Baroque bodies in post-Franco era literature by Spanish women writers from 1980-2011

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Baroque Bodies in Post-Franco Era Literature by Spanish Women Writers from 1980-2011

by

Karina Miccio Walker

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Abstract

This dissertation constitutes an exploration of what I term baroque bodies in the literary work of a selection of contemporary Spanish Peninsular authors from 1980 to the present. The texts and authors in question are a selection of poems from Los devaneos de Erato (1980), Devocionario (1985), and Indicios vehementes (1985) by Ana Rossetti, Ligeros libertinajes sabáticos (1986) by Mercedes Abad, a selection of short stories from Mi hermana Elba (1980), and El ángulo del horror (1990) by Cristina Fernández Cubas, Algún amor que no mate (1996) by Dulce Chacón, La mujer ensismismada (2001), El ojo de Newton (2005), and El faro por dentro (2011) by Menchu Gutiérrez, and Matar a Platón (2004) by Chantal Maillard. By baroque bodies I mean those representations of the body which, when viewed through the lens of a theory of the baroque, share significant characteristics with those of the historical baroque (roughly spanning from 1600 – 1750). In my exploration of what constitutes a baroque body, I focus on how these late twentieth century authors write the body into their texts and I analyze those writings from within a framework of baroque theory. In addition, I establish how the emergence of literary baroque bodies during the post-Franco era in Spain is not purely coincidental and instead can be interpreted as a reaction to the dictatorial policies and state mythos of the Franco Regime, which sought to leverage the grandeur of renaissance and baroque era Spain for the production of a national identity.

The dissertation is organized into an introduction, three sections each containing three chapters, and a conclusion. In the introduction, I establish the history of the term baroque, and the theoretical framework used to establish my use of it as a theoretical concept in the analysis of the contemporary works chosen. The chapters that follow are divided thematically into three
sections “[Un]Regulated Bodies,” “Abject Bodies,” and “Transcendent Bodies.” The chapters in the section entitled “[Un]Regulated Bodies” explore archetypal models of female sexuality and their manifestation under the rigid and gender normative Franco Regime, as well as questions of physical and psychological longing for the other, and the regulation of these desires through state symbolism and power. In the section entitled “Abject Bodies” I consider various manifestations of marginalized bodies, and explore the effects of baroque optics, such as mirrors, replication, distortions, and illusions, as well as madness as both a grotesque and marginalizing condition. In “Transcendent Bodies” I look at reverberations of mysticism in a selection of writings by tracing the philosophical debt paid to Santa Teresa de Jesús, and consider the role of the female mystic in creating a space for expression of the subject regardless of gender.
Resumen


La tesis se divide en una introducción, tres secciones principales cada cual contiene tres capítulos, y una conclusión. En la introducción establezco la historia del término barroco, y el marco teórico utilizado para trazar mi uso de éste como concepto teórico en el análisis de las obras contemporáneas elegidas. Los capítulos siguientes se dividen temáticamente en tres secciones: “[Un]Regulated Bodies,” “Abject Bodies,” y “Transcendent Bodies.” Los capítulos de
la sección titulada “[Un]Regulated Bodies” exploran modelos arquetípicos de la sexualidad femenina y su manifestación bajo la dictadura Franquista, así como cuestiones de anhelo físico y psicológico por el otro, y la regulación de estos deseos a través del simbolismo y el poder estatal. En la sección titulada “Abject Bodies” considero diversas manifestaciones de cuerpos marginados, y exploro los efectos de la óptica barroca, como los espejos, la replicación, las distorsiones y las ilusiones, así como la locura como una condición grotesca y marginadora. En “Transcendent Bodies” analizo las reverberaciones del misticismo en una selección de textos, trazando la influencia filosófica de Santa Teresa de Jesús, y considero el papel que juega la mística femenina en la creación de un espacio para la expresión del sujeto.
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# Table of Contents

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

Section I [Un]Regulated Bodies ........................................................................................................ 17
   Chapter 1  Virgins and Maidens: Conflicting Notions of Chastity ............................................... 22
   Chapter 2  Wanton Bodies: Eroticism, Pornography, and Prostitution ...................................... 49
   Chapter 3  Desiring Bodies: Transgression in Ana Rossetti and Mercedes Abad .................... 63

Section II Abject Bodies ..................................................................................................................... 79
   Chapter 4  Grotesque Optics: Mirrors, Doubles, and Madness .................................................. 84
   Chapter 5  Bodies and Bodily Fluids: Constructing Porous and Hybrid Subjectivities .......... 103
   Chapter 6  Body [in] Parts: Violence and Dismemberment ........................................................ 117

Section III Transcendent Bodies ....................................................................................................... 133
   Chapter 7  Menchu Gutiérrez’s Interior Castles ......................................................................... 136
   Chapter 8  The Instant: the Mystical Experience of Time in “Matar a Platón” ....................... 153
   Chapter 9  Ecstatic Experiences: Bodies at the Threshold ....................................................... 166

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 184

Works Cited ........................................................................................................................................ 191
Introduction

The baroque is the regulating of the soul by corporeal radioscopy.

—Jacques Lacan

Early on in my doctoral degree work I became aware of a frequent reference to the aesthetic “baroqueness” of certain post-civil war Spanish cultural production. Although the reasons for the emergence of this aesthetic quality were never clearly defined during my studies, its recurrence intrigued me greatly. This was due in large part to my own interest in renaissance and baroque Spanish literature, as well as to an uncertain, yet persistent, sense that an aesthetic connection between these historical periods existed, though formulating a theory and a way to express it clearly, eluded me. It was not until I stumbled upon the notion of a “return of the baroque” — a phrase introduced by critic Gregg Lambert in his book by the same title, which has been adopted by many critics such as Monica Kaup, Luis Martin-Estudillo, Nicholas Spadaccini, and Lois-Parkinson Zamora as a way to indicate a general resurgence of baroque elements in contemporary artistic production — that my vague feeling that a connection could be traced and analyzed took shape. I was particularly intrigued by how this resurgence of baroque elements manifested in post dictatorshp Spanish cultural production. Over time, two parallel questions became the central focus of my inquiry: The first, how the aesthetic and mechanical elements of a selection of this cultural production could dialogue with a theory of the baroque. The second, what was the relationship between the historical baroque and the socio-historical context of the Post-dictatorship years in which it was produced. From these questions, I determined that the
central focus of this dissertation is to demonstrate that there exists a clear and observable re-emergence of archetypally, aesthetically and ideologically baroque representations of bodies in the work of a selection of Spanish women authors, from 1980 to the present. Beyond simply pinpointing this aesthetic recurrence however, it explores the circumstances surrounding the reemergence of it, and the avenues of expression that it opens up. This study fits naturally within a larger body of critical thought on the baroque, while remaining novel in its approach to the authors and writings chosen.

Thus, the text that follows is an analysis of representations of what I call *baroque bodies* in the work of a particular subset of post-francoist peninsular authors: Ana Rossetti, Mercedes Abad, Dulce Chacón, Cristina Fernández Cubas, Menchu Gutiérrez, and Chantal Maillard. By baroque bodies I mean those representations of the body which, when viewed through the lens of a theory of the baroque, share significant characteristics with those of the historical baroque (roughly spanning from 1600 – 1750). In my exploration of what constitutes a baroque body, I have focused on how these late twentieth century authors write the body into their texts and I analyze those writings from within a framework of baroque theory. In addition, I have established how the emergence of literary baroque bodies during the post-Franco era in Spain is not purely coincidental and instead can be interpreted as a reaction to the dictatorial policies and state mythos of the Franco Regime, which sought to leverage the grandeur of renaissance and baroque era Spain for the production of a national identity.

Although labeling representations of the body in contemporary literature as baroque may appear anachronistic, I propose that this is not the case due to a series of converging factors that include a current interest in baroque studies and the applicability of a baroque
theoretical framework to contemporary artistic production, as well as the unique circumstances relating to the ideology of the dictatorship and its effect on literary production in Spain. Its interest lies not only in identifying how the contemporary writers chosen reinterpret baroque bodies in their work—although this is a necessary part of the study—, but in the possible reasons why this aesthetic emerges in it, what elements of the aesthetic allow it to readily lend itself to the expression of contemporary notions and anxieties surrounding the body, and what forces (external, internal, conscious or unconscious) may be at work in its manifestation. With these considerations as guide I have attempted to establish that the classification of these representations of bodies as baroque is not only conceivable, but can prove fertile as a ground for examining how literary manifestations of the body in post-francoist Spanish literature became a space for resistance to the oppression of the subject experienced during the dictatorship. More narrowly, it serves as a way of gaining a new perspective on both the certain vague baroqueness in the work of post-dictatorship authors identified, as well as how this same baroqueness emerges as a response and a weapon of resistance. To begin, however, it is requisite that I define more narrowly what constitutes a baroque aesthetic.

The concept of baroque and the evolution towards its current meaning as a term is complex, varied, and encompasses a great temporal, geographical and intellectual space. What we know today as baroque theories are the result of a long series of reformulations and considerations about what the term baroque means, and its potential application in a variety of fields of thought. This summary is limited to presenting a brief history of how the concept, as it is used within this dissertation, came to be, and providing a context to those aspects of the various conceptions of the baroque that are most significant for my study. In particular, once the
historical timeline of the baroque is drawn, I focus on those characteristics of it that are most applicable to the study of the representation of bodies in the literary works chosen for my dissertation.

Severo Sarduy tells us that “... [t]odo texto sobre el barroco se emprende considerando los orígenes de la palabra barroco” (15). The etymology of the word was for many years itself a source of debate. At present, it is generally accepted that “the French adjectival term, *la baroque*, is derived from the etymology of the Portuguese (not Spanish) word, *barroca*, which means ‘an odd and irregular-shaped pearl’” (Lambert 1). Lambert further notes that the theory that the term was a derivative of the nomenclature of syllogisms advanced by René Wellek gained momentum, yet in later years Wellek himself suggested that it was more probable that the word originated from the similar Portuguese word, *barroca*, widely used in jewelry-making (2), it in turn being derived from the Latin word *verruca*. It is significant, given that a good portion of baroque theory focuses on aspects of irregularity, deformation and bizarreness, that the genesis of the term is found in a context which we associate with perfection, and the preciousness of both material and final product. The aberrant nature of the pearl, its rarity and deformity, thus become a reflection of the perceived decadence of classicism towards an aesthetic of extremes, irregularities, and incompleteness, that later will be called baroque art.

It’s important to emphasize that the baroque as a historical and artistic period was designated as such after its apogee, and like many cases of nomenclature its definition is somewhat problematic. Helen Hills reminds us that “[i]n the seventeenth century, the baroque term did not exist. To describe the license taken by Borromini, the word used was ‘gothic’ and unlike Renaissance art, there was no contemporary theory of it [...] But it is noteworthy that the language and attitudes that were to feed the future word ‘baroque’, such as ‘unreasoned’,
‘licentious’, and ‘bizarre’ with its implications of immodesty, gathered force from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries” (12). In her book *Rethinking the Baroque*, Hills discusses the baroque from an interesting and important perspective for our consideration:

Within art history in recent years, the term ‘baroque’ has been delegitimized, ostensibly because it had no contemporary usage in the period to which it was subsequently applied. It is frequently treated on one hand as an inherently ‘anachronistic’ term and therefore to be avoided; and on the other as a stylistic term steeped in negative connotations, denoting immodest excess, moral dubiousness, the supposed insubstantiality of rich ornament, dangerous emotional indulgence, the willfully bizarre, pernicious caprice, and bad taste.

(3)

In spite of the little prestige that the term has in the field of art history, Hills notes that this is not the case in other fields. Hills of course alludes to the great interest that the baroque has produced in recent years, and observing this disparity between disciplines intends to create some links between them. Furthermore, she proposes “we resist a conceptualization of art history as linear periodization to think of baroque as ‘a conceptual technology’ that does not simply allow retrospective understanding but actually provokes new forms of historical conceptualization and interpretation” (3).

In recent years there has been a marked interest on the part of critics in exploring the theoretical possibilities that a revision of the baroque as concept can offer. This revisionism relies on a wide variety of studies and works by philosophers, critics, and historians from the twentieth century to the present. Perhaps of these new notions of the Baroque the most notorious in the field of Hispanic literature are those proposed in the works of Severo Sarduy, among his pioneering conclusions on the *neobarroco*, and José Antonio Maravall in his approach to the
baroque as a cultural movement and not simply an aesthetic or historical period. Some of the more recent critics who have been interested in this phenomenon (some call it a “baroque revolution”) include Luis Martín-Estudillo, Nicholas Spadaccini, Gregg Lambert, Lois Parkinson-Zamora, Monika Kaup, and John Beverley. These critics share an interest in the evolution of the Baroque as a concept, rooted in the notion that its existence and validity is not determined by a particular historical epoch, an element that makes it relevant and contemporary as a current critical approach.

As mentioned above, the term baroque did not enjoy general use until well after the appearance of the first artistic productions that we can consider as falling into this stylistic category. The first time we find the term associated with art is in 1757, when Antoine-Joseph Pernety defines it in his *Dictionnaire portatif de peinture, sculpture, et gravure*. Shortly after, Quatremère de Quincy conceived the baroque in his *Encyclopédie méthodique: Architecture* (1788). It is here that we find reference to what might be considered some of the most distinctive features of the baroque. One such characteristic introduced by Quatremère is that of the bizarre:

*Bizarrerie*, the heart of the baroque, produces vice. In ethics, says Quatremère, a distinction is made between ‘capriciousness’ and ‘bizarreness.’ While the first stems from the imagination, the second is the result of character (*le caprice se manifeste dans les goûts, la bizarrerie dans les humeurs*). While caprice implies lightness of touch and seems to be only a tiresome habit that can be broken, *bizarrerie* implies a defective shape or malformation (*une conformation vicieuse*) not susceptible to reformation. (Hills 13, emphasis in original)

Francesco de Milizia, Leopoldo Cicognara, Ernst Förster, and Benedetto Croce all ascribe to similar views on the baroque, echoing the notion of the aesthetic as a mere degeneration of more
classical and pure forms (Hills 3-39). Just as the deformity of the pearl is central in the conception of the baroque as theory, we see in their critiques a recurrence of the notion that there is an element of unnaturalness, and abnormality, in the baroque. This sense of anomaly, which Quatremère characterizes as bizarre, permeates the work, and in their minds, relegates baroque aesthetic to the level of the degenerate.

