itself does not show the process, but by piecing together César's comments with pieces of the illustrated cases of others it becomes clear that César's descent began with an inability to produce. This lack of production resulted in the cessation of promotions and the stagnation of his success. As already discussed, success that is not continually renewed eventually becomes labeled failure. It is at this point when the reader encounters the protagonist, in deep personal crisis because according to the structure of competitive society he is on the brink of failure.

The question then becomes what makes competitive society's structure so influential that it is capable of turning a confident individual into a person in crisis? As the author illustrates, the key lays in the structure of diametrically opposing success and failure, and by maintaining the structure through a complex hierarchy of power. The introduction of the individual to the rule's of the hierarchy begins early, during the years of scholarization. From the comparisons made by the protagonist, the structure of the

educative system is shown to resemble in many aspects that of the corporate world. For example, the physical description of Matías just before going to speak with a superior is compared to that of a student before the teacher, "Ahí estaba, a su lado, con ojos deslumbrados y sudando como un mal escolar ante el maestro" (13). The comparison reveals aspects common to the two situations, the hierarchy within the classroom, teacher/student, parallels that of the corporate world, boss/worker. The power and fear the teacher's judgement inspires previews that of the boss's, and the emotional and physical discomfort experience by the student translates into the stress, ulcers, and coronaries of the corporate environment.

Another important similarity highlighted is the goal oriented structure of both. Both students and workers know that what is ultimately valued is the product and not the process, as evidenced by the importance put on productivity in the case of the former and grades in the later. The result of this focus is a hierarchy of corporate or scholastic success that divides the winners from the losers, rewarding the former and punishing the latter, as seen in the following passage that describes the moment in which annual promotions are made public:

...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)

Theoretically, one of the goals of this structure, both in the educative and corporate system, is that the unsuccessful individual would then be motivated to strive harder to achieve. Quite often however the effect is just the contrary as César illustrates after an encounter with his boss:

Entró en la agencia con el mismo calambre de estómago con que, en la niñez, entraba a las clases de matemáticas de don Emiliano. No se sabía la lección. Nunca sería capaz de aprendérsela correctamente. Jamás podría colmar las exigencias. [...] Con don Emiliano, César obtuvo un conocimiento fundamental: aprendió para siempre jamás a ser culpable. (72-73)

Yet even this result has its functional aspect within the corporate system. In this manner the school experience becomes not only an introduction to the structures of the corporate world but also shapes the individuals response to this structure, on one hand better assuring its propagation through the winners, and alleviating itself of responsibility in the case of the loser by shifting the guilt to them.

As seen in the preceding section, one of the key elements to the firm's power over the individual is the hierarchy, here observed in the classical triangular form, with power concentrated in the apex. Because this structure limits the number of positions at the top, strategies must be developed to perpetuate the hierarchy. In Amado amo several of the principal methods to achieve this are increased benefits and prestige to those who ascend, the fomentation of dissention and mistrust among those that do not, and the elevation of the boss figure. With regard to the first, as we have already seen the firm maintains a series of ceremonies consecrating the attainment of the different material perks at each level of ascension. These rites of passage also apply to social conventions, as one ascends from one level to the next, one is expected to associate with the colleagues at the new level and leave behind those of the former. The rewards of the new associations, although not as evident as the material perks, are of more significance, with each ascension one moves closer to the nucleus of power and information.

The latter is one of the most highly prized commodities of the corporate system and one of the key elements to maintaining the hierarchy. By keeping secret the vital processes of the firm, such as promotion decisions, management does not have to justify, and is able to change at will, the standards of measurement. Because of this lack of reliable standards against which to measure oneself, employees are kept

guessing as to what they are. This obligates the employees to rely on gossip and interpretation of signs from management, both of which are often purposely ambiguous, for information. The result, as seen in the following passage, is a mistrust of one's colleagues and an approbation of all that management does:

...todos anduvieran olfateando el aire como perdigueros en tensión, a la caza de algún aroma de desgracia, sopesando y aquilatando cada gesto y cada monosílabo de los jefes por ver de descifrar el sentido oculto de las cosas; y ello hacía que imperaran los usos sociales más conservadores, esto es, reír las gracias de los mandos, censurar las costumbres de los censurados y opinar siempre lo mismo que opinaban los jerarcas. (88)

Although a lack of worker solidarity is an important factor in the perpetuation of the hierarchy, the most important aspect is the elevation of the boss figure. Because success in the corporate system is defined as the attainment of the highest position possible, and due to the triangular structure of the hierarchy this becomes increasingly difficult with each ascension, it is evident that the position of boss must possess sufficient attractiveness to motivate the often brutal struggle to attain it. That it does is easily observed in the description of the bosses in Amado amo. Some of the principal motivating factors described are the position of the

bosses in the hierarchy, the liberties permitted them, and most importantly the power they exercise over the professional as well as the personal lives of the employees.

With regard to their position in the hierarchy, it is clear that bosses also have their own pecking order and corresponding rewards. In fact, César believes that the concept of hierarchies is so widespread that even heaven and hell are structured according to one. But with regard to the corporate world, César signals that while lower level bosses may have power over a certain number of employees, they are in turn employees themselves to higher level bosses, to whom they must submit. That latter, although enjoying greater power, must also submit to those of the next higher level, and so on until a chain of power and submission is formed that ends only in the last and highest boss figure. It is this position that is considered the ultimate goal because it is in this position only that one obtains the ultimate reward, the absence of submission which constitutes total power.

It is due to this power that César likens the boss figure to that of a God, "Los jefes eran los dioses de un mundo ateo" (39). Like Gods, these few privileged bosses did not have to answer to anyone, thus they were able to do as they pleased. For example, behavior that would be censured in a subordinate had to be tolerated in a boss. There are many examples of this in the novel, ranging from excruciating public

humiliations of a subordinate, to simple invasions of one's privacy or tiresome jokes as seen in the following passage:

Smith abría la garra, soltaba su magullado brazo, no sin antes despedirse con su broma habitual del ¡Ave Sísar! bramada con los talones juntos y la mano en alto; broma que siempre provocaba en César angustiosos deseos de matarlo o morirse. Pero como Smith era el gerente se limitó a sonreírle. (53)

The most important aspect of a boss's god-like power however is the control the he posses over the employee, not only in the professional arena but more significantly in the private one. The foundation for this is the fact that bosses are set-up as the standard against which an employee measures himself, "es la magnitud de nuestros dioses, de nuestros reyes y de nuestros jefes lo que nos da la medida de lo que somos" (27). As such, it is logical that the boss's opinion be of great importance, a situation that as César recognizes can "elevarte al séptimo cielo. O de hundirte en la miseria" (25).

Numerous examples of both of these are encountered in the protagonist's case, but it is the latter that clearly dominates. Just one ambiguous comment by Morton, for example "Menuda la armaste con el perro," has the potential to send César into hours of agonizing internal debate. Due to the power a boss exercises over an employee, the latter's greatest terror is evidently falling from the good graces of his boss

because not only does the employee disappoint the expectations of the boss, more importantly he loses his self-esteem, his identity. This is quite clear from the protagonist's case and illustrates another reason why failure must be avoided at all costs.

Curiously, the enormous power the boss figure wields that quite logically breeds hate in the subordinate, also possess a type of seduction. César attributes this seduction not to the figure itself but rather to the unique properties of power:

El Poder poseía esa energía secreta, esa asombrosa alquimia: La capacidad de aparejar amor y sufrimiento. Y así, en todo subalterno parecía existir una pulsión de entrega hacia sus mandos. Como el perro que lame la mano que le azota, o el campesino bolchevique que llora tras haber degollado a su señor. Amado amo. (143)

It is this passage, from which the title of the text springs, that enunciates the principal theme of this novel as well as the next, and one of the primary themes of Montero's entire narrative - power. As this and preceding novels have shown, power is one of the key elements of the human experience, be it interpersonal, male/female, or corporate relations.

As we have seen, in Amado amo Montero focuses on the role of power in corporate-personal relations, of its structure in the firm, and how this affects those subject to it. What has

not been mentioned until this point is that corporate-personal relations are considered primarily from a very specific perspective, that of the American style management. This is made clear early on in the novel when the history of the Golden Line is presented, and by various comments throughout the text. Also made clear is the attitude toward this management style, which is characterized as an evolution of the European Industrial era tendencies that resulted in "el modelo perfecto de colectividad depredadora" (195).

Although the entirety of Amado amo is a critique of this management style, nowhere is this more apparent than in the final pages of the text where the Golden Line's tactics are compared to the famous American land runs of the nineteenth century. The description of these land runs is seen through the eyes of Clara who, as César qualifies, "poseía una dilatada biografía de activismo izquierdista" (195). She focuses on what she considers to be the unjust manner in which the land runs were conducted:

La carrera de la tierra, peroraba Clara encendida de justicia social, no la ganaba el más honesto ni el más inteligente, y ni siquiera el más rápido; triunfaba el más fuerte, el más cruel, el más insolidario e inhumano. (197)

Clara concludes that because this same method was employed in several land runs that it represents the conscious and perverse will of the society to build its bases upon survival

of the strongest, or in her words "la carnicería como vía natural de selección" (197).

These words by Clara at the end of the novel immediately bring to mind the actions of the characters throughout the text. There is an undeniable parallel between the methods employed in the land runs and those of the corporate system, with the same results in both, only the strongest triumph. Montero however reinforces this two more times before the end of the novel, once by César's thoughts immediately following the passage, and a second time even more effectively by intercalating images of the land run in the final scene of the novel.

In this final scene César is pressured by the firm to sign a paper stating that he will testify against Paula as to the fairness of the methods of the firm. As the coercion tactics increase, César's emotional reaction to them are represented by scenes from a land run:

No estás obligado a firmar, naturalmente, decía Morton; pero te agradeceríamos mucho que lo hicieras; a fin de cuentas es la primera vez que la Golden Line te pide algo, ¿no es así? No, no era así, había algo radicalmente falso en el razonamiento, pero César no sabía encontrar la falla, la fisura. Cabeceó afirmativamente sin musitar palabra, porque el polvo de los otros corredores le estaba ahogando. Y además, proseguía

Morton, tampoco te lo voy a negar, creo que sería francamente bueno para ti. César se estaba quedando atrás, la masa de los competidores se alejaba, por delante y por detrás de él no había más que desierto y soledad, un campo agostado por el tropel de tantos pies ansiosos. Sintió un frío infinito. Cogió la Mont-Blanc que Morton le ofrecía y firmó... (208)

This very effective ending to the novel highlights the complex orchestration of power and domination throughout the text. Although, as just seen, the specific focus is the inhumanity of the American style of management, on a larger scale it is clear that the critique is aimed at the issue of power and the individual. Power is a corruptive force capable of destroying individuals through its exertion as well as its pursuit, ultimately merging both "winners" and "losers" into the same category. This category, as defined from the whole of Montero's narrative, is clearly that of losers.