A burgeoning change in attitude towards the baroque can be found in some expositions previous to Heinrich Wölfflin’s, but his work remains the first to represent a substantial change in attitude towards the aesthetic. In his study Renaissance and Baroque Wölfflin establishes a series of definitions of the baroque that served as basis for its appreciation, and they form the foundation for the arguments that try to establish its contemporaneity. Wölfflin gives the baroque an identity of its own. His study categorizes the baroque as a differentiated aesthetic, and not as a deterioration or perversion of the renaissance. The baroque is thus established as an autonomous aesthetic movement independent of the renaissance.

Wölfflin’s analysis, though immensely useful and influential, is concerned entirely with the baroque as an aesthetic movement specific to a historical period. The first indications of an elaboration of the baroque as independent of a specific socio-historical framework are seen in the work of four theorists: Henri Focillon, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, and Christine Buci Glucksmann. Henri Focillon, in The Life of Forms in Art, questions the periodization of art, and proposes the notion that over time different stages of aesthetic forms interact and affect each other, rather than presenting themselves in a succession. Walter Benjamin, in The Origin of German Tragic Drama, proposes that the expressive mode of the Baroque par excellence is the allegory. Absolutism, and what Benjamin considers the false pretensions of a representation of truth, are the evils introduced by the Romantics with the exaltation of the symbol. According to
Benjamin, it is allegory, in its conscious inability to represent truth in absolute terms, the mode of expression that most closely approximates and reflects reality. Gilles Deleuze, in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, proposes a series of complex ontological tests by which he argues that the baroque is an independent concept of space and time and whose existence can be established through the same argumentative structures through which the existence of God is proposed. Of greater interest is the discussion of the concept of the double within the baroque, and the formation of the subject, and for my purposes, the interplay of these concepts with gender theories and thought. For this reason perhaps I am most attracted to, and rely most heavily on, Christine Buci Glucksmann, drawing primarily from her *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity*, and *The Madness of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics*. In *Baroque Reason* she traces the origins of the baroque aesthetic and proposes that modern aesthetic principles are greatly indebted to the baroque. In *Madness of Vision* she analyzes the phenomenological aesthetics of the baroque, proposing the important concept of all vision being embodied vision, and therefore an imperfect and distorting tool for the perception of reality. I will return to Buci Glucksmann further on as she is central to the postulation that baroque aesthetic can, not only, be applied to contemporary cultural production, but also in that her analysis provides ample and fruitful avenues for the consideration of gender in relation to the formulation of the baroque subject. It is important however to note that authors such as Sarduy and Maravall made some of the most influential early contributions to the thinking on the baroque.

Severo Sarduy plays a fundamental role in the reformulation of the baroque as a concept. Sarduy defines cosmology before the baroque as a direct product of a Western construction based on Plato’s *Timaeus*. According to Sarduy, the effect of this conceptualization of the universe is echoed in all aspects of society prior to the historical Baroque period. Although there
is evidence that there were pre-Copernicus astronomers who had already proposed a heliocentric model, the earth-centered model as the axis of the universe remained unchallenged for several centuries, shaping Western thought:

En Aristóteles la cosmología esférica se confirma. El universo es un sistema de orbes concéntricos: cada uno tiene su movimiento propio; el orbe exterior, que impulsa a todos los otros, es el de las estrellas; el del Sol y los de los planetas giran alrededor de un mismo eje; la esfera de la Luna tiene un eje especial; al centro de todo el andamiaje móvil, la Tierra. (Sarduy 30)

In the transition to a new cosmology the centrality of the circle disintegrates in two phases: First through the introduction of the heliocentric model by Copernicus, and then definitively, with the formulation of the elliptical orbital shape proposed by Kepler.

Las tres leyes de Kepler, alterando el soporte científico en que reposaba todo el saber de la época, crean un punto de referencia con relación al cual se sitúa, explícitamente o no, toda actividad simbólica: algo se descentra, o más bien duplica su centro, lo desdobla; ahora, la figura maestra no es el círculo, de centro único, irradiante, luminoso y paternal, sino la elipse, que opone a ese foco visible otro igualmente operante, igualmente real, pero obturado, muerto, nocturno, el centro ciego, reverso del yang germinador del Sol, el ausente. (Sarduy 56)

Much of Sarduy’s theory on the double axis of the ellipse, and the contrast between the visible and invisible, the tension and decentering that it causes, is crucial for the theories of the baroque formulated by later critics including Buci Glucksmann. In Cultura del Barroco: análisis de una estructura histórica, José Antonio Maravall maintains that we can extract the elements that form the historical baroque from their context. In this way, it
becomes possible to examine them outside of their historical confines. Maravall examines certain aspects of the baroque such as ornament and incompleteness, and provides a strong foundation for contemporary critics to draw on as they seek to cement the baroque as an undeniable contemporary aesthetic.

In *Hispanic Baroques* Estudillo and Spadaccini reiterate the validity of the baroque, emphasizing that the historical Baroque has a great number of parallels with our present day, which he characterizes as a period of contrasts, doubts and internal struggles. He suggests that both periods are permeated by an atmosphere of uncertainty, and perhaps melancholy, and yet this uncertainty fosters a great wealth of thought as it leads to intense questioning of social, religious and existential norms. The essays in *Hispanic Baroques* postulate and analyze the clear parallels linking our historical period with that of the historical Baroque. Other critics like Gregg Lambert propose that it is possible to conceive that “…there is nothing modern about the postmodern, but that it could be understood, in a certain sense, as a ‘return of the Baroque’” (Lambert 2). On the other hand, Kaup and Zamora tell us that “In fact, we might think the Baroque, New World Baroque, and Neobaroque as a single, rather large, eccentric pearl with excrescences and involutions corresponding to the overlapping histories and forms in Europe and the Americas” (3). What these critics have in common is the insistence that baroque as a concept is a recurring element throughout history, and is not limited to a specific aesthetic, or a particular historical moment.

This freeing of the baroque from temporal boundaries that relegate its relevancy to a singular historical period is one of the consequences of this resurgence of critical interest that I consider most valuable. It is precisely this loss of temporality of the baroque as a concept, or theory, that allows a dialogue with other theoretical frameworks, elucidating new ways of
analyzing not only the artistic production of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, but that of other historical epochs. As an example of the analytic productivity precipitated by such a possibility we can appreciate the great amount of criticism devoted to the analysis of this “return of the baroque”, and the effects of such considerations, such as questions surrounding the validity of the concept of postmodernism.

Among the conceptions mentioned throughout this summary, the ones that I identify as most significant to my study fall into two fundamental categories. On the one hand the extremely important postulations that conclude that the elements, mechanisms, or residues, of the historical baroque can be applicable in a contemporary context. On the other are those theories and concepts of the baroque, which are most fruitful when applied to the analysis of (female) bodies in contemporary Spanish cultural production. Among these elements those which are most prominent relate to the notions of the bizarre, excess, the tension produced by the decentering of the ellipse, and questions of optics, vision, and madness.

The concept of the bizarre is particularly interesting when it is related to the image of the deformed pearl and the general notion of baroque as a synonym for decadence. The analysis of this concept in contemporary literature opens the door to questions about deformed and grotesque bodies, an element that is also related to excess. Madness and the image of the madman as an incomplete or decadent human also falls under this rubric, and with it comes a questioning of the peripheries, the strangeness and otherness of the subject. According to Sarduy, this concept can be seen reflected in the overabundance of words, in that excess so characteristic of the baroque literary style (Sarduy 44). This dynamic of fear of emptiness and the reaction of filling it with excess is of interest to me when exploring certain images of the excess present in bodies, both physical excess in the form of corpulent bodies, and excessive impulses. The
emptiness for its part is interesting when it comes to discussing contemporary mysticism that
seeks to confront this emptiness. Finally, the ellipse as a figure of the baroque is extremely useful
in the analysis of gender relations, the concept of fluidity and fusion of bodies, and desire for the
other.

stories from *Mi hermana Elba* (1980) and *El ángulo del horror* (1990) by Cristina
Gutiérrez, and *Matar a Platón* (2004) by Chantal Maillard — and their relationships to each
other, are the principle organizing factor. The authors that form the foundation of this
research were selected to reflect a spectrum of different degrees and nuances in the
expression of a baroque aesthetic in post-dictatorship Spanish literature, and their work was
chosen from a larger pool of potential examples due to a sense of cohesiveness and certain
congruencies between them. The writings selected span three literary genres, and are the
basis for varying amounts of scholarly research and critique, as the levels of notoriety
among the authors differ. A conscious effort was made to give an overarching view of
different manifestations of this re-emergence of baroque bodies in contemporary literature,
while also presenting a coherent and unified exploration of it. Many of the texts are
challenging in nature, some obscure in their meaning, presenting non-lineal sequences of
events, such as in “Basenji” and *La mujer ensismismada*. The work of Menchu Gutiérrez (*El ojo de Newton* and *El faro por dentro*) and Chantal Maillard (*Matar a Platón*), demands that
its readers reconsider what constitutes a cohesive narrative, and requires a willingness to accept and explore plotlines that appear still or inch forward slowly and in convoluted patterns. Their obscure poetic language, and references to both Western and Eastern traditions, present challenges of comprehension and cultural knowledge. The work of Mercedes Abad (*Ligeros libertinajes sabáticos*), Dulce Chacón (*Algún amor que no mate*), Cristina Fernández Cubas (selected stories), and Ana Rossetti (selected poems) present their own difficulties to the reader. Fernández Cubas, with her open-ended and suspenseful narrative, can easily cause a careless reader to lose the narrative thread. While more straightforward in their narrative Chacón and Abad explore topics of violence and sexuality that push readers into uncomfortable psychological and emotional territory, while Rossetti’s ornate poetic language and incorporation of both traditional, and contemporary, Spanish cultural production requires a knowledgeable reader that can identify these references.

In the texts selected we see echoes of the baroque in the way that the female body is written into them. These bodies, though varied, fall roughly within one of three categories which I have identified as recurring in the baroque aesthetic: the erotic or unsatiated body, the grotesque, dismembered or abject body, and the transcendent, mystical or body at climax (of pain or pleasure). The bodies in question often fall within more than one category, however. I do not attempt to confine these literary works into one of these narrow spaces, but rather trace how these broad characteristics of the baroque aesthetic come to play in the texts, and what role the baroque aesthetic fulfills in both a new reading of these subjects and the dialogue of the texts with their historical context.

The sections are divided into these three main categories, corresponding to [un]regulated, abject and transcendent bodies, each containing three chapters respectively.
The chapters under the category of “[Un]Regulated Bodies” deal with questions of physical and psychological longing for the other, and the regulation of these desires through state symbolism and power. I focus particularly on the archetype of the maiden and the transition from Diana or Artemisia to the Virgin Mary, as a movement from chastity as an exercise of female control over her own sexuality, to that of an externally imposed control over female desire. I discuss the Catholization of the maiden and her incarnation as the Virgin Mary, and how it plays a crucial role in the creation of notions of the feminine ideal during the Franco Dictatorship. I contextualize this discussion through an examination of how this archetype, and its evolution, manifest in Algún amor que no mate, by Dulce Chacón, as well as in the film El perro del hortelano directed by Pilar Miró. The discussion of chastity naturally brings us to questions of desire and sexuality, and I devote time to exploring expressions of desire in the work of Rossetti and Abad. I address accusations of obscenity and pornography surrounding their work, as well as the regulation of prostitution and pornography during the Franco Regime and the historical baroque. I dedicate space to the discussion of the archetype of the whore in relation to those of the maiden and mother, noting that prostitution and pornography are treated very differently in terms of their social acceptance, and propose that this is due in part to the transgressive nature of the latter.

Carrying over some of the key concepts of the previous chapters, the section entitled “Abject Bodies” considers various manifestations of marginalized bodies. I explore the effects of baroque optics on the body, such as mirrors, replication, distortions, and illusions as well as doubts about perception and the reliability of vision as a tool to discern reality, in a selection of short stories by Cristina Fernández Cubas. Madness as both a grotesque and marginalizing condition is considered in contrast with its potential to provide a new optical
perspective. I touch upon the notion of pornography once again, but in this case specifically in regard to its relation to spectacle, and the questionable display of mutilated and violated bodies. I explore the sixteenth and seventeenth century fascination with optics, lenses and mirrors as I consider the role of seeing and vision in the works in question. Menchu Gutiérrez’s *El ojo de Newton* reflects on this baroque obsession with vision and all the instruments available for its manipulation, while Menchu Gutiérrez’s *El faro por dentro*, explores how the optical distortion caused by lenses and mirrors seamlessly transitions into the warped optics of madness, and the complex relationship between the optics of the gaze and the abject body appear Mercedes Abad’s “Crucifixión del círculo”, as I analyze the urge to mutilate, dismember and ultimately destroy the female body, and the potential of this act to become a spectacle.

In “Transcendent Bodies” I look at reverberations of mysticism in a selection of writings by Maillard, Gutierrez, Abad and Rossetti. I begin by tracing the philosophical debt paid to Santa Teresa de Jesús by these authors, and the appropriation of this figure by the Franco Regime. Following this, I consider the role of the female mystic in creating a space for expression of the subject regardless of gender, and propose that looking inward and introspection lead to a loss of gender considerations in the work of authors like Gutiérrez and Maillard, and are replaced by a preoccupation with individual experience. I explore how their writings can be considered mystical, and how through this process we are able to move beyond gendered restraints of self. I compare Santa Teresa de Jesús’s *Moradas* to La mujer ensimismada by Gutiérrez, tracing the similarities and highlighting the differences in their representation of the exploration of the self. In looking at Maillard’s work I consider an alternate experience of time and its effects on the perception of self and other. I explore the
many ways in which the ecstatic experience is induced, citing instances from the texts ranging from extremes of pleasure and pain to meditative trances. The moment of ecstasy is discussed in relation to various psychoanalytic, and gender theories, including Bataille’s theories on pain, pleasure, death and sexuality.

It is my hope that by distilling one essential component and tracing it through a select body of work I am able to set forth a clear and compelling argument for the re-appropriation and re-emergence of a baroque aesthetic of body representation in the work of this specific group of Spanish writers. The notion that there is a tangible baroque aesthetic in much of contemporary artistic production is not a new concept. The application of these notions to contemporary Spanish literature is also not an aspect unique to my dissertation, as studies of this nature have already been undertaken and published by scholars in the field, most notably Martín Luis-Estudillo. The dialogue between a theory of the baroque and gender theory has also been analyzed by the likes of Severo Sarduy, Christine Buci Glucksmann, Julia Kristeva, John Beverley and to some extent, though in a different light, Aurora G. Morcillo. The novelty in my research resides in its focus; primarily, how this baroque aesthetic appears through the resurgence of archetypal, aesthetic and ideological representations of the body, and how these representations function within the literature of a subset of post-Francoist writers as a reaction to imposed notions of body and object/subject relationships. Some of the techniques these writers employ as they re-interpret the baroque in contemporary writing include pastiche, parody, the re-appropriation of cultural and symbolic markers, as well as a tendency in their work towards a baroque aesthetic and epistemological position.
Section I  [Un]Regulated Bodies

After the Spanish Civil War and particularly during the first few decades of the institution of the Franco Regime, the dictatorship imposed on its citizenry a series of archaic regulations that not only subjected female citizens to a gradual dehumanization, but also created a climate that was conducive to the erosion, and wrenching dissolution of healthy human relationships. In “Gender and the State: Women in the 1940’s,” Helen Graham suggests that “[t]o seal victory in the post-war required the imposition not just of an authoritarian political framework and regressive economic policies, but also of a socially conservative project” (183). Evidence of a systematic effort to regulate even the most intimate aspects of human interactions suggests that the Regime viewed its citizenry as mechanical parts with rigidly defined roles, making it clear that men and women were considered as fundamental building blocks for a greater ideological machinery. In this section I explore how state imposed legislative regulations, and cultural influences, were used by the Regime to control female bodies. I consider the consequences of this control both during the Regime and after it in the literature of Dulce Chacón, Ana Rossetti, and Mercedes Abad. In addition, I examine the baroque roots of the attitudes towards gender relations adopted by the Franco Regime, and how the baroque aesthetic appropriated by these contemporary women writers, as well as the film director Iciar Bollaín, opens up avenues for resistance against the Regime.

The Franco dictatorship established women’s bodies as crucial territory to be won for the good of the nation state. The anxieties and turmoil associated with the rapid social,
cultural, and economic changes that contributed to the outbreak of war in Spain found an easy target as “[w]omen’s changing identity and roles, symptomatic of these wider changes, were perceived by those sectors of society adversely affected as the cause of their personal problems and of ‘failing standards/degnerating values’ (which is how anxious humans generally read social change)” (Graham 184). Thus, “a whole pathology of modernity was written on women’s bodies via repressive state legislation—in particular with regard to pronatalism” (Graham 184). During the Regime, the female body was regulated through a series of edicts that controlled her access to work, financial autonomy, capacity to make decisions, and ability to act autonomously in even the most minimal and inconsequential of situations. The family unit became central to the national project as well, thus, “[i]n its bid to stabilize itself, and to effect the social institutionalization of victory, the Franco Regime targeted women because of the pivotal role they played within the family. The patriarchal family was seen as representing the corporate order of the state in microcosm” (Graham 184).

Although males appeared to, and in many cases, did enjoy a higher status than women within the national hierarchy, having greater autonomy and free will (this of course not taking into account political ideology), they too were trapped within confining institutionalized norms. Males were simultaneously free and confined, given autonomy and power as long as they conformed to a rigid ideal of masculinity. Maleness was treated as both an inevitable yet graduated trait. Inevitable, because being born with male genitalia qualified you as male, graduated because despite having no choice in the matter of maleness, masculinity itself was a spectrum of traits, and the closer to the masculine ideal the closer to power the individual found himself, while the farther away his expression was from the norm, the weaker and more
disenfranchised he was. Mild forms of emasculated individuals were tolerated, yet blatantly non-masculine male forms, those regarded as feminine males, were despised, persecuted and destroyed. In *Queer Transitions in Contemporary Spanish Culture: From Franco to la Movida*, Gema Pérez-Sánchez proposes that one reason for the tight regulation of gender binaries and identities is a fear of being susceptible to homosexuality:

> Within fascism’s very fascination with the beauty of the vigorous, youthful male body and with male bonding lay the fantasmatic possibility of a slippage from homosocial acts to homosexual acts. The fear of the degradation of spaces of camaraderie among men, coupled with fascism’s more obvious fixation on violent masculinity and its ‘glorification of war and struggle’ (Mosse 42), necessitated the creation of internal enemies, particularly when there were no obvious external ones. (12)

In this way, homosexual males became representative of deviance and destabilization of accepted social behavior. To conform to gender ideals the entire citizenry was encouraged via posters, flyers, and news articles to perform their national duties, dictating all aspects of Spanish life from exercise regimes, personal hygiene practices, etiquette and general behavior guidelines to marital relations, spiritual pursuits and entertainment. In essence bodies, both male and female, were fiercely regulated and considered national commodities.

Female bodies however, in their role of wombs to further the population needs of the nation, found themselves particularly subject to invasive and archaic government and societal regulations:

> The caudillo expected Spanish people to realize one of their new patriotic tasks—that of attaining a population of forty-million Spaniards. Women’s national duty at this juncture was to produce as many children as possible for the fatherland. The female political
persona was defined by biological destiny: motherhood. By enforcing pro-family policies, the state aspired to control the population. Bodies turned into power-exchange tokens under the totalitarian economy. (Morcillo 87)

Among the many tools devised by the Regime to encourage women to fulfill their roles as nation builders through marital subservience both willingly and complacently, la ‘Sección femenina’ (a key actor in the newly formed ‘Servicio social de la mujer’) stands out for its effectiveness. This organization served as the counterpart to military service for males once the Franco Regime was established, though it had been created in 1934 as a support system for the Falange Española. Pamphlets, posters, and manuals disseminated by the organization instructed women on how to be good wives, mothers, and citizens, in order to further the national project. Chief among its publications was a manual given to young women upon joining, which instructed them to be obedient, passive wives, with advice ranging from keeping a clean house and awaiting their husband with a cooked dinner, to comportment such as smiling, speaking little, and always engaging in what their husband desired. The Falange’s depiction of marriage was one of unquestioning subservience to the male head of household; the power structure within the family unit mirroring that of the nation state.

State mandates and impositions on Spanish bodies had a devastating effect on gender relations. Within the government-sanctioned structure, marital dynamics and daily interactions became defined and limited to those which furthered the patriotic project, with procreation being chief among them. This is not to imply that patriarchal structures were an invention of the Regime, but rather, to suggest that the strict adherence to gender binaries was essential for the social and patriotic project of the Regime. The effects of these stringent regulations were long lasting and expansive. In the chapters that follow I delineate the relationship between the
baroque and the national culture of the Franco Regime, as well as the stringent regulation of female bodies within this new order. In “Virgins and Maidens: Conflicting Notions of Chastity, the Goddess of the Hunt and the Holy Mother,” I trace the archetype of the maiden in its changing roles and representations between the baroque and post-civil war Spain. In “Wanton Bodies: Eroticism, Pornography, and Prostitution,” I trace the treatment of pornography and prostitution during the Regime, and in “Desiring Bodies: Transgression in Ana Rossetti and Mercedes Abad,” I consider how authors such as Ana Rossetti and Mercedes Abad use pornography in selected works as a means for resistance.
Chapter 1  Virgins and Maidens: Conflicting Notions of Chastity

He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty.

—William Blake

Archetypes as powerful illusory models for subjectivities play an important role in shaping social dynamics and expectations. This chapter explores how archetypal imagery can serve as outlet for self-expression under rigid and totalitarian regimes through their illusory and artificial nature, while also serving to impose unbending and stifling models of identity. The role that illusion plays in archetype by opening up space for questioning and doubt, and thus shades of difference that are contrary to a monolithic and normative expression of gender and self, are explored alongside the apparent contradiction inherent in archetypes; that of totality and truth. Archetypes are both illusions, that is, they are not true reflections of reality but rather express reality through the conception of an artificial set of meanings, while simultaneously attempting to encapsulate and deliver reality and truth. This ambiguous nature renders archetypes useful as escape valve that creates space for the expression of multiple and nuanced subjectivities, while contradictorily imposing a simplistic model that lends itself to interpretation as the sole model for expression. Most importantly this chapter will explore how an archetype prevalent during the baroque period, that of the virgin goddess and warrior, evolved and is repurposed during the
Franco Regime as the Holy Virgin, drastically changing the meaning of, and power dynamics surrounding, the concept of chastity.

One of the thumbprints that often identify a work of art as baroque is an enhanced realism, or rather an exaggerated depiction of reality that augments and sharpens detail. This form of realism can be construed as a sort of hyper-realism, one that rather than truly portraying reality as it is, aims to convey a deeper reality by enhancing its peculiarities. Thus, we often characterize this artistic period as one of exaggeration and excess: “[...] what we identify as stylistically baroque—and what shared a dominance in the historical period known as Baroque—depends on the play of appearances in relation to a corporeal substance assumed to exist beyond that play of appearances” (Eggington 15). We can argue then that in baroque expression there is a desire to portray that which is beyond the surface. This deep preoccupation with appearance manifests in several ways: it leads to a hyper-realism that in its purest form aims to communicate the true, or essential, reality of the thing it portrays. At this level, appearance is simply the vehicle for conveyance and expression of the true nature of the thing. The baroque aesthetic is however a self-conscious one, and thus, simultaneously explores the ability of appearance to convey the truth, as well as its ability to deceive. Appearance is acknowledged to, just as often as not, fool the observer into believing that the essential nature of the object is something entirely different than its true nature through the use of artifice. Both aspects of appearance are readily found in works of the period, and various artistic devices employed in its expression.

Among these are allegory and archetype, which play crucial roles in baroque aesthetic as ideal tools for the conveyance of the first noted function of appearance; the transmittal to the observer of the deeper and essential nature of the thing, one perhaps truer
than reality. Archetypes are particularly effective as they seek to embody the purest form of the thing they represent, bared down to their most essential characteristics, yet innately possessing a contradiction in their function as in order to convey this true nature they must inevitably employ artifice. The archetype, as a structure of meaning, can readily be identified as a baroque form of expression, and to describe the type characters of Golden Age Spanish theatre as archetypes is not unreasonable.

Perhaps one of the purest examples of the use of allegory and archetype in baroque Spanish literature can be seen in *El gran teatro del mundo (auto sacramental alegórico)* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. In this seventeenth century play each character is an archetype woven into an allegory, a recurring pattern of images that the audience easily identifies and understands, such as El Rey, El Pobre, El Mundo, La Hermosura and so on. This device, the employment of these easily identifiable images and types, is also seen in *La comedia* of the Golden Age, where the use of stock or type characters that behave in established and anticipated ways is commonplace. The prolific dramaturge Félix Lope de Vega y Carpio, whom along with Luis de Góngora is often attributed the ushering in of the baroque literary movement in Spain, wrote in his *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, that the king must speak as the king, the old-man as the old-man, and the servant never above his station (270-291). In his writer’s guide for what he envisioned as the new theatre of Spain, the prescription of the use of characters that comport themselves in predetermined ways is what we now identify as the call for the stock or type character. These types are in essence archetypes that become shorthand; a direct representation of a universally understood concept simultaneously familiar yet new in each of its iterations.
Thus, the archetype embodies a tension of superficiality and depth. The Jungian archetype is both superficial in nature as an image or a form without content, yet derives from it all iterations of the concept it represents, and serves as the prototype of the concept. Spanish Golden Age theatre is populated by a variety of these prototypes, like the maiden and the sexualized woman, embodied in La Dama, and La Viuda. These stock characters serve as a sort of shorthand that creates an expectation of performance. The female archetypes that populated Golden Age theatre are of particular interest here as they inform us of the prevailing constructs of femininity, and it is these precisely that we see reconsidered and analyzed in the writings of authors such as Dulce Chacón and in films like _El perro del hortelano_ directed by Pilar Miró.

Archetypes surrounding femininity and female sexuality were important markers for interpretation in Golden Age Theatre of Spain, yet their influence reached beyond the stage. These stock characters and their attending defining characteristics permeated Spanish society and reflected expectations for behavior. It is impossible to assert which begat which, that is to say, did these notions of femininity inform society or vice-versa. Regardless of provenance however, they serve as useful embodiments of social norms regulating gendered behaviors and relations; a mirror for the society of the period, and an enlightening record for contemporary scholars.

In the case of women these gender prototypes revolve primarily around their sexuality, sexual appetite or lack of it, and the context in which it is expressed. Although male type-characters concern themselves with honor and duty as much as the pursuit of pleasure and matters of the heart, the latter often does not define them. The male type-character is primarily defined by his physical and mental prowess, his deference to god,
monarch and kingdom, or his failure to act appropriately within this social context. In contrast, a female character’s role and place in the social strata seems inevitably bound to her sex and the expression of her sexuality. The female sex in fact defines her, regulates her behavior, and creates her place in the social tapestry. A woman’s sexual functions, whether it be the virtuous regulation of her base instincts, or the expression of desire, is always at the forefront. Honor, in short, is the compass that guides the prototypical Golden Age theatre character, yet this honor revolves around a significantly greater set of virtues in males, while being concentrated, rather narrowly, to sexual roles in females.