One last comment with regard to Amado amo is its style, which in this novel moves to a higher level. As with the structure, characterization, and thematic, the language of the text is carefully chosen to communicate the essential aspects of the novel. Absent of dialogue, it is the language that indicates whether the reader is submerged in César's internal discourses or crosses the thin line to those of the objective narrator. It is the language as well that imparts the very

physical sense of time in the novel, its ability to transform itself into an antagonist as real as any individual. The language also creates a subtext that reveals the narrator's attitude toward the primary issues of the text. And finally, it is through the language that a melding of the levels of structure, characterization, and thematic is artfully achieved, moving Amado amo to the highest plane of Montero's production thus far.

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CHAPTER V

TEMBLOR

The last novel that will be examined in this work is Montero's fifth novel, Temblor (1990), which appeared just two years after Amado amo. Despite this proximity, Temblor is Montero's longest and most ambitious novel to date. It is also, as critics consistently signal, the most externally different novel of her narrative.³⁹ Situated in a distant future in a fantasy world the novel is constructed along the lines of an adventure/science fiction novel. These striking changes however are in reality a continuation of what by now has clearly become a tradition in Montero's narrative of external change that overlays internal continuity, as the author herself points out:

Sí, desde luego: exteriormente Temblor es una especie de novela de aventuras, una obra fantástica, una fábula con ribetes legendarios, ingredientes que no había utilizado anteriormente. Pero todo esto no es sino la envoltura. Por debajo están las obsesiones de siempre, expresadas esta

³⁹Masoliver Ródenas, in his review of Temblor, goes even farther by stating that the novel is "irrepetible y sin precedentes en la narrativa española" (19).

vez, espero, de manera más universal y más profunda. ("Autorretrato" 51)

This internal continuity has much to do, as the author states, with the repetition in Temblor of certain themes that have been observed throughout her narrative. This thematic repetition stems not from a lack of imagination but rather from the author's on-going desire to formulate and convey her vision of the world. The themes that are repeated are those that she considers essential to her perspective on the human experience, and their obsessive reworking in each subsequent novel is nothing less than the desire to arrive at their essence. For this reason, although the thematic focus of each novel shifts, the thematic corpus holds to a common trajectory.

As we have seen, the external evolution of this trajectory in Montero's narrative has moved from the highly personal narrative worlds of Crónica and Función to the more distanced ones of Te trataré and Amado amo, and finally to the universally emblematic one we will see in Temblor. This gradual yet dramatic change in narrative perspective is the fulfillment of the author's own ideas on writing:

Para poder soñar, el novelista necesita distancia.

Ha quedado dicho, o al menos insinuado, que la aventura de escribir transcurre por un camino hacia el interior, hacia las profundidades de lo que uno es. Ahora bien, para que ese interior sea lo

suficientemente rico, para que tenga la grandeza y la universalidad que exige el arte, la meta del camino nunca puede ser la anécdota personal, sino la identidad común de los humanos. ("Apuntes" 136-37)

Thus the dramatic external jump in Temblor to a fantasy world reflects the author's need for critical distance to continue her narrative's internal search for the essence of the human experience. In Temblor, this combination of external change and internal continuity results in the most complete portrayal of Montero's vision of the world as yet.

The starting point for the elaboration of this world springs from the idea of acabamiento⁴⁰; the narrative world of Temblor is gradually disappearing because its existence is based on human memory; things exist only so long as they are remembered. This obsession for what the author terms "la fugacidad de la experiencia y lo irremediable del olvido" (Méndez 3), which is dramatically illustrated in Temblor, is not new to Montero's narrative. The basic premise of Temblor is already insinuated in one of the final scenes of Te trataré. Bella, after being crushingly disillusioned yet one more time, desperately tries to hang on to her sense of self.

⁴⁰Montero recounts that Temblor grew out of a very concrete episode of her own personal history, "Sentí una tarde al contemplar la antigua casa donde viví con mis padres, e intentar recordar sus objetos, los dibujos de sus azulejos que acompañaron mi adolescencia, el despeñarse de las cosas, de la vida, hacia la nada" (Méndez 3).

Through the recourse of memory she unsuccessfully attempts to concretize her existence by recalling the house that she grew up in:

Bella sintió un vértigo: ¿cómo era su casa, cómo era? No se acordaba bien. Oh, sí, tenía clara la distribución, las líneas generales. Pero se le escapaban los detalles. ¿De qué color eran las baldosas del cuarto delantero? ¿Y cómo era el dormitorio de sus padres [...] ¿Y el zócalo del pasillo? ¿O no había zócalo? Bella se estremeció, repentinamente angustiada. Habían tirado la casa, ya no existía. (Te trataré 230)

The key to Bella's fear comes several lines later in the passage where the reader learns that it is not the physical demolition of the house that causes it to cease to exist for her but rather her loss of memory, "Miedo, miedo a haber olvidado, miedo a no poder recuperar lo que hubo, dolor casi físico ante la ausencia de lo que uno fue" (Te trataré 230). Bella never does recuperate the memory and it is from this image of loss and finality, that in fact forms part of the author's personal history, that the novel Temblor springs.

Yet tellingly, the structure of Temblor is not constructed solely around finality but rather balanced upon a mixture of the latter and beginnings. This becomes clear upon examining the division of the novel. Temblor is a linearly constructed novel that is divided into four parts, three of

which are roughly equal in length (1=18 sections; 2=19 sections; 3=14 sections), and the last which is much shorter (4 sections). Each of the parts corresponds to different stages in the life and the adventures of the young protagonist, Agua Fría. This narrative line is set against, and motivated by, the decay of the world into which the protagonist is born. In this manner the overall structure of the novel is composed around both commencement and finality, life and death.

That this essentialist construction is not haphazard becomes clear upon examination of the parts of the novel. Montero carefully balances the events of the narration, biological and social, around an alternation of life and death. This alternation, which as we shall see in the final examination reveals itself to be circular, belies the apparent lineality of the novel. The appearance of lineality stems in great part from the fact that the time of the narration advances chronologically. A superficial overview of the four parts of the novel also conveys this idea. Part one, "Tiempo de fe," focuses on the initiation of Agua Fría into adult society and the rituals of the governance of that society; part two, "Camino del Norte," centers on the adventures of her flee from that society in search of the truth, which she believes to reside in the Gran Hermana; part three, "La medida del desorden," reveals that this truth is not to be found in the Gran Hermana nor with the Uma, a primitive tribe with whom

she cohabits after leaving the Gran Hermana; and part four, "El corazón de las tinieblas," centers on the termination of the power structure of her society in order to save it. On the surface the structure of Temblor resembles the simple lineal formula of an adventure novel; problem revealed, resolution sought, problem resolved.

This superficial appearance however is immediately weakened by a closer examination of several of the key aspects of the final part: in order to gain the knowledge she needs to save her world Agua Fría must return to the same place from which she had fled in part one, the temple Talapot; the destruction of the power structure of her society leads to the birth of a new society; through the knowledge obtained the concept of history and memory are reformulated to insinuate not immutability but rather change; and a new future in which the sterility of the old society is annulled is represented physically by Agua Fría's imminent pregnancy and by the final season of the novel, spring. The sensation the ending of the novel creates is that Agua Fría has come full-circle, she is once again at a starting point.

This effect is reinforced by the careful structuring of each part and the important role that the alternation of life and death play in each. As we have seen, each part of the novel is constructed to encapsulate a period of passage in the protagonist's experience. These passages are strongly marked by life and death, the elemental forces of human existence,

and their rhythm is closely tied to the natural rhythms of the protagonist's world. The structure of part one is a representative example of this. "Tiempo de fe" encompasses Agua Fría's initiation into adulthood and into the inner workings of the power structure of her society, and her rejection and escape from the latter. As the preceding observation would imply, it is a period marked by tremendous mental as well as physical changes for the protagonist, all of which are characterized by a close relationship to life and death events and to her world's natural rhythms.

The opening passages of part one illustrate this structure. Before the description of the initiation of the protagonist even begins, the reader is initiated into the natural rhythm of this world through the concretization of the time of day, afternoon, and the season of the year, autumn, in the very first line of the novel. While this establishment of the protagonist in her natural ambient could be perceived as simply setting the stage for the events to be narrated, the repetition of very similar descriptions, as observed in the following lines, indicates that the references to nature function as more than just background:

(1) El sol crepuscular llenaba la habitación con una luz incandescente. (12)

(2) Y, sin embargo, el sol apenas estaba un poco más bajo, sus rayos algo más rosados y más oblicuos. (14)

(3) El sol poniente estaba ahora justo frente a la ventana, inundándolo todo con su luz escarlata.

(15)

(4) Se quedó ahí de pie, en medio del aire fulgurante, en el oro rojo de un sol casi acabado.

(16)

At times this close attention to natural rhythms which is a constant throughout the text functions to establish natural time, as in the first line of the novel, or to indicate passage of time, as in the second example. In other instances it is used, as in prior Montero novels⁴¹, to convey the inner sentiments of a character as in the first example. This line, which is preceded by "Qué tarde tan extraña" and completed by "Luz de prodigios" (12), is a transference of Agua Fría's feelings about the encounter with her anterior onto nature.

That there exists in the novel a close relationship between feelings and nature is evidenced just a few lines later when Corcho Quemado, Agua Fría's anterior, performs the crucial name ritual. In this ritual, which is the culmination of the protagonist's initiation into the adult world, the anterior reveals the significance of the name given to the disciple at the beginning of the initiation. This is done through a recounting of the happiest moment of the anterior's life. Corcho Quemado's recounting illustrates the role of

⁴¹This technique is clearly not new to Montero's narrative. Numerous examples can be found in her work from La función delta on.

nature in her memory; not only is the explanation prefaced by the description of nature at that moment ["Fue una tarde de primavera y yo acababa de entrar en la década cuarta de mi vida (12)], and punctuated at intervals by references to nature, her memory ultimately springs from the interaction of her feelings at the moment with her perception of nature:

El sol entraba por la ventana. Como ahora. Yo contemplaba el dibujo de sus rayos en el muro y percibí, súbitamente, la perfecta geometría de esas líneas. Miré a mi alrededor: todo en la habitación había adquirido una definición extraordinaria. La cama, las arrugas de las sábanas, el ángulo de la pared, la piel sudada de Algodón, el exacto contorno de mis manos: todo era sustancial, eterno, necesario. Todo parecía estar cargado de existencia. Como si, por unos instantes, hubiera atinado a ver el oculto diseño de las cosas. (13)

Another use made of natural rhythms is that of the symbolic, as seen in examples three and four of the preceding page that both center on a setting sun. Example three comes one paragraph before the death of Corcho Quemado, and example four follows Agua Fría's realization that the initiation with her anterior had terminated. Although these are not the only ways in which natural rhythms will be used in the novel, from this first passage it is clear that natural rhythms are intentionally associated with the events of the novel.