These recurring female archetypes include images such as *la dama* (maiden or unexplored female sexuality), *la mujer casada o madre* (regulated female sexuality), *la viuda* (experienced an unfulfilled sexuality), and *la vieja* (experienced yet dormant sexuality). These models of successfully regulated or channeled sexual energy in females are often tested, and their ability to adhere to the strict regulations of behavior put under duress, but the true heroines inevitably maintain their social status and honor, albeit through clever maneuvers at times.

A wonderful example of the maiden archetype, *la dama*, can be found in Lope de Vega’s *El perro del hortelano*. In a broad swath of literature of the period we see the female archetype of the maiden play an important role and, frequently, though not exclusively, associated with the classical icons of maidenhood; the virgin goddesses Diana and Artemisia. In this comedia, Lope de Vega clearly personifies the maiden goddess Diana in his protagonist, Diana the Countess of Belfor. The maiden archetype in Golden Age theatre is often, and in this case quite definitively, not associated with weakness and demureness, but rather exhibits strength of will, resourcefulness and cunning; all essential traits of the
huntress. In her book *An Erotic Philology of Golden Age Spain*, Adrienne Laskier explores how Golden Age Spanish literature is populated with a wide array of such strong female characters, that rest agency from the Pater Familias by determining their own marriage arrangements, and “are both sexually transgressive and often potently erotic to both sexes” (115). In the chapter “Wild Women and Warrior Maidens” of *An Erotic Philology of Golden Age Spain*, Laskier focuses primarily on maidens that usurp male agency through cross-dressing and transgressions into gender coded spaces such as the arena of war and the halls of power.

Though these are perhaps extreme examples of female agency, it is nonetheless true that strong-willed and independent virgins populate golden-age literature. One could argue that the baroque obsession with classical mythology, in this instance the goddesses Diana and Artemisia, is evidenced in the exaltation of the warrior-maiden during the period, and that in turn this model of maidenhood played a significant role in shaping the characteristics associated with virginity. I do not mean to imply that this is the sole model by which the notions of virginity and maidenhood are defined, as it is certainly true that the Virgin Mary as figure is also a significant part of the imaginary of the Golden Age. As Aurora Morcillo points out in *The Seduction of Modern Spain*:

> National Catholic ideology fostered what I have called True Catholic Womanhood based on the cultural construction of Castilian Catholic identity in the 1490s and 1500s. The corporeal nature of women dominated conduct manuals like Juan Luis Vives’s *The Instruction of the Christian Woman* (1523) or Fray Luis de León’s *La perfecta casada* (1583). Their virtue was rooted in their ability to preserve their modesty. (15)
Yet despite the importance of the model of Catholic Womanhood, strong-willed maidens recur in drama of the period with frequency. Accordingly, the Countess Diana is in all senses the maiden-warrior and huntress; aloof, dignified and protective of her virginity while simultaneously pursuing her love interest, Teodoro.

Although the maiden goddess of the hunt is referenced in many plays of the period, my reasons for focusing on *El perro del hortelano* as an exemplar of this archetype are twofold. First, because among her female-lead contemporaries Diana stands out for her power. In the dynamic that is created through her social status in relation to Teodoro’s, Diana holds until the very end the upper hand. In fact, the end of the play remains open and ambiguous regarding the power dynamic between both protagonists despite an apparent resolution. In addition, this play is of particular interest as it is also the subject and muse for the cinematic version, *El perro del hortelano* (1996) by Spanish Director Pilar Miró.

In her visually stunning film Miró reimagines Lope de Vega’s masterpiece, yet stays true to the baroque aesthetic in both cinematography and plot. Miró underscores Diana’s subjectivity, visually emphasizing the power dynamic between her and Teodoro through perspective, lighting, wardrobe and scenery choices. Moreover, Miró draws us into this baroque play in such a way that it feels, not outdated or removed from us in time, but contemporary and relevant. The questions of why this story and these characters should be the subject of a 20th century film, particularly as an artistic cinematographic endeavor in its own right and not merely as a filmed re-staging of the classic play, as well as why they resonate with a contemporary audience, must be explored.

As stated before, one of the main attractions of the play, in fact the propellant for the story, is Diana the Countess of Belfor’s strong subjectivity. Throughout the play it is Diana
who legitimately holds power, through her social status over Teodoro; a fact that enables her to take significant liberties within the gender norms that regulate courtship. It is in fact her higher social status that raises her above the male-female power dynamic and permits her to be the pursuer and huntress. We see this clearly when we take the relationship between Teodoro and Marcela as a counterpoint, in which case as equals, Teodoro is the active pursuant. Yet the same power structure that enables Diana to exercise free-will during the courtship process ultimately bars her from securing her prize. Whereas the unequal social status of the parties allows for greater equality during courtship, this uneven status prohibits their union. In order for the balance to be restored, that is in order for this love affair to be socially acceptable, Teodoro and Diana must be of equal class status and until this is resolved, a union is out of the question.

To this end, that of materializing a happy ending for the couple, we see that quite suddenly a long lost, wealthy and noble father is produced for Teodoro; the Count Ludovico. This single act simultaneously levels the social stratum for both protagonists while demoting Diana into the appropriate gendered power structure. With all things being equal but sex, Diana becomes the subordinate in the relationship, and although the play remains noncommittal as to the legitimacy of Teodoro’s lineage, ultimately, it is the appearance, not the truth, of nobility that prevails. As Tristán, the comedic yet poignantly philosophical lackey, admonishes Teodoro regarding appearances early on:

No la imagines vestida
con tan linda proporción
de cintura, en el balcón
de unos chapines subida.
This vain architecture embodies the deceptive optics and illusions of the baroque aesthetic, emphasizing the great period uncertainty with what can be observed and the epistemic breakdown of the medieval concepts of Aristotelian correspondence. In his definition of baroque architecture, Heinrich Wölfflin alludes to the force of illusion in what he terms painterly architecture, which finds itself in direct opposition to severe architecture and is a hallmark of the baroque period: “In short, the severe style of architecture makes its effect by what it is, that is, by its corporeal substance, while painterly architecture acts through what it appears to be, that is, an illusion” (Wölfflin, Renaissance and Baroque 59). It is artifice and illusion that create the effect of reality, giving an impression of truth, despite its illusory nature. Earlier we noted the important dynamic between appearance and truth, and in the quotes above we see how this baroque obsession with the visual underscores the ambiguity and uncertainty of that which can be perceived. The same artifice and trappings that according to Tristán serve Diana so well in creating an illusion of greater beauty (or rather have the potential to as we are never certain of whether this vain architecture is a true representation of the truth of the thing or merely a clever *trompe l’œil*) ultimately veil the truth behind Teodoro’s claims to nobility.

During the closing lines of the play Teodoro transgresses the fourth wall and appeals to the audience:
Con esto, senado noble,
que a nadie digáis se os ruega
el secreto de Teodoro,
dando, con licencia vuestra,
del Perro del Hortelano
fin la famosa comedia.

This moment of metafiction, in which Teodoro addresses his audience (or readers) and requests our assistance in sustaining the illusion of his nobility, functions at several levels of optical manipulation. The fourth wall dissolves, and momentarily, attention is drawn to the artificial nature of this divide. The audience is made aware of the illusory nature of the partition between themselves and the performance, and yet the actor sustains the illusion by entreating the observer’s complicity. Similarly, the actor is self-consciously aware of the gaze of the audience, understanding that as an external eye it has perhaps cut through the illusion, and is aware of, if not the truth, at least the efforts to veil it, while remaining within his dramatic role of Teodoro; layer upon layer of illusion and artifice.

At this final juncture, one could be tempted to suggest that Teodoro’s appeal confirms that he is in fact not of noble descent and merely posturing. Yet careful analysis of the text leads to a much richer and complex reading of these final lines. Ultimately, the only certainty is that there is no certainty, for while Teodoro guiltily admits his pretense by implicating us in the sustainment of the ruse, our perspective removes us farther outside the frame. From this vantage point it is clear that despite his conviction that he is not truly the son of the count and is therefore falsely assuming the role, other circumstances call this into question. Ultimately all he confirms is his certainty that he is lying, yet the central
question—whether he is indeed the long-lost child—remains open. Just as the veil separating fiction and reality is ruptured calling into question notions of truth and falsehood, so does the drama in its entirety challenge notions of truth, proposing that one’s reality changes in relation to perspective and positionality.

It is this last observation that makes the cinematic version of the drama doubly interesting and ripe for inquiry. Pilar Miró exploits all the artifice and illusion inherent in the medium of film, creating a sumptuous visual feast that plays at each turn with light, scenery and perspective; aesthetically both contemporary and baroque. Through her artistic choices she exhibits a painterly style akin to that which lies at the heart of the baroque aesthetic. This emphasis on illusion highlights the role of the prevailing archetype of the drama, the maiden, by reinforcing the role of artifice. Archetypes impose an illusory reality, which as we have already discussed, simultaneously seeks to invoke a deeper truth whilst resorting to superficiality and artifice to do so. Miró in turn emphasizes the artificiality of the medium of film, eschewing a realistic representation in her choice of scenery and backdrops, thus underscoring the role that illusion, artifice and optics play in the shaping of truth and reality at multiple levels.

The film shows a curious lack of everyday objects and mundane details in the frames, an aesthetic that prevails throughout the film and compliments other stylistic choices such as
the lavish use of color to contrast characters, and the clever framing of actors in dark
doorways or shafts of light. Illusion and artifice are not merely expressions of an aesthetic
or a function of archetypes, however. As Fernando Ordoñez states in “Models of
Subjectivity in the Hispanic Baroque: Quevedo and Gracián”: “In a world touched by
disillusion, baroque subjects and their discourses are developed between “freedom and
containment”, a tension determined by the internal freedom granted by the possibility of
doubt and contained within the external limits imposed by an authoritarian social order”
(72).
Within a rigid, externally imposed framework for subjectivities, the ability to obscure and
distort the external gaze—that is to escape observation through illusion—opens the
possibility for internal freedom. Thus, illusion and artifice, ambiguity and uncertainty,
become a liberating outlet for self-expression. That is, they open the possibility for
otherness within a rigidly structured social order.

This is perhaps ultimately the reason why the warrior maiden archetype, through its
ambiguity, is so compelling for the baroque period, and I would argue, also the reason it
returns as an archetype in post-Franco artistic productions such as Miró’s film. It is the
constant tension between Diana’s femininity and masculinity that encapsulates the dual
nature and ambiguity of the baroque subject, and opens previously closed avenues of self
expression to those affected by the Franco dictatorship. Just as Teodoro has the possibility
of being both noble or not through this optical dynamic, that is one in which what we see
has the potential to be but may not be the truth, so does Diana (and by extension other
female subjects) have permission to explore both gendered and social boundaries of
behavior.
Miró explores this tension of subjectivity through plot, imagery and scenery, emphasizing the Countess’ own uncertainties and contradictions. In lines 325-339 of the play Diana expounds on the complexity of her position, debating not only her feelings and ambiguous sentiments towards Teodoro, but also the limited options available to her for the fulfillment of her desires. She is fettered by an oppressive social order that regulates and limits her ability to act on her impulses. Miró enhances the contrasts in this monologue by using sharp delineations of light and dark as well as a stark contrast between Diana’s colorful and rich attire against a plain, and stark background. In addition, the film highlights her agency by often placing her above, and talking over Teodoro, contrasting once again her attire with his dull colored and plain clothes as well as emphasizing those scenes in which Diana controls the power dynamic through gaze; observing Teodoro in anonymity just as the Count Ludovico observes the maidens in his household.

The archetype of the maiden goddess (holy virgin) that the Countess embodies is one of power and female agency. This model of maidenhood and virginity so popular in the baroque presents itself in sharp contrast to our more contemporary symbol of female chastity, the Holy Virgin Mary. Although there is ample evidence to suggest that Marian worship has its roots in goddess worship, including that of the classical maiden goddesses, the connotations surrounding the chastity of each are drastically different. Whereas in classical literature Diana’s maidenhood is a representation of her independence and power, in Marian worship virginity becomes associated with purity and virtue, an emphasis that is absent in classical archetypes of maidenhood. The absence of a male partner or a child underscores the classical goddesses’ ability to function alone and unhindered. The Christianization of this archetype and its representation through the Virgin Mary, narrows
the significance of the notion of virginity limiting it to a literal abstinence of sexual intercourse, rather than a symbolic act of independence. This shift removes the underlying implication of female agency and power from maidenhood, and instead replaces it with a state of purity that is to be guarded and regulated in function of male interests and power.

The archetype of the maiden and the transition from Diana and Artemisia to the Virgin Mary, marks a transition from chastity as an exercise of female control over her sexuality to that of an externally imposed control over female desire. The Christianization of the maiden and her incarnation as the Virgin Mary also plays a crucial role in the creation of notions of the feminine ideal during the Franco Dictatorship, a concern that surfaces in the writing of Dulce Chacón. In her Trilogía de la huida, Chacón focuses on the effects that the Franco Regime’s aggressive regulation of gendered relations had on interactions between the sexes.

During the dictatorship symbolism, more so than archetype, becomes the prevailing means of garnering support and coercing individuals into compliance, be it voluntary or involuntary. The Franco Regime is accused of being baroque in its makeup and functioning. Though this accusation is made critically and to highlight a sense of backwardness, it becomes an applicable descriptor of the dictatorship in various ways. Foremost, Francisco Franco understood the power of symbols and focused his efforts on the reinstatement of the Spain of the Golden Age. As Morcillo points out in The Seduction of Modern Spain, Franco sought to establish an organic democracy:

The notion of organic democracy was not new. It goes back to the Golden Age political discourse that the Regime revived to legitimize itself in power. Spanish organicist tradition, rooted in the works of baroque Counter-Reformation scholars, fits perfectly
within the authoritarian Francoist model—having as its main objective a divinely sanctioned order in which each individual plays a predetermined and immutable role. As in the baroque period, National Catholicism made Franco head of the state (a role assigned to the king in the early modern period) and strong supporter of the Catholic Church as in the Counter-Reformation era. In turn, the Catholic Church lent legitimacy to the Regime, and corporeal wholeness, by acting as its heart and soul. (31)

Among one of the most powerful symbols that the Regime evokes and enlists to its advantage in order to restore Spain to its previous glory, is that of the maiden archetype. However, this iteration of the maiden is completely transmuted into the Holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, and therefore all the attending notions of female chastity that accompany the religious figure. As we can see in the propaganda posters below, both the Republic and the Regime understood the importance of shaping female identity through imagery:
Both posters encourage young women to join social clubs, yet the underlying messages are widely divergent. The first, published during the second Spanish Republic, advertises a camp for young women featuring an amazonian-like figure poised to release a javelin. The image conveys strength and determination, highlighting these traits as desirable, and fomenting the pursuit of physical activity and health in young women. Implicit in the image is the idea that warrior-like prowess is not exclusive of femininity, a notion that implicates women in the project of nation building and identity within a role that is on par with that of males.

In sharp contrast with the poster on the left the one put out under the Franco Regime several years later encapsulates the message being given to women regarding the dictatorship’s expectations for their behavior: “Young women must prepare themselves to become angels of the home, winning the respect of all humankind by preserving their physical and spiritual virginity” (Morcillo 62). In other words, women were to be virgins, mothers and housewives. The image features a silhouette of a virgin-like figure rather prominently, with her head covered, and holding up a symbol of the catholic faith. Behind the first we see two more silhouettes of figures, echoes of the one in the forefront, conveying different roles. The one immediately behind the first seems to be wearing a hat, possibly symbolizing the everyday woman in her public role as upholder of social mores and catholic principles. The last and third appears to be wearing a headscarf, indicating her role within the home as steward of the family nucleus and her contributory role to the national project through her labors in the household. In every image, we find a side profile, and a silhouette, depicting women who appropriately do not confront the viewer with their gaze, and are also unremarkable, interchangeable and anonymous.
Through the rhetoric and propaganda of the Regime we see how the archetype of the maiden embodied in the Virgin Mary becomes a central symbol for women’s role within the Regime. In the posters below one can see not only an emphasis on motherhood as a sacred and exalted duty, but imagery that evokes the Virgin Mother:

Regardless of whether this is an intentional or even conscious use of this aesthetic by the artists, it is clear that the virgin archetype in the form of Mary permeated falangist discourse, and was used to define female roles within the Regime. This new preferred symbol of maidenhood conflates virginity with purity, meekness with virtue, and promotes the commodification of women’s sexuality. The associations of virginity with physical strength and willpower are obscured by this commodification, making women’s bodies property that can be despoiled and is therefore in need of management.

38
We can observe this shift in all forms of propaganda, pamphlets and policies, but the image on the cover of *Sí* beautifully encapsulates the general fervor exhibited by the Regime for this symbol. Morcillo points out that this fervor and devotion for the Virgin is in fact an important socio-political tool for control exercised by Franco. “In the official propaganda Franco became the iron surgeon in charge to restore health to the agonizing body politic at the turn of the twentieth century. He incarnated the savior who delivered Spain from the evil secularizing Second Republic” (45). Just as in the Catholic tradition Jesus delivers his wife, the church, from sin, Franco casts himself as the husband and savior of the mother nation:

Man, and woman became “one flesh” in the image of the Union of Christ and his Church—an indissoluble union under God. [...] In the same way, there existed an indissoluble contract between Franco and his people. Like the groom, the Francoist state joined his bride, the motherland, in a union consummated by the blood spilled during the Spanish Civil War. Official propaganda devoured the “madre Patria” becoming one flesh with Francoism forming, as scholar José Antonio Maravall pointed out in 1956, a mystic body politic. (Morcillo 142)

We see then how the symbolism surrounding notions of female gender roles and chastity played a crucial role in the process of nation-building. Through the exercise of power over female bodies the Regime by extension regulates the entire mystic body politic and effectively defines roles for all members of the citizenry.

The model of the Virgin Mary as aspirational for the female body during the Franco Regime is significant for its definition of female subjectivity and agency. In *Alone of All Her Sex* Marina Warner explores the historical changes that the figure of the Virgin Mary underwent over hundreds of years. Warner argues against characterizing the Virgin Mary as
an archetype, describing her rather as belonging “to a vast community of people and
[representing] a gradual accretion of their ideas, the deposit of popular belief interacting
with intellectual inquiry” (xxiv). Yet Warner’s representation of this figure is one that I find
useful in the examination of the role that the Virgin Mary plays during the Franco Regime.
In the chapter entitled “Virgin Birth” Warner notes that in the case of the virgin goddess
Diana “[h]er virginity signified she had retained freedom of choice to take lovers or to reject
them” while the “interpretation of the virgin birth as the moral sanction of the goodness of
sexual chastity was the overwhelming and distinctive contribution of the Christian religion
to the ancient mythological formula” (48). This shift in emphasis and significance relating
to female chastity is problematic for both the female subject and the body politic, as in both
cases it wrests power and authority from the female body.

The Franco Regime exhibited a fierce determination to regulate gender dynamics and
subjectivities and, when it came to female sexuality in particular, promoted the notion that
chastity equaled morality. The interference of the Regime in the most intimate aspects of
citizens’ lives shaped human interactions under the dictatorship, a fact that Dulce Chacón
explores in Trilogía de la huída. Early on in Chacón’s Algún amor que no mate, the first
book of the trilogy, the main character asserts that “[d]urante tres días y tres noches
Prudencia esperó con lágrimas la pérdida de su virginidad…” (Chacón 34). We see here a
portrayal of the wife as the new archetypal, and problematic virgin who cries for the
anticipated loss of her purity for three days and nights, yet understands the transmutation of
virgin to mother as a moral and civic duty. Her virginity is problematic because as has been
discussed repeatedly in gender theory, the model of woman who is both mother and virgin,
ingénue and lover, is an unachievable ideal wrought with contradictions. The failure of this
model of woman lies both in the impossibility of one person embodying these contradictory roles, as well as in the fact that pursuing it results in a total annulation of the subject, a loss of agency, and a suppression of all desire: a reality that Prudencia confesses to from the opening lines of Algún amor when she tells us “[h]ace muchos años que no hago el amor” (19). Prudencia’s virginity and loss of it, is not represented as a powerful example of female agency, but rather an objectification of her sexuality. Instead of choosing whether to engage in her sexuality, she is portrayed as passively awaiting its execution. She does not actively choose to leave her state of virginity, but rather, has her virginity taken from her. In fact, even describing the act of moving from virgin to non-virgin is problematic. The notion that virginity is something to be taken, relinquished, or forcefully removed is so ingrained in patriarchal culture that language does not give us a verb to describe it as an active decision by the subject. An individual may potentially bestow or give their virginity to someone, yet most often it is described as taken, removed or lost.

In Prudencia, Chacón presents her readers with what is undeniably a portrait of the ideal Spanish woman during the Franco Regime: one who embodies the humble, chaste and obedient model of wife. Chacón masterfully depicts the plight of women in their roles within the confines of the marital structure and the national mechanism in Algún amor que no mate. Through the protagonist the reader witnesses the slow unraveling of the characters as they are subject to this unyielding regime. Both Prudencia and our protagonist, whom we later discover to be two aspects of the same character, exemplify the submissive, naive, gentle wife who before wedding guards her innocence, and once wed allows herself to be molded by her husband. As the story progresses however, we learn just how toxic this dynamic is and we can observe an implicit criticism by the author. Despite fulfilling the ideal to the
best of her abilities — that is being innocent, pure, meek and self-denying — the protagonist finds herself trapped, discarded and abused, physically and emotionally. The attitude of the husband towards her is nonetheless justified within the framework of the traditional patriarchal regime. The possible outcomes for the individuals within this oppressive regime, which rigidly defines gender roles, are very limited. In every case however, destruction of self is inevitable. Both parties are subject to mechanisms of power that demand a loss of individuality and replace personal individual relationships with a union with the nation-state. Individuality is thus obliterated and abandoned in favor of a single common identity, that of the good Spaniard.

Chacón represents this dynamic in Algún amor que no mate through Prudencia and her husband. At the beginning the relationship between them is promising. Each one seems genuinely in love with the other, tenderly attending to their partner’s needs, and anticipating their desires and comfort. This happy relationship is not to last, however. As Prudencia narrates the story of her gradually deteriorating marriage we see that the progressive dissolution of the relationship goes hand in hand with the slow and steady adoption of a regime-endorsed marital model. It is the protagonist’s spouse whom first begins to slip into his proscribed role as the ideal Spanish husband; at best distant and patronizing, at worse cold, vindictive and cruel. The husband’s change is gradual and always one step ahead of Prudencia’s, anticipating and influencing her behavior, and thus slowly molding her into the ideal Spanish wife. Through Prudencia’s recollections we see the alterations of his attitude towards her:

Prudencia se levanta todos los días antes que su marido. Le prepara el desayuno y la ropa que va a ponerse, y luego enciende la radio para que él se despierte con las
noticias. Hace muchos años que lo hace así. Cuando se casaron se levantaba antes el marido, sin hacer mucho ruido para no despertarla, y tomaba el café en el bar de la esquina. De esta forma, ella podía dormir un poco más. Prudencia sospechó que a su marido le molestaba que se quedara en la cama cuando empezó a hacerle reproches con bastante frecuencia. Si ella decía que no había tenido tiempo de hacer algo, o aunque dijera que estaba cansada, él siempre le contestaba lo mismo, que se pasaba el día durmiendo. Pero cuando se dio cuenta definitivamente fue cuando él, al levantarse, tiraba de las mantas dejándole las espaldas al aire. Prudencia volvía a taparse y el marido ponía la radio a todo volumen mientras se afeitaba. Como ella no podía volver a dormir, se levantaba y preparaba el desayuno y él le decía: ¡Ay qué bien, cariño, un café calentito! Aunque no lo hiciera con cariño. Así fue como ella se acostumbró a hacer el café todos los días y él dejó de llamarla cariño. (43)

Chacón’s masterful portrait of how a relationship gradually and systematically falls into sanctioned marital roles, with their accompanying expectations, tensions and inevitable emotional degradation, unveils the violence of minute daily interactions. The quiet indignation and gradual escalation of her husband’s micro-aggressions eventually lead to Prudencia’s compliance. It is precisely this masked aggression, measured violence that eventually becomes blatant, which slowly forces her acquiescence. In a perfect micro-cosmos, the marital institution mirrors the nation-state, the husband a dictator of his household.

The husband’s alteration comes also in the form of more frequent and longer absences from the home, his interactions with the narrator becoming increasingly mundane and impersonal, limited to the oversight of household chores and minutiae. Their intimacy
and his attentions towards her move from passionate love to violence, and eventual indifference. We also learn of his lover, with whom he repeats the abusive cycle. For her part Prudencia mirrors her husband’s evolution by becoming increasingly subservient and accustomed to his aggressions. She even comes to accept her husband’s lover, if only, because she represents an outlet for his attentions; a reprieve.

It is true that the gradual progression from love to complacency, and even mutual dislike, is commonly represented in popular culture as a likely fate for many long-standing relationships. Yet the question that Chacón seems to pose is: Is this truly inevitable? Is this not ultimately, or rather originally, a problem of patriarchal structures and expectations? I would argue that the answer is yes. The dissolution and ultimate loss of this human relationship is a tragedy, one that comes about through the imposition of extreme patriarchal structures through a fascist regime. Prudencia, increasingly isolated and accelerating into madness, has not fulfilled her patriarchal duty, despite being forcefully subjected to its structures. Repeatedly, Chacón reminds us that the Regime, the eye of the dictator, is turned to even the minutest detail of this couple’s affairs and governs the private as well as the public. The narrator complains that Prudencia’s husband allows himself to be filled with the ideas of others:

Él se cree muy instruido porque escucha la radio todo el día y lo que pasa es que tiene la cabeza llena de ideas de otros. Todo va bien si oye siempre los mismos programas, pero cuando los cambian menudo lio se hace el pobre. Y también piensa que es más ilustrado que ella porque lee siempre el periódico mientras cenan. Se sonríe si Prudencia le hace un comentario, con aires de superioridad y casi con desprecio. ¿Qué entenderás tú? (22)
As discussed elsewhere in this study, the Franco Regime sought to mold its citizens and the nation through a coordinated effort that included propaganda and other forms of cultural production (posters, magazines, pamphlets, radio shows, TV programming etc.). In *Algún amor que no mate* the invasion of home-life through the airwaves and print media is made clear in the effects that this information has on Prudencia’s husband. Although the content of the material he is consuming is not specified, the effect that its consumption has on their relationship is portrayed through his behavior: It leads the husband to espouse notions and ideas that are not his own, and to lose interest in, and devalue, those of his wife.