The reason behind this association and how it affects the structuring of the novel is also established in the first passage of the novel. From the above examples it is clear that the sun, light, forms the basis for the majority of the descriptions of nature. This element, which has been traditionally associated with the idea of commencement and hope, is here not surprisingly used to contrast with darkness as the following passage illustrates:

La habitación, la más grande de las dos que componían la vivienda, resplandecía con una luz suave y dorada. El sol se deslizaba mansamente por entre las tablillas de las contraventanas y pintaba un sutil dibujo rayado en las paredes. Era como encontrarse dentro de un fanal, de un farolillo de verbena. Agua Fría se apresuró a cerrar la puerta a sus espaldas, dejando fuera la penumbra, la inquietud y el frío; y sintió cómo sus miedos se deshacían en ese aire tan alegre y liviano. (9-10)

Without entering into thematic considerations at this point, the numerous examples of the contrast between light and dark established in this first passage function in a traditional manner; they are associated with beginnings and endings, with life and death.

That the natural rhythm of life and death is the core of the structure of this first passage becomes clear through the events that constitute it. The focal point of the passage is

the death of Corcho Quemado and the conclusion of Agua Fria's initiation with her, which symbolizes the end of her childhood. This is balanced however by new beginnings; socially Agua Fria now enters the adult world, an event that is significantly biologically mirrored by the commencement of her menarche. This balance is made explicit by the protagonist's final thoughts of the passage, "Todo estaba bien, todo era apropiado: el principio y el fin fundidos en este instante único, el lento girar la de Rueda Eterna" (16).

Thus, this basic structure of the alternation of life and death revealed in the first passage of the novel confirms the impression created by the end of the novel, that it is this alternation that constitutes the underlying foundation of the structure of the entire novel. From this underlying foundation that represents the core of the author's vision of the world, the natural succession of life and death, springs the problem and subsequent argument of the novel. If this natural balance is altered, if human rhythms cease to mirror and form part of natural rhythms, what might be the result? One possible answer is that illustrated by the argument of the novel. In Temblor, those that govern the protagonist's society, in a basic instinctual attempt to fight against one part of the equation, death, pervert the nature of the latter through the misuse of power and the manipulation of the memory to the point that the natural balance is affected and their society is dying.

Nonetheless, despite the rapidly increasing down-spiral toward inexistence created by the imbalance and symbolized by the fogs that destroy the material evidence of existence, the thrust toward survival and renewal continues to exist in a limited number of individuals. Of these, Agua Fría is perceived as, and is a crucial part of, the final effort to reverse the imbalance and preserve humanity. Thus the argument of Temblor is constituted by a struggle between two opposing thrusts, one toward inexistence and the other toward life, a mirror of the central philosophy that is behind the novel.

A comprehension of the internal workings of the structure of Temblor is essential because in typical Montero style the structure of the novel is very closely tied to the crux of the themes and also influences the characterization of the novel. With regard to the latter, one aspect that immediately stands out is the naming of the of characters. Because the novel strives to communicate a vision of the world through the recreation of an emblematic fantasy world, the cast of characters is necessarily quite large. As discussed with relation to Crónica, numerous characters entail a specific type of characterization, one that is brief but memorable. Montero resolves this problem with an abbreviated, but poetic version of her snapshot technique, the naming of the characters.

As previously mentioned, the name of each character is designated by his or her anterior and represents the most outstanding memory of the latter. Because of this the character names are quite peculiar, immediately standing out in the text and causing the reader to fix his or her attention on them. Another aspect that adds to their memorability is the ritual and obligatory introduction ceremony; each character must state his or her name and its significance immediately upon meeting another. Although the tale encompassed in this ritual is derived from the anterior's experience and has no direct relationship between the chosen name and the character, it is generally very moving, frequently representing as one character points out:

...un momento de felicidad inmediatamente previo a una desgracia, o un instante en que fueron dichosos [los Anteriores] precisamente porque no sabían aún los dolores que les acechaban. (19)

These tales poetically serve to concretize and de-foreignize the character names.

The final aspect of the naming process that facilitates characterization is the often evident symbolism of the characters' name. This symbolism, which logically can not be derived from the perspective of the anterior due to the process the name choice involves and the fact that the name is given at the beginning of the initiation, is however often associated with the nature of the character in question. In

an abbreviated form of the snapshot technique, Montero chooses names that represent or clarify a particular aspect(s) of the character. The type of aspect reflected varies, ranging from transparent associations based on elements such as physical appearance as in the case of *Doble Pecado*, or on mental attitude as in that of *Respetuoso Orgullo de La Ley*, to more enigmatic associations based on less evident elements like a hidden personality trait as in the case of *Pedernal*, or the character's role in the novel, as seen in the essentialist naming of the twins *Océano* and *Oxígeno*.

Although the element upon which the association is based varies from case to case, the functions of the symbolic naming can be divided into two basic groups: those names that reveal easily identified features of the characters, and those that are drawn from associations not readily accessible. The objective of the first is related directly to the snapshot technique, to help form a quick yet lasting impression of the character. *Diamante*, the name given to the leader of the caravan with which the protagonist travels, is a good example of this. The personality traits that the author wishes to highlight in this character are those that are commonly associated with the diamond, value, brilliance, hardness, power, etc. The name choice thus facilitates and concretizes the rapid characterization of the character.

Of this first group, in the majority of instances the association between name and character functions directly, as

in the case of Diamante. But on occasion the association is based on an inverse relationship, as in the case of Respy, the young man who in defiance of the law and at great personal expense smuggles the renegade Agua Fría into the caravan. Respy's full name is Respetuoso Orgullo de La Ley, a clearly ironic choice because from the very first intervention of this character in the novel it is evident that the name and the individual that must bear it are diametrically opposed. Respy not only questions and criticizes the law/religion of his society, which is considered punishable heresy, he outright disobeys it as seen in his initial conversation with Agua Fría:

-Pero, cómo, ¿no me vas a explicar tu nombre? - exclamó ella.

-¿Quién, yo? ¡Por supuesto que no! -contestó Respy enérgicamente.

-Pero eso... ¡eso es un pecado!

-Tonterías. El rito de las saluciones no es más que una ceremonia en honor de los que ya se han muerto. Admito que lo de revivir a nuestros Anteriores a través del recuerdo es una costumbre hermosa, pero se da la circunstancia de que yo odio y desprecio a mi Anterior, y no deseo revivirlo en modo alguno. (20)

This first type of symbolic naming, be it directly or inversely associated, is designed to take advantage of common

associations that enable the character to acquire additional dimensions that one, then need not be specified in the narration, and/or two, that quite possibly are not attainable due to limited intervention, as in the case of secondary characters.

The second type of symbolic naming however, that which has a more enigmatic association with the character, is much more common in the novel. Because the association is more difficult to establish, this second group does not generally function to communicate an immediate image of the character, but instead comes into play further along in the characterization process: it functions much like a puzzle, the answer to which the reader must decipher.⁴²

In some cases the answer to the name riddle points to the function of the character in the novel. Case in point is the character Hilo Blanco. Agua Fría first encounters Hilo Blanco when she enters the temple Talapot, he is one of the priest/guardians of the Outer Circle and performs some of the first rituals of the protagonist's introduction into the temple. Agua Fría's contact with the young priest during her stay in this part of the temple is very limited, he serves the meals and cures the wounds but never speaks with the

⁴²Support for the interpretation of this aspect of Montero's characterization being puzzle-like is found in the novel itself. The three riddles posed by the beggar to Agua Fría at the beginning of Temblor form an integral part of the novel and reveal the author's taste for the mysterious, playful, and mentally challenging aspects of a puzzle.

disciples. During this period, because of his lowly position and his restricted intervention, the priest's name is never given, although pointed reference is made to his mutilated hand which is missing two fingers.

After Agua Fría leaves the Outer Circle the young priest does not intervene again until the final passages of part one, when the protagonist receives the terrifying news that she is to enter the Inner Circle as a Cobalt priestess. This news causes great despair for the protagonist because she realizes that she must escape but believes this to be impossible. It is precisely during this moment that Agua Fría, quite by chance, once again encounters the mutilated priest. Unbeknownst to Agua Fría he is one of the rebels, and it is his unfortunate discovery by the priestesses that presents her literally with the key to escape from the temple.

Intentionally, it is not until the moment of this escape that the priest's name is revealed, Hilo Blanco. The young priest's ultimate function is to provide the link, tenuous as it may be, to the rebel cause and to save Agua Fría from an imposed destiny. Thus the name Hilo Blanco, that I have interpreted to be translated as Thread of Hope, springs from the character's function in the narration and serves not to facilitate a snapshot impression of the character but rather to tie the character to the structure of the plot.

Some name riddles on the other hand link the character to the themes of the novel, illustrating a particular aspect of

it as in the case of Duermevela. The latter is the tutor of the Circle of Shadows, the intermediate level of the novices' training as Duermevela explains:

Estáis, pues, en un territorio fronterizo. Y, del mismo modo que aquí reina un crepúsculo eterno, ni luz ni oscuridad, así vuestras almas se encuentran ahora en el tránsito hacia la perfección, a medio camino entre la ignorancia y la sabiduría. (50)

This idea of intermediacy is echoed in the tutor's name, Duermevela, which represents the intermediate stage in the sleep process. That it alludes to this process is no accident, these passages reveal that the ultimate goal of the initiation is to figuratively put the disciples' minds to sleep. This ties directly into one of the themes of the novel, the dangers of mindless adherence to a belief system.

While there are numerous examples of namings that reveal key aspects of the themes, one of the most significant is that of the twin sisters Océano and Oxígeno. These two characters, who are named for the essential elements around which life revolves, are the essential elements around which the narration revolves as well, both structurally and thematically. With regard to the first, the primary functional role of each character forms the foundation for the already mentioned dichotomous nature of the structure. Océano is the central figure of the established power structure of the society, and Oxígeno is considered the focal point of the

rebel cause. These two opposing forces are structurally associated with the struggle between life and death, Oxígeno represents the hope for a future while Océano is the promise of the death of the society.

These two characters also represent the thematic core of the novel. On one level evidently it is the struggle between the two opposing forces, incarnated in the other characters, that gives rise to many of the thematic issues of Temblor. The core of the themes however springs directly from the battle between the two sisters. This conflict occurs because of a question of succession; Océano and Oxígeno are the twin daughters of the supreme ruler, the Gran Sacerdotisa, and according to tradition only one can rule. As Oxígeno explains:

Océano [...] lo entendió en seguida. Gobernaba aún nuestra madre, y éramos las dos sacerdotisas cobalto del Círculo Interior, cuando mi dulce hermanita intentó envenenarme. Nos hemos estado combatiendo a muerte desde entonces. Quizá Océano acertara al decir que todo empezó por despecho. Por mi envidia al perder la sucesión. Pero mi condición de desterrada me obligó a mirar, a reflexionar, a comprender. Ahora mi hermana tiene el poder y yo tengo la razón. (163)

Thus the conflict between the two, which in its essence is the struggle between power and reason, is the personification of what is an important aspect of the thematic core of the novel.

As illustrated, the naming process of the characters is not only the key to their characterization, it also ties them very closely to the structure and the themes of the novel. This holds true for one of the most enigmatically named characters, the protagonist. Although Agua Fría is one of the first characters for whom the name source is explained (she is preceded only by Corcho Quemado), it is not until the end of the novel that a full understanding of her name can be reached. This is because only by joining the initial meaning of the protagonist's name to her actuation throughout the novel is the significance revealed.

In a passage at the beginning of the novel, Corcho Quemado reveals to the protagonist the significance of her name. The essence of the memory is a moment in which Corcho Quemado, by grace of the sunlight playing on the walls of a room, had the extraordinary experience of stopping time:

Yo contemplaba el dibujo de sus rayos en el muro y percibí, súbitamente, la perfecta geometría de esas líneas. Miré a mi alrededor: todo en la habitación había adquirido una definición extraordinaria. La cama, las arrugas de las sábanas, el ángulo de la pared, la piel sudada de Algodón, el exacto contorno de mis manos: todo era sustancial, eterno,

necesario. Todo parecía estar cargado de existencia. Como si, por unos instantes, hubiera atinado a ver el oculto diseño de las cosas [...] El mundo se había detenido y los objetos estaban impregnados de vida. (13)

The impact of the moment was so frightening to Corcho Quemado that she took a drink of cold water to break the spell. Thus interestingly, the protagonist is named not for this extraordinary moment but rather for the catalyst that ended it. Nonetheless, as Corcho Quemado explains, the protagonist's name also recalls this moment, "Y pensé: cada vez que beba un trago de agua helada, procuraré recordar que hubo una tarde en la que fui capaz de detener el tiempo" (13).

Taking this into consideration with Agua Fría's actuation throughout the novel, it becomes apparent that her name as well serves as a riddle that reveals the essence of her function. Although Agua Fría is the central character of the narration, structurally linking the episodes and parts of the novel as well as bringing unity to the varied and multiple themes, it is not her particular life that is the essence of the novel. Her primary function instead, as the name given her insinuates, is to be the catalyst that reveals the essence of the text, which are the themes.

The themes of Temblor are the most interesting of any Montero novel from the perspective that they form the most coherent articulation of the author's very particular vision

of the world. This vision, as we shall see, is both a synthesis and reworking of those of prior novels as well as an exploration into previously undefined thematic areas. As noted, the vision is conveyed through the creation of a futuristic fantasy-like world that nonetheless has definite links to our present society. One of these links is historical; as the *Gran Hermana* reveals, the society of Temblor is descendent from the survivors of an ancient society that was abruptly destroyed by a very powerful energy force. Although the identity of this ancient civilization is not specified, passages that deal with the catastrophe and the nature and scope of this society's knowledge and technology strongly insinuate that it is our society in the very near future. This is reinforced by the nature of the themes; the major thematic areas of Temblor are problems encountered in present-day society that the author moves to a futuristic plane. The outcome is themes that true to Montero style are clearly familiar on one level, but that on another have been defamiliarized due to the futuristic perspective from which they are considered. As we shall see, it is this defamiliarization that permits these themes to acquire, as the author desires⁴³, their dimension of universality.

One theme that immediately stands out is that of sexism. As prior chapters have underscored, gender discrimination has -

⁴³See the author's declarations on page 51 of "Autorretrato."

consistently been a central concern of Montero's narrative. Up to Temblor, this discrimination has generally been focused on from the female perspective, although the use of a male protagonist in Amado amo did lend to a limited exploration of the theme from the male perspective. In Temblor however, sexism is explored from both perspectives, the male and the female, the victim and the propagator. In addition, aspects such as its origin, stereotypes, and limitations are also examined. This results in a narrative that once again reinforces the author's concern for the issue as well as provides the most coherent vision of her ideas on sexism to date.

The vehicle that makes the issue of sexism so notable in this novel is the particular gendered social structure of the protagonist's world. In all of the societies except for two in Temblor, the social structures reflect the belief that women are superior to men. The origin of this belief is due not to an extraneous imposed whim that the reader must simply accept but rather is the product of this world's particular development. As the Gran Hermana reveals in a long discourse (239-242) whose primary points will be summarized here, the original dream of the survivors of the Great Catastrophe was to construct an egalitarian society in which everyone was equal, there were to be no hierarchies, and decisions were to be the result of group consensus. This utopian dream was achieved and for many centuries functioned well.

Unfortunately, the balance of this world was disrupted by a combination of biological change and social ritual; there were not enough Crystals, an element essential to the death ceremony of this society, for the quickly growing population. Thus a committee was formed to decide who would and would not receive a Crystal, fatally introducing for the first time an element of inequality into the society.

The presence of this initial inequality was like a fissure through which chaos was able to introduce itself into the society. Terrible plagues, civil wars, endemic illness, and most importantly a growing infertility among the population became the norm. Due to a high mortality rate caused by the former, and the low birth rate as a result of the latter, the population of the society began to rapidly decrease. It is this stage in the society's evolution that gave rise to the superiority of women; their biological capacity to give birth in a world of increasing sterility became greatly valued.

The female capacity to gestate life, and the importance attributed to this, led to the control of the society's institutions by women. This resulted in what would be considered from present-day society's point of view a reverse gender hierarchy. The manifestations of this are clearly observable in the political/religious structure of the protagonist's society. Over the years, from the committee that initially determined who would receive a Crystal, emerged

a ruling dynasty that decreed and enforced what is termed the Ley, a mixture of religious and secular laws. At the pinnacle of this governing dynasty is the Gran Sacerdotisa who rules through an intricate hierarchy of subordinates whose ultimate function is to ensure the propagation of the system. As the title implies, the supreme ruler is a woman. Also exclusively women are the highest ranking subordinates, the priestesses of the Inner Circle. Below this level in the hierarchy a limited number of men are admitted into the power structure but only in lower ranking positions of restricted authority. These positions generally involve performing tasks considered distasteful by the ruling women, such as menial labor, or those that the women are supposedly genetically incapable of exercising, such as physical violence.

Because they hold the reins of power in the society, women are also able to control the nature and distribution of knowledge. This control over knowledge is fundamental because, as repeated several times in the novel, "el saber es la llave del poder" (241). Thus the women are able to maintain their position of power by the careful manipulation of knowledge in several key areas such as the past, through the manipulation of history, the present, through the propagation of stereotypes, and the future, by the highly selective process of determining who will have access to knowledge.

-The manipulation of history by keepers of power is a technique common to the perpetuation of power. Through the rewriting of history, those in power are able to reinforce and legitimize their claim to power. In Temblor, despite the fact that it is a matriarchal society that utilizes this technique, the basic methods employed and the desired outcome remain the same. The first step, which is based on the concept of the fragility of human memory, is to erase from the collective memory all vestiges of the past, which in this particular case is the legacy of centuries of egalitarian rule. This is achieved by substituting this past for a more convenient history determined by those in power.

In the society ruled from Talapot this substitute history is based on the idea of the Rueda Eterna. This theory, which is presented as the absolute truth, explains that past, present, and future all form part a continuous, immutable whole; that what has been, will always be. Thus this "natural" rule of the priestesses in the present is legitimized by tradition, and its projection into the future is assured by a view of the universe as unchanging. The acceptance of the theory among the common people is facilitated by their absolute inaccessibility to the knowledge that might challenge this view, and through the strict and unmerciful enforcement of the principal tenets of the theory.

One of the major tenets of this new immutable world is the idea of hierarchy. This notion is legitimized in much the

same manner as the governing theory of the Rueda Eterna, by signaling its natural origin as can be observed in the words of the priestess Duermevela:

Pero el universo se ordena, con armonía infinita, en organismos que van desde lo más simple a lo más complejo; y, así como la esencia de la hoja de tilo es mucho más sencilla que la de un león, del mismo modo hay seres humanos inferiores y otros superiores, ocupando todos, desde siempre y para siempre, su exacto puesto en la eternidad de la escala jerárquica. (57-58)

In this manner, the nature-based substitute history not only validates the existence of the regime, but its structure as well.

Another tool employed to reinforce the power structure is the creation of gender specific stereotypes. These are initially facilitated through the rewriting of history; by erasing the past, the epoch of male dominance is deleted from the collective memory, and by the substitution of the concept of a changing history for an immutable one, the possibility of it is effectively annulled.

This idea of male subordination is made further absolute by the creation of a set of stereotypes based on the dichotimization of the feminine and the masculine through which the former is associated with values superior to those of the latter. For example the capabilities of intelligence

and truth are associated with women, while those of emotion and duplicity are attributed to men. Whereas women are considered to possess virtuous instincts, such as the need for justice and morality, to men are attributed the base instincts such as lack of self-control and violence. These stereotypes are promoted, through the priestesses control of education and socialization, as common knowledge and become integrated in the psyche of the individuals of the society as truths.

The repercussions of these ingrained stereotypes with regard to the structure of the society are easily observed, men are limited as to the social, professional, and political position they are permitted to attain. Because these are the key elements upon which respect and prestige are based, men clearly have great impediments for attaining either. This is strikingly illustrated by Agua Fría's attitude toward her father that comes out upon learning of the death of her mother:

¡Que había muerto de muerte verdadera! Su madre había fallecido y su mundo se esfumaba detrás de ella. Y, sin embargo, ¿cómo era posible? Era una mujer todavía joven... y reunía todas las condiciones para llegar a la Casa de los Grandes, para ser designada Anterior. Agua Fría podía entender lo de su padre; entendía que se le hubiera llevado la muerte verdadera muchos años atrás,

porque a fin de cuentas poseía un oficio inferior y no era más que un hombre. (22)

Related to this are the effects of the stereotypes on interpersonal relationship. From the point of view of the dominant sex, the generalized scorn and underestimation of men produces an ingenuous belief in self-superiority based upon gender. As seen in the protagonist's own comments with regard to men, this belief at times functions simply as a defense mechanism to protect one's sense of worth. An example of this is Agua Fría's first encounter with Respy. When the young man is not duly impressed with the fact that Agua Fría's anterior has just died, which as mentioned signals her passage into adulthood, she overcomes her irritation with the thought that, "a fin de cuentas no es más que un varón" (17).