Hearsay and gossip are other forms of surveillance found in the text. Throughout the novel Prudencia finds herself the subject of gossip and conversations among family, and friends. Despite her almost total isolation within her home, she is constantly under scrutiny. Her cousin, who purports to be concerned for her welfare, exploits Prudencia’s marital discord and troubles as a fresh source of conversation and satisfaction with her own situation in life: “[e]n el fondo, mi prima y las amigas disfrutaban mucho viendo a Prudencia perder la cara de contenta que tenía cuando se casó, eso les hacía sentirse mejor, por comparación, no porque ellas fueran más felices, sino porque eran un poco menos desgraciadas que Prudencia” (49). Pressure to perform in a socially acceptable manner is present throughout the novel. This type of social policing, citizen to citizen, is highly effective as a means of control. One clear effect is that despite an unhappy marriage, Prudencia and her husband remain together. Although their situation could be remedied through divorce or separation—and despite having reached conditions of physical violence and contempt insupportable for Prudencia while the husband maintains a relationship with another woman which has produced a son and which we can presume he favors—the fear of what will be said imprisons the couple:
También el marido de Prudencia aceptó su destino. Dice el marido de mi prima que el suegro de Prudencia le contó, pocos días antes de morir, que le había exigido a su hijo prometerle que jamás se divorciaría, se lo hizo jurar por Dios. El hijo había ido a la pensión a decírle que pensaba separarse y el padre le contestó que si lo hacía daría mucho que hablar, que ya la gente estaba hablando demasiado. Acabó gritándole. Y le hizo jurar que no se divorciaría nunca. Digo yo que ese juramento es una condena, no sólo para el marido de Prudencia, aún más para ella, la convirtió a la vez en presa y en prisión. (90)

Neither individual is therefore free to pursue a path that would lead to greater fulfillment or happiness, yet patriarcal structures dictate that Prudencia will suffer the most amount of restriction.

The result of this normative and rigid model of marriage, the promise of which is national renewal and aggrandizement, is two isolated, withdrawn, and alienated individuals. When Prudencia finds and reads a note from her husband’s lover, the protagonist has a revelation:

‘Felicidades, mi amor, espero que mi regalo de cumpleaños te acompañe, para que no te sientas tan solo cuando no estoy contigo. Dale mucho cariño, es muy mimoso, se parece a ti.’ No era la letra de su suegra. Prudencia encontró la nota en la chaqueta de su marido, por casualidad, al ir a buscar la tarjeta del veterinario porque el perro se había comido un bote de pastillas. Así fue como se enteró de que el perro era un regalo de la amante. Así supo que no era ella la única que se sentía sola. (57)

Prudencia sees that she is not alone in her isolation. Both she and her husband, though unequal in their status and privileges under the Regime, are plagued by symptoms of alienation, loneliness and depression. Although her husband has a son with his lover, we find that the Regime’s model
of marriage and its intended outcome are ultimately a failure, while the strict social mores and structures that buttress it allow no escape for either individual into an alternate life that could provide them some measure of satisfaction.

The failure of this ‘model couple’ is Chacon’s indictment of the system. If they fail, they in their perfect gender normativity, then the question must be, is this a sustainable system for anyone? The grand purpose of marriage, the institutionalization of the indenturing of women to the purpose of procreation, is fruitless. The sacrifices made by the individual, primarily the woman, for the greater good, the pain, the loss of self the violence endured, do not ultimately produce the intended outcome. This grand scheme that is the pretext for the systematic isolation of women, whom become merely uteruses—vessels for the sons of the nation—and relegates the individual to the status of object, does not fulfill its promise, while it limits the flourishing of relationships that could be fruitful emotionally and psychologically. The episode in the quote above, which narrates the gift given to the husband gives us a fleeting image of the frustrated prospects of the couple. Despite the provenance of the animal, we find that both Prudencia and her husband become fond of it, and until its death, pour onto the animal the affection that they are incapable of showing each other. An affection which they are unable to give to a child of their own despite the love that was once between them. Their relationship is spent and discarded; a byproduct of a failed national enterprise in which the worth of individuals and their relationships is measured by their service to the nation through the production of offspring, regardless of their desire or ability to do so.

In this social equation, the Spanish populace is reduced to fulfilling the goals and quotas set forth by the nation, and human interactions are sacrificed to the ‘greater good.’ Our couple not only succumbs to acting out the normative gendered roles set forth by the
Regime, but also bases its worth and self-valorization on their ability to fulfill their patriotic task. As an infertile couple, they are doomed to making the futile sacrifice of their loving relationship for an outcome that never materializes into the fulfillment of their civic duty. Instead this system that reduces a woman’s role to that of uterus, insidiously leads to the objectification of women by their husbands (and society in general) while breaking down otherwise healthy human relationships into a series of farcical repetitions, and a warped simulacrum of interactions. Furthermore, in this system, the archetypical maiden is stripped of all subjectivity as she makes the ultimate sacrifice of self to a failed national project. The Regime’s model of womanhood—virgin maiden, devoted mother—left no room for unbound sexual expression. This was left to the prostitutes and whores, whom we will analyze in detail further on.
Chapter 2  Wanton Bodies: Eroticism, Pornography, and Prostitution

¿O cuál es más de culpar, aunque cualquiera mal haga:
la que peca por la paga, o el que paga por pecar?

- Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

In 1979, only four short years after the death of Francisco Franco, the publishing company Tusquets establishes an annual contest for erotic literature in Spain, *La sonrisa vertical*. This literary contest was considered a prominent example of el *destape* that took place in Spain following the death of Franco, and became one of the first official recognitions of erotic and pornographic art as part of mainstream Spanish culture since prior to the dictatorship. As Jean Gilkison observes in her article “From Taboos to Transgressions: Textual Strategies in Woman-Authored Spanish Erotic Fiction,” this type of fiction “enjoyed a relatively high degree of respectability in Spain” (1). This degree of respectability could be attributed to varying factors, however, the most convincing is that of a desire to rebel against the “catholic, parochial, politically and sexually repressive culture” of the Franco Regime (Gilkison 1). Erotic or pornographic fiction, a distinction that is often difficult to draw and that the Franco Regime did not bother to make, becomes a mode of anti-establishment rebellion. Two noted contemporary Spanish authors, Ana Rossetti and Mercedes Abad (both recipients of the *Sonrisa vertical* award in 1991 and 1986 respectively), engage in this type of disruptive literary discourse. The reasons why erotic fiction in Spain can be viewed as a liberating or resistance form of expression are not immediately obvious and bear analysis. In this chapter, we will take a closer look at how
pornography and eroticism, specifically that produced by women, came to play a disrupting role during and after the Franco Regime, and how its effectiveness as disruptor relates to social attitudes towards women’s sexuality, including the role of prostitution.

On the 22nd of December of 1936, in the midst of civil war, the Nationalists circulated a mandate prohibiting, among other things, the dissemination of “folletos y toda clase de impresos y grabados pornográficos y de literatura socialista, comunista, libertaria, y, en general disolvente” (Boletín Oficial del Estado, Burgos, n° 66 471-472). In less than twenty words, this edict foreshadows what will become a prolonged and often contradictory obsession on the part of this totalitarian government with sexuality and its expression, and a conflation of liberal and socialist tendencies with depravity and moral degradation. In apparent contradiction with this stance, not long into Franco’s military rule instated in 1939 during what is known as the first wave of the Regime, the dictatorship enacts the 1941 Patronato de protección a la mujer, targeting women’s bodies by codifying and regulating prostitution which had been made illegal during the Second Republic with the intent of, as Mercedes Rivas Arjona frames it, creating a prostitution economy that was regulated and contained:

En cuanto al sistema reglamentarista, dicho método se ha caracterizado tradicionalmente por concebir la prostitución como un “mal menor” para regular la sexualidad masculina. La prostitución, sería así, un “mal social” inevitable, al que cabría por lo tanto reglamentar para el “bien común”, permitiendo evitar pecados y excesos mayores y defender el orden social establecido —en primer lugar en la familia—, pero no prohibir. En la práctica, el sistema estuvo encaminado a regular administrativamente el ejercicio de la prostitución mediante el sistema de ficheros, controles sanitarios y aplicación de tasas,
todo ello con el propósito claro de prevenir las enfermedades venéreas y mantener el orden púbico. (348-349)

Interestingly, we find the Nationalist party adopting a zero-tolerance policy towards pornography, yet regulating and sanctioning prostitution, effectively making it socially acceptable.

This apparent schizophrenia betrays two interesting underlying biases on the part of the Regime: That women’s sexuality is only acceptable within the context of a transaction—that is not freely given or willfully sought, but exchanged within a predetermined system in which it is relinquished for gain (financial, comfort, security)—and that female sexuality that implies desire on the part of the woman is taboo. On the one hand, the inclusion of pornography as an outlawed and offensive form of print circulation among a list of apparently unrelated (primarily politically charged) print media, instantly attaches political significance to this sexual trade, where perhaps it did not have it before. As part of an outlawed form of expression, pornography becomes, in later years, a form of protest and resistance against the Regime. It is unclear as to why pornography is handled so differently to prostitution, but one must surmise that one offensive aspect of it is its implicit transgression: By default pornography does not conform to a traditional and religious view of sexuality as it does not further the intended and primary purpose of the sexual act (procreation), nor does it possess the normalized and accepted status of prostitution, in addition certain kinds of pornography imply and even celebrate the willingness and enjoyment of the woman in participating in the sexual act. In *La civilización pervertida o la ética sadomasoquista cristiana*, Javier Fisac Seco suggests that the regulation of pornography under a fascist regime is at its core an exertion of power over the free expression of individuals:
La pornografía es la representación estética de las relaciones sexuales individuales o colectivas que sólo producen vergüenza en una moral represiva y en un individuo reprimido y dominado. A efectos políticos, sociales y culturales la prohibición de la representación y difusión de la pornografía tiene el mismo objetivo que la represión de la libertad de pensamiento, de conciencia o de moral. Se reprime la pornografía igual que se reprimen la literatura, el teatro, el cine, el arte, las fotografías que contienen valores críticos con la moral dominante. Se reprime el pensamiento, la lectura o la escritura de libros científicos, políticos o novelas por las mismas razones por las que se reprime la pornografía por que fomentan el sentido de la libertad y la personalidad individual frente a la moral dominante. (129)

The institutional regulation of prostitution during the first wave of the Franco Regime underscores deep-rooted misogyny based on Augustinian notions of the “inevitable sin” of prostitution, a social evil tolerated as a vehicle for curbing greater and more serious evils, such as the threatened virginity of young women. We will begin by examining the latter bias as it pertains directly to archetypal notions of womanhood as seen in the previous chapter.

In *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, Marina Warner explores the archetype of the penitent whore and its significance in Christian mythology. Insightfully, Warner notes that “…[t]ogether, the Virgin and the Magdalene form a diptych of Christian patriarchy’s idea of woman. There is no place in the conceptual architecture of Christian society for a single woman who is neither a virgin nor a whore” (235). It is precisely this dichotomy that becomes codified with the *Patronato de protección a la mujer* of 1941. The regulation of prostitution fits within a traditional religious framework of sexuality, wherein women can either be virgins, mothers or whores —no other space for the sexual expression of
women is available under the Regime and the archetypes of womanhood it espouses. Pornography on the other hand, particularly that created by women, is antithetical to the Regime. Its transgression, especially when the narrative voice is female, is in the granting of agency to the woman in the sexual sphere. A woman’s body that functions as subject, not object within the traditionally male-dominated domain of sexual pleasure is a threat to normative masculinities and the Regime.

As Jean-Louis Guereña insightfully points out in his lecture “Prostitución y franquismo: vaivenes de una política sexual”, regimented prostitution is normalized during the first wave of the Regime and is not abolished until 1956, in part due to a desire to break from Republican laws (the second Republic having abolished the practice), and in part as a reinforcement of traditional and religiously based views on the subject. One could interpret this as a re-establishment of traditional subject object relationships when it comes to sexual expression, and a reaction to the destabilizing effects of the liberal attitudes towards sex and sexuality emerging, and given space for expression, during the Republic.

The contradictions evident in that a government that proclaims itself as the savior of the family should be permissive in its attitudes towards prostitution, going so far as to effectively sanction it through regulation, are from its inception a source of tension for the Regime. As Morcillo notes:

Franco’s regime during the first decade was truly ambivalent about the practice of prostitution. On the one hand, it saw prostitution as a necessary evil—a healthy outlet for natural male desires. This image of the sexually potent man fit with the Regime’s promotion of itself as virile and masculine. The thinking went that if these strong men did not have the prostitute’s body as a barrier, they would surely defile the pure and chaste
bodies of their fiancées—True Catholic Women and the future mothers of the New Spain. (Morcillo 92)

Despite this moral ambivalence, the law will not be revisited until 1956 when in an effort to leave behind its isolationist mantle, Spain rebrands itself to the world and, among other things, outlaws the practice. It is to be argued, however, that this desire to join the world economy as well as enter an international political stage, is what ultimately creates the momentum necessary for this policy to come to fruition, not a sincere disavowal of the practice. It is well documented that despite the prescription of a spartan and austere conservatism to its citizenry, falangist elites often enjoyed lives of excess. In *Usos amorosos de la posguerra española* Carmen Martín Gaite points out the “contradicción existente entre la austeridad que predicaban [los ideólogos falangistas] y el escandaloso florecimiento del estraperlo, la prostitución y los negocios sucios” (Gaite 12). Chief among these excesses was the normalized and accepted frequenting of prostitutes by males. The double standard towards male and female sexual practices was clear:

…[A]l hombre que llegaba virgen a la boda se le miraba como a una «avis rara» y nadie le auguraba muchos éxitos ni como pretendiente, ni como marido ni como padre. A pesar de que la censura de la época silenciaba cualquier referencia abierta a la sexualidad, había todo un código de sobreentendidos, mediante el cual se daba por supuesto que las necesidades de los hombres eran más urgentes en este terreno, e incluso se aconsejaba a las muchachas que no se inclinaran, en su elección de novio, por un jovencito inexperto sino por un hombre «corrido» o «vivido», como también se decía. (Gaite 17)

The proscribed state of being to enhance an individuals’ suitability presented a conundrum: How does this ideal state for marriageability come to be when it requires opposite conditions for each of the participants? One must conclude thus that, “fallen women” though maligned, are an
essential part of the sexual economy and social fabric (Nuñez). Indisputably it must be so, as it is impossible to have men that are *corridos* or *vividos*, when all women are sworn to chastity before marriage, and exclusive marital intercourse as wives. If men must be by default experienced and virile lovers, and women must be virgins, faithful wives, or abstinent widows, then the prostitute, though reviled and labeled a public threat, must exist. This notion of the ‘necessary evil’ of the prostituted female body is an ancient one, yet its cementation in Catholic conservative ideology comes with St Thomas Aquinas’ treatment of the subject of prostitution in *Summa Theologica*. Despite a strong condemnation of prostitution as a sin and evil, Thomas Aquinas refrains from suggesting that it be banished or legally penalized, stating instead that “in human government also, those who are in authority, rightly tolerate certain evils, lest certain goods be lost, or certain greater evils be incurred: thus Augustine says (De Ordine ii, 4): ‘if you do away with harlots, the world will be convulsed with lust’” (Aquinas).