In other instances the belief in gender-superiority serves to reinforce and protect the beliefs of the community. A clear example of this is Pedernal's challenge to Agua Fría that he as well, even though he is a man, is capable of dominating the art of hypnosis if only taught. Agua Fría's immediate reaction of stupefaction is one determined by years of political indoctrinization and gender-specific socialization:

Eso no era posible, reflexionó Agua Fría. Iba en contra de la Ley, en contra de la costumbre inmemorial; era pecaminoso y era inútil, porque Pedernal nunca conseguiría aprender ese saber

supremo; era peligroso, porque, de ser descubiertos, sufrirían un penosísimo castigo.

(57)

And in fact, this absolute belief in gender superiority is an essential part of the propagation of the society in its present form. In the great majority of cases it facilitates the avoidance of challenges to the validity of the system because these challenges are officially deemed ludicrous. This is fundamental to the system's survival because if one dares to question the validity of a tenet, as does Agua Fría when she realizes that Pedernal is not genetically incapable of learning hypnosis, then the validity of the remaining ones comes into question.

Nonetheless, the insidious, pervasive, and persistent nature of official stereotyping is clearly highlighted in Temblor. Even an intelligent, independent, and reasonable individual like Agua Fría, who discovers first hand the duplicity of the matriarchal regime and the falsity of the stereotypes propagated by it, is unable to ever completely liberate herself from its sexist beliefs. The problems that this creates are illustrated repeatedly throughout the novel. Examples of the destructive effects of Agua Fría's ingrained gender-based sense of superiority can be observed on a personal level with affective relationships, as in the case of Mo, on a community level with the resistance to egalitarian integration, as seen during her stay in Renacimiento, and

ultimately on the level of personal survival as illustrated by her encounter with the Uma tribe.

The most telling example however of the destructiveness of sexism is the regime itself. As the preceding examples clearly illustrate, the simple substitution of one type of official sexism, patriarchal rule, for another, matriarchal rule, does not resolve the problems facing society. This last point is the moral to Montero's parable on sexism. As we have seen, the structure of sexism in Temblor consciously mirrors that of our own society, beginning with its biological, supposedly "natural" origins, through its perpetuation by the keepers of power by means such as historical distortion, exclusionary tactics, and the creation of convenient stereotypes, to its quite possibly not uncertain future.

The immediate goal of this, as we have seen in prior Montero novels, is to once again highlight the injustices of sexism, but this time intentionally from both side of the equation. By combining both the sexism of the protagonist's society against men, as well as that of the Uma's against women, the author takes a stand against the very concept of sexism, oppression based on gender, be it male or female.

The denouncement of sexism however, is not the extent of the author's intentions on this subject. Forging into territory not explored in prior novels, Montero also comments on the nature of a society free from sexism and the possibility of its perpetuation. Two examples of this type of

society are encountered in the novel, the egalitarian society developed by the survivors of the Great Catastrophe and Renacimiento. In both cases the basis of the society is equality, between and the sexes as well as within them. This results in a society that not only is free from sexism but hierarchies as well; all decisions are made by means of assemblies that spread power horizontally, not vertically.

As one would expect, the idea of happiness is associated with the individual's relationship to this type of society. But in both cases the element of boredom is also pointedly included. Océano describes the colonist's society as "un mundo feliz y aburridísimo" (240), and Agua Fría's reaction to life in Renacimiento is much the same, "La placidez de esa pequeña sociedad le crispaba los nervios" (118), clearly indicating that life in a non-discriminatory society is not for everyone.

Further evidence that the absence of sexism is not the cure-all for society's ills can be observed in the final outcome of both societies. Although each does prosper for a period of time, that of the colonists' being several centuries, when a crisis-provoked element of discord is introduced into the societies both are destroyed by the response, which in each case centers on the issue of power. Thus, although it is evident that the author's conception of a utopian society would be one free from sexism, it is equally

clear that she considers the elimination of sexism to be but one of the keys to peaceful cohabitation.

The primary impediment to a utopian state, as indicated by the whole of Montero's narrative, is the question of power. From Crónica through Temblor, the author consistently singles out the issue of power, both on an organizational level and an individual one, as the principal element of discord in human relations. In Temblor, the representation of power at the organizational level is clearly intended, as was the case with the issue of sexism, to mirror the configurations of power in our own society. The critique of Western-style corporate capitalism at the center of Amado amo, has in Temblor been shifted to the governmental level.

This change of venue of the power issue in Temblor both incorporates and amplifies elements examined in prior novels. An example of this can be observed in the power structure of Magenta's ruling class which, in its classic triangular-structure, is similar to those encountered in the Golden Line as well as the newspaper where Crónica's Ana works. As in both of these cases, the framework of the power structure is maintained by an intricate web of hierarchies whose subordinates are motivated to rise to the highest level possible by the conferring of privileges and power. And as in Amado amo and Crónica, the achievement of the highest level of power is an illusory goal because in reality

it is limited to only an elite minority, in this case the daughters of the Gran Sacerdotisa.

However, by shifting these familiar structures to the governmental level Montero is able to magnify the scope of power relations. On an immediately apparent level the quantitative disparity created by a triangular power structure between those who rule and those who are subjected to rule becomes more dramatic. This is reflected as well on the qualitative level where the enriched nature of the ruling class's powers and privileges is more absolute. Not only do they control every aspect of their subjects' lives, they are able to directly terminate them as well. These increased privileges in turn intensify the drive of those in the hierarchy to ascend to or retain a certain level of power, as exemplified by the case of Pedernal.

With regard to the maintenance and reinforcement of the power structure, the familiar tactics of manipulation and secrecy are employed, but the malevolent nature of the tactics is amplified. Case in point is the indoctrination of the disciples. Fundamentally similar to a corporation's push to make all employees toe the company line, the primary goal of the indoctrination process is to suppress all manifestations of independent thinking on the part of the disciples so as to ensure ideological continuity and facilitate manipulation.

The means employed however at this level are more extreme; the goal is achieved through an extremely cruel

disciplinary regime that teaches the disciples to automatically obey their superiors, or to suffer physical retribution. The severity of this retribution depends on the type of insubordination; minor transgressions are usually dealt with by beatings, but more dangerous cases, such as those of independent thought, are subject to amputation. This is how Agua Fría loses her little finger, she openly rebels against the priestess's teachings by refusing to accept an explanation she knows to be untrue.

These tactics moreover are not limited to those who form part of the hierarchy. Due to the great numerical disproportion between the apex and the base of the triangular power structure, absolute control over the masses is a necessity. This is achieved in part by the strict enforcement of ideological precepts; any deviation from the precepts is deemed punishable heresy and must be publicly denounced. Another method employed is a plethora of obligatory rituals that each subject must dutifully perform which effectively restricts their individual thinking. Also utilized is the proverbial carrot on a stick, in this case the extension of the possibility to form part of the hierarchy if one lives up to society's rules.

All of these tactics illustrate the same fundamental lesson on power encountered in prior novels: that those in power will go to extreme lengths to preserve their position. Once again we find that in this novel the destructiveness of

these lengths is amplified, the ultimate example being Océano. So determined is the Gran Sacerdotisa to maintain her position of supreme power that she is willing to let not only the entire society perish, but herself as well.

From the preceding examples it is clear that once again, the structure, tactics, and nature of governmental power in Temblor are not accidental, they are an allegory intended to critique similar power structures in our world. The extreme danger of entrenched hierarchies composed of a minority who determine the course of events for millions according to their own personal agenda and who would sacrifice the former to the latter is quite evident. And while the destructiveness of the example offered in Temblor, and perceived just below the surface in today's world, is sobering, the fact that a small group of determined individuals are able to impede the complete destruction of their society by those in power is an extension of hope.

The nature of this hope however is clearly one of guarded optimism. This is illustrated by the way in which the novel ends; although the matriarchal regime that ruled from Talapot is destroyed, the oppressive structures of power and hierarchies are not. Instead, the matriarchal regime will be supplanted by a different regime, one ruled by el Negro, that will substitute its value system ["un mundo disciplinado y duro, eficaz y desolador, carente de reflexión y sentimientos"

(247)] for those of the former and will establish its own criteria for discrimination ["El triunfo de la fuerza" (247)].

The fundamental cause of this is observed repeatedly throughout the novel, power is so seductive that it is difficult for individuals to relinquish it once attained. This is illustrated by the actions of Océano, Oxígeno, Dogal, and even the protagonist. The case of the latter with regard to hypnosis highlights the attraction of power even for those conscious of its ensnaring mechanisms. When Agua Fría learns during her indoctrination that the highly valued skill of hypnosis is accessible only to women she immediately feels a sense of personal superiority to men, "predestinada y poderosa, rozada por el dedo del misterio" (55) as she explains. Once she acquires this skill, although she repudiates many of the concepts and privileges of the matriarchal regime, she never relinquishes this one, it forms an integral part of her sense of self-worth and her sense of security.

In this manner Temblor illustrates that one of the central impediments to an egalitarian society is the issue of power, not only at the organizational level but more fundamentally at the individual level. Because human nature is so susceptible to the ego boosts provided by the acquisition of power the possibility for a horizontally constructed society, although not impossible, is much more difficult.

Another issue that is tied to and viewed in much the same light as power is that of organized religion. Unlike its counterpart however, in prior Montero novels the issue of religion stands out more for its absence than its presence. As we have seen, although Montero consistently includes themes that would easily lend themselves to an examination from a religious perspective (abortion, hetero/homosexual relations, suicide, etc.), only infrequently is religion mentioned in conjunction with them. Even on a personal level the question of religion is notably absent, only in counted occasions do characters in these novels turn to religion in search of answers or solace.

However, when Montero's narrative does touch upon some aspect of the issue, the treatment it is accorded anticipates that observed in Temblor. This can be seen in two very representative incidents, the first is that of the irreverent likening of the Golden Line's organizational hierarchy to that of Heaven's in Amado amo (147-148), and the second is the dismissive attitude of Antonia's priest toward her during confession in Te trataré (21-22). In both cases, the author's critique focuses not on the question of faith itself but rather on specific human-related issues and their effect on the faithful, in these cases the organizational aspect of religion and the behavior of its representatives. This same focus holds true with respect to Temblor. Although much more extensive and direct, the criticism of religion in this novel

is directed not at the question of faith itself, but rather at specific people-controlled issues.

Two of the central issues are those just mentioned in conjunction with prior novels, the organizational aspect of religion and the conduct of religious representatives. With regard to the first, although the specific organization of the religious order that rules from Talapot and the ranking of its members does not follow that of any denomination in particular, in general terms it does mirror that of most in that it is based on the concept of hierarchy. Two basic components of hierarchy, as we have seen in the previous section, are inequality and the drive for power, both of which are abundantly evident in the religious order that rules Agua Fría's world.

As we have seen in the words of Duermevela⁴⁴, inequality is one of the basic precepts of the religious order of this world. The institutionalization of this inequality is what permits the elite minority to rule over the great majority. This is achieved by establishing in the minds of those ruled that certain qualities, evidently those conveniently chosen by the individuals in power, are superior to others. The

⁴⁴The first part of this quote appears on page 318 of this chapter. The following lines which demonstrate the range of the concept finish the quote, "A las mentes más desarrolladas se nos ha otorgado el privilegio de pertenecer a la orden sacerdotal, de convertirnos en los guardianes de la norma. Y aun entre nosotros sigue habiendo rangos, desde los humildes Hermanos Intendentes hasta alcanzar la estirpe de las grandes sacerdotisas, de las Madres Supremas, que no aconsejan y nos guían" (58).

entrenchment of the superiority of these qualities in the minds of the masses is achieved by linking them to religious precepts which, because the state and religion are one, are totally disseminated throughout the entire population, are obediently accepted, and are strictly enforced. In this manner the organizational apparatus of this society's religion is able to maintain its authority and perpetuate its existence.

The dangers of such a hierarchy-based religious structure are clearly illustrated in the novel. One of the primary ones is the very alteration of the nature of the religious organization. The latter, which is meant to serve as a conduit between the divine and the secular, when faced with the temptations and pressures that hierarchies entail may instead become an end in itself. This is clearly observed in the actions of the religious community throughout the narration; as a group they are more than willing to sacrifice the entire community they are supposed to serve in order to perpetuate their organization.

The means that the religious community as a whole employs to achieve this end includes the alteration of the religion itself. The latter, which is intended to serve divine intentions, instead is made to serve its human apparatus. In Temblor this is easily observed with regard to the elaboration of religious precepts. These, which are depicted to the faithful as never-changing truths, in reality reflect not the

truth but rather the desire and need of the rulers to perpetuate the religious organization. Examples of these deceitful yet functional precepts are illustrated throughout the novel, ranging from simple manipulations to achieve authority over the disciples to the magnitude of those that alter fundamental knowledge in order to manipulate the general populace.

The enforcement of these altered precepts brings up another major criticism related to religion, the behavior of the religious representatives. Although it is made clear that the altering of the nature of religion is spiritually harmful to the faithful, special emphasis is put on the physical harm incurred by those that challenge the erroneous precepts. The latter, who are deemed heretics, must be publicly denounced and punished. These punishments, which are graphically described on several occasions, range from simple amputations of body parts to ceremonial torture ending in death. Because the religious community knows the precepts to be false, this focus on the punishment highlights on one level their hypocrisy with regard to the position from which they make decisions, and on another the extent to which they go to preserve the organization. As Océano chillingly admits when Agua Fría questions her about how she was able to sentence innocent people to death, "Pareces tonta, querida. No es una cuestión de herejías ni de pureza religiosa. Es, como resulta obvio, un asunto de poder" (237).

The issue of individual power within the religious community is another area that is strongly criticized in the novel. Due to the hierarchical nature of the organization, the drive to succeed and to rise in the organization is considered a positive attribute. However, this quest for power may deform the spirit of the individual as is dramatically illustrated in the case of Pedernal. A childhood friend of the protagonist before being taken to Talapot, once reunited in the disciple training Perdernal and Agua Fria form an even closer friendship that overcomes the strictly imposed ban on inter-disciple communication. During this period Perdernal proves to be a loyal friend, comforting the protagonist both emotionally and physically, sparing her physical punishment by accepting it himself, sharing knowledge with her, and even participating at great risk in an escape from Talapot with her. During the latter in fact Perdernal proves just how true a friend he is by telling the protagonist to go ahead and leave him behind when the plans go awry, exchanging his life for hers.

The failed escape however is the turning point in Pedernal's life and character. In exchange for his life, Pedernal is forced to publicly confess, among other things, his part in the escape. Although as punishment his left hand is amputated, he is permitted to remain in the religious organization and, thanks to his ambition, makes what he terms "una buena carrera," becoming the first male to obtain the

rank of cobalt tunic. This success however, as Perdernal himself insinuates, clearly has been at great personal cost. Although he does not enumerate the details of the latter, when Pedernal betrays Agua Fría during her attempt to save the kingdom the reader quickly understands what has been the primary one, his soul. Perdernal coldly calculates the chances of his former friend and lover's group to overcome those of his own and opts for the latter, discovering Agua Fría's presence to Piel de Azúcar. The issue of loyalty is never even a question because, as Pedernal the "sacerdote cobalto," points out, "Yo sólo me debo lealtad a mí mismo" (232).

Although certain aspects of the dramatic character change in Pedernal can be attributed to his own personality traits, the focus of the criticism is not on an individual's weaknesses but rather the negative combination of these human weaknesses with the structure, goals, and methods of the religious organization. As was the case with power, Temblor holds up to criticism specific aspects of organized religion without neglecting the role of the individual in these problems.

This is clearly illustrated by one of the primary criticisms leveled at religion, the danger of the individual's absolute belief in religious dogma. One primary risk that is repeatedly depicted is that this belief blinds the individual to the reality of his or her environment. This can be clearly

observed in the evident manipulation of the disciples' minds during their initiation period. Although their senses convey one vision of reality, it is suppressed in order to accommodate the vision demanded by religious dogma. This same risk is dramatically illustrated on the level of the masses as well; despite overwhelming empirical evidence that the world is not immutable as religious dogma states, the masses continue to resist acceptance of this fact.

While this blindness to reality is serious, an even greater peril is the refutation of the dogma. If the dogma in which the masses base their sense of reality and identity is proven untrue, as is the case in Temblores, the majority then find themselves without a base from which to function, and without the skills to deal with the new situation. The result is a desperate chaos that destroys not only the individual but the society as well. This can be clearly observed in the Magenta that Ague Fria encounters upon her return:

...entraron en Magenta, cuyas puertas, arrancadas de los monumentales goznes, ya no cuidaba nadie. Porque en la ciudad reinaba la más terrible confusión. Las gentes dormían, malvivían y agonizaban en las abarrotadas calles, y en las aceras se mezclaban los desdichados vivos con yertos cadáveres que nadie se había ocupado en retirar...Se escuchaba por doquier una ensordecedora algarabía, gritos, llantos,

discusiones, cánticos religiosos, juramentos blasfemos y soflamas. (220)

In Temblor the individuals that survive spiritually intact the downfall of the religious dogma are those that had already begun to question its validity, such as the renegades from Renacimiento, or those that had been less influenced by it, such as the hardy residents of out-lying regions of the society.

Nowhere however is the questioning of one's fundamental attitude toward life more apparent than in the issue of death. As we have seen, death plays a prominent role in all of Montero's novels, and in this novel, as in Función, death is the catalyst for the entire narrative. As already mentioned, it is due to the society of Magenta's desire to conquer death through an association of the death ritual with memory that leads to the imbalance of power that triggers the decline of the society. In addition to its function of catalyst, death is also one of, if not the, central issue of the novel because it not only touches every single character of the book, but is the driving force behind their behavior as well. As a result, the primary focus on the issue is from a perspective we have already observed in Montero's narrative, that of the individual's attitudes toward death.

These attitudes are revealed primarily through the individual's contact with death. In Temblor this contact covers a wide range of types of death; examples of all of the

types of death encountered in prior novels are present -death from aging, accidental death, suicide, and murder- with the exception of death from terminal illness and with the important addition of collective suicide, execution, and death from battle. Also as in prior novels, there is a notable emphasis on the manner in which individuals die which is frequently quite graphically described. The latter, as already observed in Montero's narrative, is not gratuitous but rather used as a shock technique to drive home the reality of death by making the character involved, and the reader as well, turn-off his or her mental automatic pilot and confront basic issues. In this manner, individuals' attitudes toward death are concretized.

In the society ruled from Magenta however, as in most contemporary societies, individuals' attitudes toward death are highly conditioned by the religious precepts of the society. These precepts, which on a certain level are particular to this religion, in general reflect the common human desire to vanquish death as well as the uncertainty and fear that surround it through the creation of an eternal life. As we have seen, in Magenta this eternal life is achieved through the institution of the anteriores which is based on the idea of continuance through memory. Thus, although one's body may die, the spirit does not because it has been transmitted in the form of memory to an apprentice.

As in many contemporary religions however, this creation of eternity, while offering solace to the human spirit, also serves as a method to control individuals. In order to attain the rewards one must strictly follow the religious precepts. Those who do not are denied access to eternity and must suffer what the religion of Magenta terms "la muerte verdadera," their memory is not passed down to anyone and they cease to exist both physically and spiritually. Because of this, a dichotomy is established between the two types of death; that which leads to eternity is considered positive while "la muerte verdadera" is viewed with terrible fear and anxiety.

This dichotomy evidently influences to a great extent the reactions and behaviors of individuals to the death of another. This can be easily observed in the responses of Agua Fría to the death of those that surround her. The first of these, that of Corcho Quemado, on the surface epitomizes the type of death idealized by the protagonist's society. Corcho Quemado dies of old age after having been appointed an anterior and after successfully transmitting her memories to Agua Fría. The description of her passing reinforces the idealized vision of an easy and fearless death promised to those who faithfully follow the religious precepts:

Corcho Quemado dejó caer la cabeza. Su cuerpo se estremeció ligeramente y después se distendió hasta alcanzar una quietud relajada y perfecta. Eso fue todo. Qué fácil, pensó Agua Fría, contemplando el

diminuto y sereno cadáver. Qué fácil era morir cuando no se trataba de la muerte verdadera. (15)

The religious and socializing effects of this type of death on those who presence it are illustrated by the above thoughts of Agua Fría; because Corcho Quemado's death followed the prescribed course of expected events, the protagonist views it as a confirmation of religious doctrine. This in turn serves as a motivation factor for the protagonist; after the death of her anterior, Agua Fría's first goal upon stepping out into the adult world is "convertirse en una mujer tan sabia y tan notable que los sacerdotes le concederían el privilegio de acudir a la Casa de los Grandes: sería elegida Anterior y se salvaría de la muerte verdadera" (17).

Another effect of this type of death is that of desensitization. Because the events leading up to it, and those that follow are so programmed and embedded in ritual, they distance the reality of death from those that presence it, thus making death easier to accept and less frightening. This can be observed in the reaction of Agua Fría who expresses little pain over the death of the woman with whom she had shared the last two years of her life. This image of death however, despite being that idealized by religion, does not accurately portray the type of death experienced by the overwhelming number of individuals in the empire. In fact, Corcho Quemado's peaceful, ritually conserved death is

the only one depicted in the novel.⁴⁵ Thus, an important part of Agua Fria's journey is one of learning to confront and understand "la muerte verdadera."