In adherence with what Morcillo identifies as a baroque attitude towards prostitution, the early Franco Regime echoes Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas in the rhetoric with which it addresses the topic. In *An Erotic Philology of Golden Age Spain* Adrienne Laskier Martín describes seventeenth-century attitudes towards prostitution and its regulation, noting that “the diminishment of women into marketable flesh (and a source of social disorder and disruption) is a necessary discursive step in the process of exclusion to which the structures of power and control in early modern Spain attempted to submit prostitutes by enclosing them in licensed brothels” (2). In a detailed and insightful analysis of the literature of the period, Martín highlights how “despite her social marginalization” the prostitute remains a powerful archetype of the period, and is an indispensable part of the social and economic fabric. Likewise, the Franco Regime identified the practice of prostitution as a necessary and tolerated ‘evil’ that
required regulation. Martín’s assertion that “although the concerns underlying the legislation of prostitution and public brothels were framed in a discourse of public safety, health, religion, and a morality that encompassed all of them, they were largely economic” (19), is just as applicable an observation when discussing the Franco Regime, as it is a descriptor of sixteenth and seventeenth century ideology on the subject. Ultimately the regulation of prostitution is an extension of the regulation of female bodies as commodities, whether the transaction occurs as a marriage, a dowry, or a direct monetary or material exchange for sexual favors.

The archetype of the whore complements those of the virgin, mother, and widow, as without her the latter cannot exist without compromising the ideal virile male archetype. These narrow spaces for female sexuality emphasize the lack of subjectivity available to the female body and it is clear that female bodies faced with these options for expression are doomed to transgress. The whore archetype therefore becomes widely applicable, not simply to women who sell sex, but those who express sexual desire outside the confines of marriage. Like the others, the whore despite being a transgressor of taboos, is ultimately fettered by the trappings of a patriarchal hierarchy. The whore is either marginalized and scorned, therefore outcast from society and merely an outlet for the satiation of base male instincts, or otherwise seeking redemption and reinstatement into the social fabric through reform and penitence. In fact, it is precisely this aspect, her ability to seek redemption, and the expectation that she will do so, which allows her to be part of the ideological framework (Sánchez Ortega).

The archetypal whore so prominent in Golden Age literature is, however, a poor reflection of the clandestine prostitute that lived and breathed in post-war Spain. Under the Regime’s regulation the lot of the prostitute—often destitute women, orphaned or widowed by
the civil war—was one of strict regulation requiring an identification card, medical examinations and monitored finances:

Certainly, the Civil War created a web of misery for those women who lost their husbands or parents. The repressive state apparatus affected them in two ways: Some went to prison to pay for the crimes of their relatives; others had to prostitute themselves to survive in a labor market that favored the victors over the vanquished. Total public humiliation, either serving time in jail or registering in a public brothel; was the penance many poor women paid for survival. They inhabited bodies that belonged to the Regime.

(Morcillo 103)

The desire to be an independent or clandestine prostitute, in spite of the real threat of prosecution, was primarily fueled by a desire to circumvent laws that excluded certain women from exercising the trade (underage or medically unfit females for instance) as well as monetary gain:

Algunas de ellas eran madres solteras o viudas con hijos que mantener, y ejercían la prostitución clandestina o callejera, porque les traía más cuenta que someterse a la opresiva explotación de que eran víctimas en los numerosos lupanares repartidos generosamente por la Península Ibérica y regidos por jefas avarientas y sin escrúpulos.

(Gaite 74)

Yet, despite the real and tangible factors that led women to practice clandestine prostitution, it is interesting to consider it as an intrinsically rebellious act (whether conscious or not). As Morcillo so succinctly describes it, these women were subject to institutionalizing and regulation of their bodies which rendered them objects of the Regime, completely disenfranchised within the system. A desire to break away from this totalitarian and suffocating structure must, therefore, be
considered part of the impulse to engage in the illicit trade. Clandestine prostitution, as opposed to sanctioned prostitution, fell then in the same category as pornography, an illegal, subversive act destabilizing to the Regime. Prostitution does not however emerge as a feminist or liberating trope. On the contrary, in Spanish cultural production the prostitute is often used as misogynist tool to classify those women who would transgress: She is either within the normative and accepted transactional, sanctioned model, or is destitute, otherized and ostracized.

Pornography in opposition to regulated prostitution, was outlawed at the inception of the Regime’s establishment of power. A thorough analysis of the governmental attempts at censoring film media, *La censura cinematográfica en España* by Alberto Gil, highlights the extreme, and often comical when seen through a contemporary lens, efforts of the Regime’s censorship apparatus as it purported to protect Spanish morality from corrupting influences. The effort became especially desperate as the second wave of the Regime faced the cultural fluidity and infiltration that came with tourism and foreign media, a culture that was at odds and drastically contrasted with the austere social mores of Spain. The irony in this is that despite the Regime’s desire to emulate the Golden Age of Spain (including in its treatment of prostitution), it failed to recognize that the period possessed a rich and varied tradition of erotic writings, which gave rise to a tradition of erotic literature, and that the Spanish *comedia* often explored non-normative or traditional sexualities, including cross-dressing and pre-marital relations. It is true that the policing of sexuality and morality was a characteristic of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, yet this was not to the exclusion of erotic artistic production. On the contrary, the Baroque in particular was fraught with contradictions when one contrasts period artwork and literature with religious and political institutional stances. The Franco Regime, however, failed to appreciate the nuances and contrasting views espoused during the period, and adopted an
incomplete and one-sided reflection of it, unwittingly promoting, despite their strict censuring, cultural production that undermined their official stances on sexuality. This irony is patently obvious in the aesthetic found in works by transgressive authors such as Ana Rossetti and Mercedes Abad.

The sixteenth century, far from being strictly puritanical in its views on desire and eroticism, saw the birth of the first form of recognizable pornography as understood in the modern sense. Despite the prevalence of erotic art since antiquity, it was not until the publication of *Il Modi* by Giulio Romano (a series of sixteen sexually explicit engravings) and the accompanying *Sonetti lusoriosi* by Pietro Aretino (sexually explicit sonnets to accompany the engravings) that we see the mass circulation of erotic art with the specific intent of eliciting arousal. The literature of the baroque in Spain reflects these trends. In *An Erotic Philology of Golden Age Spain*, Martín discusses the common misconceptions regarding literature of the period, as well as the need to unearth and bring attention to numerous works previously ignored: Much of pre- and early modern Spanish literature is not, in fact, didactic, at least not in the moralistic, admonitory sense in which didacticism has traditionally been interpreted. Rather than being exempla of sin and repentance, these earlier works and much Golden Age verse reflect the existence of a complex set of surprisingly tolerant attitudes toward the literary representation of sexuality and eroticism in early modern Spain. (Martín 171)

The lack of study and attention given to much of the literature of this kind must be attributed to some degree to the moralistic and sexually repressed policies of the Franco Regime as well as lingering attitudes towards eroticism and its representation. However, one must consider that the slow unearthing of these erotic works is in part due to the fluid nature of pornography. The intersection of erotic art and pornography is at times difficult to delineate, with
much erotic artistic production occupying a gray area where aesthetic pleasure and voyeuristic desires overlap. As Martín asks “how do we distinguish, with any specificity, between love poetry and erotic poetry? Eroticism is a vague, unstable concept grounded in contemporary notions of sexuality and the personal, moral, and literary standards of its readers” (172). This fluidity and mutability of accepted notions of sexuality is certainly at play in the Franco Regime’s categorization of immoral and pornographic material, often presenting an extremely prudish view best illustrated perhaps by its treatment of film posters. In La censura Franquista en el cartel de cine, Bienvenido Llopis provides a series of side-by-side comparisons of film posters released in the United States, versus the doctored versions as they appeared in Spain having been subjected to the censor’s brush. It is clear from the images that the sensuality of the women is not completely obliterated, but rather, made acceptable by the inclusion of modifications in the image that make it fit within sanctioned parameters. As a whole the posters provide a small example of the vast purview of the censorship mechanism under the Regime, which worked furiously to keep cultural production within the sanctioned parameters of decency and morality, even though these were ambiguous and contradictory at times.

Despite its evasive nature, we find that the Franco Regime aggressively attempted to label and outlaw pornography, categorizing it as a social corruptor, blaming it for the dissolution of morality among Spanish youth, and effectively sanitizing the public’s media consumption. In the Boletín Oficial del Estado of the 24 of December of 1936 the Falangists declare that: “Una de las armas de más eficacia puesta en juego por los enemigos de la Patria ha sido la difusión de la literatura pornográfica y disolvente. La inteligencia dócil de la juventud y la ignorancia de las masas fueron el medio propicio donde se desarrolló el cultivo de las ideas revolucionarias y la triste experiencia de este momento histórico” (Estado Español). This conflation of pornography
with leftist influence, is precisely what elevates the production and consumption of erotic art to the level of political resistance. Currently there is much discussion on whether pornography or prostitution should be viewed as liberating or oppressive (see Melissa Farley, Julie Bindel, Catharine Mackinnon, Laura María Agustín, and Carol Queen). This is not a debate I intend to enter into here, however it is important to note that the discussion lends itself to strong opinions on both sides of the argument. In the narrow context of this study, however, I posit that pornography or eroticized literary production, particularly by Spanish women, is a distinct form of political resistance. The Franco Regime created a dynamic in which, through the purposeful outlawing of pornographic content and its association with leftist tendencies, the production and consumption of it became implicit rebellious acts.

Returning finally to the authors mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, we find that both Ana Rossetti and Mercedes Abad explore the constraints and possibilities of erotic literature for the expression of female desires. Their work straddles the fine line between literature and pornography, and examines the relationship between object and subject, manipulating taboos and encoded misogyny. Whether their work is in fact liberating to women is a topic of some debate. Critics such as James Mandrell and Judith Drinkwater have asserted that there is in their work no successful disruption of male narratives, fantasies or power structures. Even this extreme conclusion, however, does not negate that the authors engage in an appropriation and manipulation of not only the language and codes of eroticism and pornography that were contemporary to them, but an acknowledgement of baroque literary devices and the language of sexuality appropriate to that period. Furthermore, seen in the context of the aforementioned official stance towards pornography and erotic content, coupled with the repressive androcentric expectations placed on women, the mere production of this type of literature by women must be
acknowledged as a subversive act, regardless of whether it breaks new ground stylistically within the genre.

As we’ve seen, using the Spanish Golden Age as a model Francisco Franco actively pursued an ideology that included a propagation of cultural notions of women that re-established the archetypes of the mother, the virgin, and the whore, as well as the idealization of an unrealistic normative masculinity. I propose that these policies as well as the overt emulation of baroque Spain may have unintentionally served as a catalyst for the baroque aesthetic evidenced in some of the literary work produced late into, and following, the Regime. Certainly, we can assert that in some of their work authors such as Rossetti and Abad display an aesthetic that can be called baroque, and taken a step further, this stylistic choice becomes not only an appropriation and reaction against gendered discourse in canonical literature, but a counteroffensive to the Regime’s appropriation of this tradition. I propose that by adopting a baroque aesthetic, and doing so to express themselves through a forbidden medium (pornography), these writers magnify their dissidence and defy not only antiquated and traditional sexual mores that alienate women from the economy of desire and pleasure, but also sabotage the more contemporary attempts to double down on women with this ideology. The baroque aesthetic is by definition equivocal and contradictory, and so, lends itself to the disruption of a monolithic fascist ideology through subversion and vandalism of the official rhetoric. In the following chapter I analyze in detail how work by these authors explores the creative and subversive possibilities of the baroque aesthetic simultaneously internalizing and disrupting the official rhetoric on female sexualities.
When I beetheld the Image of my deere
With greedy lookes mine eyes would that way bend,
Fear, and desire did inwardly contend;
Feare to bee mark’d, desire to drawe still neere,

—Lady Mary Wroth

Much of the cultural production prior to, during, and after the Spanish Civil War is marked by an attempt to manufacture a national identity, and develop a narrative of this confrontation through the creation of nascent national mythologies. The discourse on both sides shared cultural markers but was fundamentally in opposition. As Noemí De Haro García and Julián Díaz Sánchez state in “Artistic Dissidence under Francoism: The Subversion of Cliché”:

“Both sides felt that they should defend their nation against a foreign enemy. For the Republicans, this menace was embodied by Hitler’s and Mussolini’s particular brands of fascism, whereas the insurgents believed that the threat to the nation came from a Judeo-Masonic conspiracy instigated by the USSR” (736). The use of cultural production as a means of garnering support, creating cohesion, and controlling the prevailing narratives, did not diminish with the end of the war and the establishment of the dictatorship. On the contrary, Jo Labanyi proposes that the Franco Regime was particularly attuned to, and effective at, establishing cultural hegemony.
In previous chapters I discuss the prevailing female archetypes as put forth by the Franco Regime, emphasizing the narrow spaces sanctioned by it for the expression of female sexuality. I noted that these archetypes are part of the cultural hegemony imposed by the Regime, which took up the Baroque period as a referent. As Tobias Locker notes in “The Baroque in the Construction of a National Culture in Francoist Spain: An Introduction,” “[t]he new leadership found in the Baroque the past that it wanted to retrieve” (657). In the preceding exploration of how these archetypes led to a discussion of the transgressive role of pornography, insofar as it is associated with female sexual desire and agency, Mercedes Abad and Ana Rossetti were introduced as significant contributors to the genre. Both of these authors embody a decided rupture from the official narrative of female personhood. Adopting a maligned and outlawed form of artistic production—language that blurs the lines with, and often delves into, the pornographic—and doing so as women in control of, and manipulating, the official discourse of oppression, they disrupt and attack the foundational language that buttressed the Regime.