This journey begins almost immediately upon Agua Fria's reentrance into society. Her initiation complete, and embedded with the teachings of her religion, the protagonist returns home only to encounter that her mother had been killed the day before. Although she does not witness the gruesome accident, Oxígeno does not spare her any of the horrifying details of the physical reality of her mother's death as the following passage shows:

Ayer fue día de mercado y a unos vaqueros se les escapó el semental. El toro corrió por la ciudad enceguecido, perseguido por sus dueños; y entró en esta calle al mismo tiempo que tu madre. No la corneó: simplemente la aplastó contra el muro...El semental le hundió las costillas y le destrozó los pulmones, pero vivió todavía un buen rato. Se ahogaba, ¿sabes? No podía respirar. Cada brizna de aire era un dolor...Luchaba con todas sus fuerzas por respirar. Se incorporaba espasmódicamente en busca de aire, abría la boca y

⁴⁵Corcho Quemado's death also ironically highlights the question of fate with relation to the manner in which one dies because, as the reader learns later in the novel, Corcho Quemado was not one of the faithful to whom this type of death is promised, but rather one of the rebels against the society's religion and laws.

dilataba ávidamente las narices, pero sus pulmones rotos la asfixiaban. Luego empezó a toser y a escupir sangre, con los ojos desorbitados por el pánico. (25)

Already overwhelmed by the painful knowledge that her mother died "la muerte verdadera," the visualization of her mother's agony intensifies Agua Fría's grief. The purpose however of relating the event, while most certainly reflecting in part the cruel nature of Oxígeno, is to disabuse the protagonist of the image of death created by her experience with her anterior. "La muerte verdadera," as Oxígeno purposely comments, "no tiene la placidez de la muerte en la Casa de los Grandes" (25).

The physical reality of this new face of death is driven home to the protagonist in the following sequence. Before even having time to grieve the loss of her mother, a priest arrives to take Agua Fría to Talapot. En route, the protagonist witnesses the brutal execution by dismemberment of a heretic. The graphic description of the event this time can only be less horrifying than what Agua Fría herself sees, and her reaction, paralyzed disbelief followed by physical revulsion, testifies to the impact of the execution. Thus, by the time Agua Fría enters Talapot, she has experienced two of the most important factors of "la muerte verdadera," its physical reality and the enormous emotional loss it causes.

Although both of these aspects are very significant at the time for the protagonist, even more important to her future understanding of the nature of death however is the seed of doubt that is sown during these experiences with regard to the vision of death propagated by her religion. This doubt springs from two specific questions that arise from the death of her mother and the execution of the heretic; if her mother possessed all the qualities to be designated anterior, why was she not so designated and hence condemned to "la muerte verdadera"? and why execute someone who dreamed of changing the world if the world, as the Ley specifies is immutable? These doubts, combined with Agua Fría's experiences in Talapot, are what enable her to begin to question the vision of death indoctrinated by her society's religion.

As Agua Fría proceeds through her adventures, this questioning is facilitated through her encounters with many different types of death, including almost her own. Although each of these experiences does help her to form ideas on the nature of death, such as the painful role memory plays⁴⁶ and

⁴⁶The protagonist's close brush with death on the way to Renacimiento makes her realize that memory alone can make death a very painful experience as the following passage shows, "Sintió entonces un agudo dolor, una melancolía profunda, porque el espejismo había despertado su memoria y, con ella, la nostalgia de la vida. Qué duro es esto, pensó" (112).

death's relation to chance⁴⁷, it is not until she views death from a perspective completely different from that of her own society that she is able to transcend the differing particulars that surround death to arrive at the basic issues.

This occurs when Agua Fría enters into contact with the Uma, a primitive tribe living in a remote region. In hopes of finding the answer to her own society's problems, the protagonist seeks out this tribe because they seem to possess a secret against death, their women are fertile and, despite the fact that all of the members die "la muerte verdadera," the physical limits of their world are not fading away. Although she does not find the specific key to saving her society, Agua Fría does through the Uma come to understand the ultimate destiny of all humans:

Pero ahora comprendía que la existencia entera de la tribu era una batalla contra el fin. Lo mismo que la de todos los otros pueblos del planeta. La vida de los humanos, en definitiva, no era sino un desesperado y siempre fracasado combate contra la muerte. (210)

An important part of this struggle against death are the rituals and symbols that each society invents as a means of

⁴⁷One of the most traumatic yet important lessons that Agua Fría learns on death is its relationship to chance and the ordering of the universe which, as Oxígeno signals, is arbitrary and not by design, "Que el mundo no se rige por la necesidad, sino por el azar. Es ésta una sabiduría muy dolorosa, desde luego, porque supone admitir el sinsentido de la existencia" (170).

commemorating and/or fighting off death. Because of her contact with the Uma and their death ritual, Agua Fría is able to reach the very important understanding that the priestesses, the Crystal, and the Ley are all simply products of her society's battle against death. Equally important she also realizes that all of these symbols, although not totally useless because they do provide a certain solace to the survivors, are impotent against death itself. As implied by the paragraphs immediately following Agua Fría's revelation (210-211), the only effective weapon in the war on death is that of procreation.

An important aspect of procreation observed in the passages with the Uma is that of its close relationship with death. In the Uma tribe, where women are still fertile, life and death are perceived as forming an integral part of each other. This is evidenced in their springtime death ritual which both commemorates the dead as well as celebrates life. In the society of Magenta however, this natural balance was disrupted by the dichotomization of death. The use of the Crystal, that once formed part of the general populace's simple ritual to commemorate the dead, came to represent an attempt to eternize part of the cycle, to escape death, for a select portion of the population. Although the motivation for this symbolic transformation was clearly that of power, the imbalance it caused had a dramatic effect on the balance between life and death. It is during the period of this

transformation that procreation, the primary weapon against death, started to decline to later become non-existent.

The enormous representative importance of the Crystal is confirmed by the end of the novel; it is its very destruction, and hence the symbolic destruction of Magenta's particular vision of life and death, that proportions what will be the beginning of a new Magenta. Although it is not concretely confirmed that fertility returns to the community, we do know that one member who has already confronted her society's vision of life and death, Agua Fría, does conceive. Quite significantly however, her conception is closely tied to the cycle of life and death; Agua Fría loses her companion and the father of her child, Zao, during the final struggle. Yet the naturalness of this eternal cycle of beginnings and endings is symbolized by one of the final passages of the novel:

La tarde moría y el sol bañaba la explanada con un resplandor turbulento y rojizo. Era un sol de sangre, el mismo sol que, diez años atrás, había bautizado su iniciación y acompañado el fluir de su primera regla. Hoy aquellas sangres tempranas se habían transmutado en un misterio de células encadenadas, músculos livianos y huesecillos transparentes. Se habían convertido en la vida que latía y crecía dentro de ella. (249)

Nonetheless, despite the fact that death forms part of a natural and inevitable cycle, it is clear that humans still

continue to struggle against death. While ultimately this struggle is not successful, Temblor does attest to at least partial success in the control of one's destiny as evidenced by the defeat of the fogs that threaten the existence of Magenta. An interesting aspect of this success however is the means by which it is achieved, not by individual action but rather group action. While this echoes Oxígeno's earlier words of advice to Agua Fría that "sumando nuestros sueños y nuestras voluntades microscópicas, a veces conseguimos influir en el devenir del universo" (171), it does appear to stand in contrast to the examples of community portrayed in the novel, all of which either fail or result in the destruction of the community, and the final example of the protagonist who, choosing not to participate in the rebuilding of a community, ventures out on her own to find her place in the universe.

This apparent contradiction however in reality reflects the human need for and inability to attain true communication. The latter, which has been one of the key issues of Montero's narrative, reappears forcefully once again in Temblor. As in prior novels, the issue of communication is represented primarily through the male/female relationship. Despite the importance of women in this matriarchal society, the most significant human relationships that Agua Fría establishes during the narrative are with men, Pedernal, Respy, Mo, and Zao.

Although all of these relationships form for different reasons, one of the basic functions of each is to combat solitude. The latter, also a driving force in the relationships portrayed in prior novels, is described as well in Temblor in negative terms as evidenced in the passage that deals with Agua Fría's departure from Renacimiento:

Fueron éstos los tiempos más amargos, más oscuros y tristes de su vida. Conoció Agua Fría el sabor de la completa soledad; los días se sucedían opacamente sin tener a nadie en quien contemplarse para rescatar, en su mirada de testigo, la certidumbre de la propia vida. Nadie la esperaba, nadie la conocía, nadie la recordaba. (134)

Yet, despite this powerful motivator, it is evident that each of Agua Fría's relationships, if it had been allowed to proceed, would have ended in failure. The reason for this appears to lie in the fact that, despite a mutual emotional, psychological, and physical need, there exists a basic incompatibility between men and women that can not be overcome through communication. This is clearly illustrated by Agua Fría's relationship with Mo. Despite months of cohabitation and communication, facilitated by the extraordinary advantage that Mo's "anterior" was a woman who passed on to him the knowledge of "los recovecos de una mente femenina" (128), the couple is never able to discuss their very different basic attitude toward life, which ultimately is the cause of their

separation. This lack of communication is highlighted again in her relationship with Zao. Upon his death Agua Fría realizes that any illusion she had of their mutual understanding was just that, an illusion:

Recordaba ahora Agua Fría esos momentos mágicos, después de hacer amor, o en un paseo por el bosque, o junto al fuego, cuando atinaban los dos a reír por las mismas cosas y llegaban a creer, por un fugaz instante, que se entendían mutuamente. Un espejismo de amorosa identidad que se desvanecía después en la desconfianza, en el malentendido, en el brusco entrechocar de sus voluntades contrapuestas. (228)

In the end, Agua Fría's solitary departure from Magenta appears to confirm that her thoughts on her relationship with Zao referred not to just that relationship but rather in general to true communication between men and women.

While Agua Fría is not able to fully communicate with other humans, she does form an important relationship, based on gestures and actions and not often misleading words, with her female dog Bruna. Given to her by her "anterior," Bruna is more than just the protagonist's companion throughout her adventures; she is her comfort in moments of solitude and her savior in moments of danger.

So intense is Agua Fría's love for her loyal little dog that when Bruna is killed trying to save her, in her grief Agua

Fría desperately tries to employ the "mirada preservativa," a technique for visual preservation of material items, on Bruna. Although the technique apparently does not function and Agua Fría must bury her beloved companion, at the end of the novel the protagonist reencounters Bruna, or a dog that "tenía que ser Bruna" (247), after the destruction of the temple. This unexpected and almost magical reunion of the two friends at the end the novel reiterates the importance of their friendship; as a pregnant Agua Fría walks off into the sunset in search of her place in the universe she is not alone, she is accompanied by her most loyal companion, Bruna.

This ending, although certainly bittersweet in many aspects, is the most positive of any in Montero's narrative to this point. This is because the protagonist, thanks to her intelligence and her experiences, is largely able to move beyond the inculcated teachings of her society to confront and question the basic issues of life on her own terms. As we have seen, the road to this point has been extremely difficult, filled with the pain and sense of loss that accompany the collapse of one's life-orienting teachings and values. Yet, as Oxígeno points out at the beginning of the novel, although the truth may be painful, "A la larga, siempre resulta más dolorosa la ignorancia" (25).

This quest for the truth, in reality, is one of the guiding points of Temblor. As we have clearly seen, Temblor is a structurally circular novel. This circularity is

reiterated at the thematic level with regard to the question of truth. Agua Fría sets out from Talapot in search of "the truth" that will save her society as well as herself. Although she encounters several individuals that she hopes will lead her to the truth, this does not occur until returns to her original point of departure, Talapot. It is upon the destruction of the Crystal that the protagonist realizes that a single monolithic truth (symbolized by the Crystal) can not exist outside of oneself, the truth rather must spring from the inside of one:

Nunca más la tiranía de la Ley, nunca más el embrutecimiento de los dogmas: para ser libres, los humanos tenían que aspirar a la omnisciencia de los dioses. La voluntad y la razón creaban mundos.
(250)

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CONCLUSION

An uninitiated glance at Rosa Montero's narrative might conclude that novels so apparently different as are Crónica del desamor, La función delta, Te trataré como a una reina, Amado amo and Temblor have little in common and comprise a narrative trajectory that emphasizes change. However, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, the essence of Rosa Montero's narrative is in reality of a dual nature, on one level it is constantly-evolving, yet on the other there is an evident continuity. This duality is expressed through the fundamental components of the author's narrative: structure, characterization, and themes.

The structure of Montero's novels is a good example of this. As the preceding chapters have shown, although on the surface the structure of each novel is different, there are several basic similarities that unite them all. Some of these relate to technique as we have seen, but the most fundamental similarity is that of functional adequateness. The evolution of the structures of Montero's novels makes apparent that change is an important component of the author's narrative. Some of this change evidently is the result of novelistic maturation on the part of the author, but the major source of

it is Montero's conscious, and on-going experimentation to find exactly the right structure to most adequately convey the content of each novel.

This concern is evident even in Montero's first novel, Crónica, whose structure is closely tied to the characterization and the themes of the novel in order to convey the fundamental intent of each. This is achieved on one level by alternating the focus of the novel's fourteen chapters between the protagonist and the secondary characters. From this alternation a sense of collective protagonism emerges, which is precisely the goal declared by the protagonist/author Ana Antón at the onset of the novel. To structurally reflect the goal of the themes however this technique is reversed; the two primary thematic groups of the novel, particular concerns and universal concerns, are not alternated but rather consistently merged, revealing that these two aspects are absolutely interrelated.

The author's desire for structural change that best reflects content is evident in Función as well. Montero continues the use of the technique of chapter alternation seen in Crónica, but in Función this alternation revolves not around different characters but rather two different time-levels: that of the protagonist's past which is conveyed by means of her memoir, and that of her present conveyed by her diary. The author chooses this particular structure in order to contrast two different temporal perspectives on key

thematic issues. However, the results of this structure also raise some interesting literary questions, such as the traditional relationship of the narrator and the narratee, and the use and function of the memoir and diary genres. This questioning of literary functions on one level leads to one of the most basic aspects of the themes -the questioning of one's own function.

The continuance of the idea of change and similarity is apparent even in the structure of the notably distinct Te trataré. Springing from a narrative world that is quite unlike those of Crónica and Función, this novel is nonetheless constructed with several of the techniques encountered in previous novels. One that is fundamental to Te trataré is the alternation of chapters that revolves around characters, this time not to create a sense of collectivity but rather one of multiple perspectives. The latter is further by the incorporation of another technique from a previous novel, that of the use of insertions in the narrative. The insertions, employed in Función in a secondary manner, here acquire a much more important role: in conjunction with the chapter alternation, they function to create multiple perspectives which have an important and direct effect upon the characterization and the themes of the novel. The results of this, combined with structural elements not used previously (nor afterwards), those pertaining to the novela negra, lead to one of the primary goals of the novel, a double reading.

This careful interweaving of the structure into the main components of the novel is also evident in Amado amo. This is achieved once again by combining new structural techniques with those already familiar from previous novels. An example of the latter is the basic form of the novel's structure which is based on chapter alternation. The alternation in this case however is different, revolving not around characters but rather the changes of local of one character, the protagonist. This particular form serves to clarify the focal point of the novel and, through a specific pattern of alternation, functions as a thematic organizer.

In addition to the alternation of local, the structure of Amado amo is also closely tied to a temporal alternation that serves to create a sense of circularity. The importance of this effect is evidenced in the fact that the construction of the individual chapters is circular as well. The chapter's circular structure, in addition to contributing to characterization, plays an important role in promoting the reexamination and redefinition of the themes, one of the primary goals of the novel.

The importance of circularity observed in Amado amo is carried over as well into the structure of Temblor. As in its predecessor, the novel's circularity is both structural (based primarily upon local) and thematic. In addition, a pattern of alternation within the chapters contributes to the sense of circularity. This alternation, which springs from the very

core of the themes -an alternation between life and death-, underscores what has by now become a constant in the structure of Montero's novels: the close relationship of the structure with the characterization and the themes that is achieved by the author's continual experimentation in search of the most appropriate form for each novel.

As with structure, an examination of the novel's characterization reveals that the evident development in the author's characterization skills springs from both the incorporation of new techniques as well as the honing of those that are present from novel to novel. An important example of the latter that reappears with frequency in Montero's narrative is what I have termed the snapshot technique. This technique, which has its roots in the author's interviews, serves to create an immediate, and lasting impression of a character from his/or her initial presentation. Among its advantages is its ability to communicate the essence of a character in a brief space; for this reason it is repeatedly used for the characterization of secondary figures throughout Montero's narrative.

One of its disadvantages however is that its exclusive use does not render well-rounded characters. Because of this in several novels the author combines the use of the snapshot technique, or a modified version of it, with other techniques to create fuller characters. This is generally observed in novels where not as many characters intervene or in the case

of more important characters. An example of this can be observed in the characterization of Te trataré's Bella. The initial characterization of Bella is established by the snapshot image presented in the first pages of the novel. This image however is not the sole basis of her characterization which instead is achieved by combining the snapshot technique with other two techniques that reappear on several occasions in Montero's narrative, that of undermining and that of perspectivism.

The first of these, undermining, functions to gradually deteriorate a particular image of a character. Regardless of the provenience of this image, its deterioration is accomplished primarily through the contrasting of the character in question with his or her own words and actions. For example in the case of Bella, the initial image presented of her is an unfavorable, sensationalist, and biased image that is created by a reporter which, as the novel progresses, is undermined slowly by Bella's words and actions. In that of Lucía in Función on the other hand, the image undermined is that that the protagonist-narrator strives throughout the length of the novel to create. Yet as in the first case, this image is eroded by the disparities of the protagonist's words and actions revealed by the two temporal levels.

The second of these techniques, perspectivism, is employed in much the same manner. Although it is utilized frequently, it is generally not used in exactly the same way.

In some instances multiple perspectives on a character are created by the use of other characters' opinions, as in Te trataré, in other instances the multiple perspectives spring from the character him/herself, as in Amado amo, or the latter aided by the perspective of a second character, as in Función. These examples highlight Montero's desire to perfect the techniques employed by exploring their different variations as well as their possibilities when combined with other techniques. This holds true for the majority of techniques (distancing, stereotyping, uses of dialog, double-reading, etc.) used for characterization.

This balance of change and continuity, so evident in the structure and characterization of these novels, is also present in the thematic component, although here similarities can be superficially more difficult to identify. At first glance, the narrative universe of each of these novels appears quite distinct. For example, the middle-class, educated, professional, and predominantly-female world of Crónica does not resemble the sordid, hopeless world that the economically and socially diverse characters of Te tratate inhabit; nor are either of these structured along the lines of the futuristic world of Temblor. However, as the examination of the thematic of each has revealed, the affinities that lie just below the surface of these narrative worlds are just as numerous and important as their apparent differences.

The reason for this is that the themes of each of Montero's novels maintain a balance between particular and universal concerns. As previously clarified, the particular concerns of the novels are the specific issues that relate directly to the group portrayed, whereas universal concerns are those issues whose importance transcends the particular group and relates to humankind in general. Each of the author's novels includes both types, although the particular mix varies from novel to novel. This is one reason for the apparent thematic differences, in some novels the particular concerns are predominant, as in Crónica, while in others the universal ones are highlighted, as in Función.

These differences are made even more apparent by the wide variety of particular concerns observed in the novels. Because the groups portrayed in each vary, their particular concerns are necessarily different. This becomes evident with just a few examples: the urgent need of Crónica's women characters for safe and reliable contraception, Lucía's struggle against cancer, Cesar's fight to retain his position in the firm, etc.. Nonetheless, while these particular concerns are superficially quite distinct, Montero makes it very clear that ultimately they are linked to basic universal concerns. An example of this is Crónica's women's search for adequate contraception. While this is clearly a problem specific to their time period and society, it is ultimately linked to the more universal concern of human sexuality. The

same holds true Lucía's struggle against cancer which is rooted in the question of death, and Cesar's fight to keep his position which is rooted in the question of power.

The nucleus of universal concerns around which Montero's narrative revolves centers on sexuality, communication, power, and death. Each of these basic areas encompasses a range of variants; for example related to death we find aging and infirmities and related to communication we find alienation and solitude. In addition, frequently an issue, depending on its treatment, is associated with several basic areas, as is the case with love which is associated with at times with power, communication, and sexuality. It is due to the numerous variants of the basic themes and their particular treatment in each novel that makes the subject matter of Montero's novels appear so distinct.

This distinctiveness is heightened by the particular thematic hierarchy of each novel. In Crónica for example the primary issues are those of love and death, while in Te trataré alienation is the predominant theme, and in Amado amo power is. Yet, despite the different approaches to the thematic issues in each novel, the same nucleus of issues is present in all of them. This is illustrated by the thematic composition of Temblor, the novel that represents the most complete and coherent vision of Montero's narrative world to date.

While it is clear that the themes of these novels do spring from a group of basic universal concerns, never does the universal aspect overpower the importance of the individual. This is because one of the basic intents of Montero's narrative is to urge the individual to reexamine set beliefs, to question society's version of reality in order to arrive at his or her own personal truths. While this search, which is achieved through the demythicizing of these beliefs caused by the characters' own individual experiences, is at times conscious, and at others clearly unconscious, the ultimate goal ^xis remains the same, to arrive at the most adequate version of personal reality.

That this goal is a reflection of Montero's own goal for her narrative illustrates the author's vision of the relationship between fiction and life. As previously signaled, it certainly appears that Montero does not accept the conventional separation between fiction and reality but rather considers that it is the interplay between the two that creates a reality for each individual. Because of this, not only can this reality be effectively explored in the novelistic form, it can also be changed.

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