Through the unabashed expression of female desire, the authors force a carving-out of space for a female sexuality that is not within the archetypical framework that the Regime so adamantly forced onto its populace. Rossetti’s female gaze, like the one that lingers over the sexualized male body of an advertisement in “Chico Wrangler” and recognizes desire within itself, as well as Abad’s female protagonists in *Ligeros libertinajes sabáticos*, which in various ways explore, accept and establish themselves as sexualized subjects, laugh (literally and figuratively) in the face of the limited constraints placed on female subjects. Far from being virgins, wives, mothers, widows, crones or whores, the females in these writings embody all these archetypal aspects, moving fluidly through them, adopting one or the other as best suits them for the occasion, blurring their boundaries, espousing porosity, homogeneity, permeability
and fluidity of bodies, sexualities, desires and identities. This multi-faceted, or perhaps more accurately, amalgamate sense of identity is diametrically opposed to the clinical, delimited, bound identities that the Regime imposes on its citizenry. The fascist ideology requires impermeable and static subjects as in this way they are easier to manipulate, compartmentalize and proscribe. In other words, they are easier to control and absorb into the mechanism of power through which they no longer possess personal identities, but rather are a piece in a larger machinery. The composite self is, therefore, a threat to the totalitarian ideology. Through their writing Rossetti and Abad transgress, appropriate and subvert female narratives of the Regime.

As noted earlier, the Baroque period (though a somewhat nebulous definition of it as the Regime included elements proper of Renaissance and Middle Ages in its conception of it) functioned “as an ideological legitimizing construct mixing different elements that were regarded by major cultural players during Francoism as specifically Spanish” (Locker 657). I propose that the baroque aesthetic, though useful as cultural tool for the Regime, was equally as present, and perhaps more truly represented, in the discourse of those oppressed by the Regime. As Locker notes, though in his case specifically regarding visual fine-arts, “[t]he Baroque was far from being a reference just within the Regime’s cultural and political discourse, or within the circles of conservative artists” as its cultural “references were also assimilated by anti-Francoist forces” (669-670). The power in the appropriation of this discourse lies in the subversion by appropriation that it implies: anti-Francoist artists “read and interpreted hegemonic culture and values in surprisingly alternative ways. In many cases these alternative readings were difficult to detect, as they were not simply contrary to the Regime’s principles but fundamentally alternative to them” (Haro García and Díaz Sánchez 739). I propose that Ana Rossetti and Mercedes Abad undermine the Regime’s discourse by presenting alternative interpretations of the baroque
aesthetic that enable heterogeneity in their work. Haro García and Díaz Sánchez argue that “the incorporation of Spanish tradition and its famous characters into the work of anti-Francoist intellectuals undermined the Regime’s control over it, as well as its control over how lo Español should be represented” (740). Similarly, Rossetti and Abad incorporate Spanish tradition in subversive ways that undermine the Regime’s monolithic representation of Spanish identity.

In Ana Rossetti’s poem “La anunciación del ángel,” we see a frequent use of hyperbaton coupled with an archaic use of language and latinizing grammar, both elements stylistically characteristic of baroque literature. The frequent use of hyperbaton creates a sense of semantic dismemberment, a trait Walter Benjamin observed as characteristic of the baroque in which “one finds a preference for accumulations of dismembered parts of speech” (188). Besides the semantic dissociation it produces, this poetic device has the effect of presenting the subjects as body parts that appear to fold onto each other. The forced and unnatural breaks in clauses put a physical distance between one word and another on the page, a distance that creates a pause in the flow of reading that results in the projection of a likewise disjointed image. This device is what Antonio Maravall identifies as an “expansion through fragmentation” or a “deliberate distortion of the centrality of the foreground” (20) typical of baroque aesthetic. This effect is particularly noticeable in lines seven to eight, and eleven to twelve:

Muriérame yo en ellos, cautiva la cintura,
amenazante dardo presentido,
pálido acónito,
igual que una fragancia, preciso, me traspase.
Muriérame yo en tu ancho hombro
doblada mi cabeza. Empapado y oscuro […] (7-12)
The use of hyperbaton creates a highly baroque effect in which the subjects become, not only fragmented and almost impossible to mentally visualize as whole individuals, but at times indistinguishable the one from the other. In the reading of the poem one must consciously make an effort to determine to whom a particular body part belongs, as the movement from one to the other is often fluid and unanticipated. The construction of the poem encourages the reader to disregard traditional notions of self and other, focusing on the intertwining, the motions within this hybrid whole, that much like the struggle of the two centers in an ellipse, create a constant tension. The tension is one of forced stasis of two bodies that can neither merge nor pull apart, while remaining an undifferentiated whole.

The ellipse mentioned above is a central stylistic and ideological device of the baroque that represents an important epistemological shift (Sarduy 56). This tension between the two centers of the ellipse is mirrored in the interaction of the bodies in Rossetti’s poem. The stress is both existential and physical: The bodies that pull apart, yet remain attracted to each other, circle around one another unable to fulfill their sexual desire and longing for the other. It is this constant pulling apart and coming together which defines the dynamic of these subjects. In a few lines Rossetti delivers erotically charged imagery that simultaneously invokes and dismantles traditional patriarchal discourse, and acknowledges the inherent difficulties in establishing equitable power dynamics between subjects.

The erotic nature, one could even say the wantonness, of the poem, just as in much of Rossetti’s work, has been a source of ammunition for her critics. Earlier in her career her work was dismissed as relying on shock value rather than talent, accused of being literature for women, smut or pornography. This is a particularly salient point as we consider the time period during which Rossetti reached the height of her publishing career, and the historical backdrop
against which she did so. In the 1980’s, during the prime of her literary achievement, Spain was only very recently emerging from almost 50 years of the repressive policies and ideology of the Franco Regime. The erotic nature of her work was a daring statement of female subjectivity and sexuality. Through the familiar and respected poetic forms so emblematic of Spain’s Golden Age, Rossetti inverts gendered literary tradition, and sabotages the discourse of the Franco Regime to express a female subjectivity that is diametrically opposed to that presented by the state. She does so through a baroque aesthetic that presents an image of women as complex, contradictory and unresolved individuals. Though this echoing of traditional literary forms could be seen as a lack of original artistry on the part of the poet, I argue that this is not so. As I have proposed, the act of assimilating and interpreting the traditional baroque aesthetic embraced by the Regime is an act of subversion. This appropriation of traditional forms and patriarchal discourse is not what Sharon Keefe Ugalde describes as an “entry into the male register” but rather a “theft” through which a movement “towards female meaning” (166) is made.

The following poem, “Chico Wrangler” from Rossetti’s collection Indicios vehementes, further illustrates both the appropriation of traditional poetic forms such as the sonnet and courtly poem, and their subversion:

Dulce corazón mío de súbito asaltado.
Todo por adorar más de lo permisible.
Todo porque un cigarro se asienta en una boca
y en sus jugosas sedas se humedece.
Porque una camiseta incitante señala,
de su pecho, el escudo durísimo,
y un vigoroso brazo de la mínima manga sobresale.
Todo porque unas piernas, unas perfectas piernas,
dentro del más ceñido pantalón, frente a mí se separan.

Se separan. (29)

Following the poetic structure and conventions of a *Carpe Diem* sonnet, Rossetti evokes tradition but transgresses its conventions at multiple levels. As is appropriate to the genre, Rossetti presents the requisite catalogue of body parts; the slow dissection of the admired body and the commentary that accompanies it. This enumeration takes place as a visual scan, from head to toe, with pauses, as the attention of the reader is focused on different body parts: mouth, chest, arm and legs. The first element of this poem to draw one’s attention is the gender inversion of this convention. As Andrew P. Debicki states:

The sugary tone and the seeming appeal to feminine modesty sets up a contrast with the rest of the poem, in which the speaker lusts after a stereotypical male body as portrayed in an advertisement for a specific brand of jeans. […] it thus consciously evokes a prior convention and then denies it in order to dramatize its revolutionary nature. Seen in a slightly different way, it evokes and turns upside down the premises of a traditional “carpe diem” text, in which a male speaker desires a female addressee: now it is a very brash female who treats the male as a sex object (Debicki 93).

The brashness of the female observer that Debicki notes is important as a marker of what Ugalde calls revision, which she deems “the most frequent and fruitful type of feminization” of literary tropes (9). This revision occurs as the poet moves beyond an identification and denouncement of patriarchal oppression, and takes hold of the language of the oppressor manipulating it to express female subjectivity. “Chico Wrangler” confronts the notion that “female subjectivity is closely bound to female eroticism, unfettered by false modesty and culpability” (Ugalde 173) head on,
and boldly places the female gaze in the role of subjective, desiring, entity. This female is a
longing, desirous subject that does not abide by a prescribed performance of self.

In a similar defiant attitude Mercedes Abad’s *Ligeros libertinajes sabáticos*—a series of
short stories that unabashedly explores the borders of the objectionable, obscene, and grotesque
in clear defiance of moralistic attitudes of the Franco Regime—can also be deemed revisionist at
its core. Each story represents a foray into the various protagonists’ sexualities and desires,
spanning from the humorous to the macabre, and at each turn prodding readers’ threshold for
what is acceptable literature and what constitutes obscenity. It is precisely in the ambiguous
space between erotic art and pornography, so difficult to define, that Abad’s short stories reside,
and from this space challenge conservative social mores. The sense of unease that the author
forces on the reader comes primarily from a play on the reader’s notions of morality, ethics and
normalized behavior. That is, the reader is constantly being made to question his or her position
in relation to the scenes described, made uncomfortably aware that the text may arouse yet
disgust simultaneously, that he or she may unconsciously respond with pleasure to an image they
find objectionable. The exploration of these boundaries of tolerance traverses not only a plethora
of sexual acts, but also questions of homosexuality, violence, social norms and taboos. The
anticipated effect of the text on the reader becomes an important part of its disruptive quality.
Abad’s text prods the boundaries of the acceptable not only through the content of her texts, but
the implication that there is a consumer of her texts.

Regarding her work, Abad confesses “[y]o siempre he escrito contra alguien” in an and
interview with Javier Sancho Más for the magazine *Caratula* (no pag.). She further elaborates by
stating that much of her writing is an act of defiance against the strict religious norms imposed
on her by her mother and traditional family. It is not too outlandish then to suggest that this
defiance extends to the society which engendered and harbored these strictures, as well as to the oppressive government which so faithfully imposed and guarded them. Abad’s work, like Rossetti’s, takes an antagonistic stance towards the Regime by appropriating certain elements of the official discourse to express defiantly erotic and in certain cases, lighthearted and comedic depictions of sexuality.

Despite a notable career as a reporter, and a substantial body of literary fiction, Abad has not enjoyed significant attention for her work. In part, this can be attributed to the fact that the work she is best known for falls into the realm of the pornographic, her very first publication (a series of erotic often grotesque short stories) was awarded the Sonrisa vertical prize when she was twenty-five years of age. Much of her writing is far from mainstream and pushes the boundaries between literature and pornography. The transgressive nature of the short story collection Ligeros libertinajes sabáticos, is exemplified and underscored in the final story “Ese autismo tuyo tan peligroso.” In this self-reflective narrative, the narrator laments the loss of sexual partners over her writing of erotic fiction. She finds herself sexually frustrated and despondent as she confesses that:

Me he quedado sin un solo amigo y ni siquiera eso es lo peor: olvidaré sus nombres con placer. El único abandono que me hiere realmente es el de quien -tal vez de una manera casual e irreflexiva- vaticinó la causa, la raíz de todos mis males y de cuanto había de acontecer: mi excomunión del grupo humano, tan finito y limitado en su humanidad que cualquier intento de hacer saltar los límites en pedazos es necesariamente inhumano y abyecto. (50)

The narrator/writer’s abjection is caused by her own perceived social and moral transgressions transmitted to those around her through her writing. She finds herself ostracized, and her
aggravation is heightened by the lack of success she experiences in accomplishing her purported objective in writing these stories:

Maldito sea el día en que se me ocurrió que podía crear los climas adecuados, componerlos minuciosamente y tensar la trama y la urdimbre colocando amorosamente cada uno de los hilos, engarzando una a una las palabras y las frases como un mago riguroso y buen conocedor de las leyes que rigen su oficio. Y lo cierto es que he conseguido crear en torno a mí un clima climatérico, detumescente, como si una mano tersa y joven intentara reanimar a un puñado de miembros alicaídos y ajados y sus propósitos se estrellaran una y otra vez contra el muro invencible de la rebeldía pasiva.

(49)

The narrator’s attempts to denounce the “ola de puritanismo que nos invade en plena década de los ochenta” (48) falls short as she finds her audience unmoved. The author’s tongue in cheek attitude, as expressed through the narrator in “Ese autismo tuyo tan peligroso,” is perhaps a parody of, and reflection on, her own frustrations as a writer. As much of her work was being dismissed as mass-market quality pornography, it is not hard to imagine Abad being the recipient of comments such as those the narrator in the story receives: “Cochina, zorría, ninfómana, mal educada” (49).

A contemporary of Ana Rossetti, Abad shares with her not only a tendency towards erotic overtones in her work, but the proliferation of ornament in her writing, as well as elaborate and labyrinthine language stylistically indebted to a baroque aesthetic. Thus, just as in Ana Rossetti’s work, the baroque reverberations in her literary production become a form of protest through appropriation and distortion via parody. Her work, taken as a whole, shares both an appropriation and revision of androcentric literary tropes and language, as well as an affinity
with the baroque. Some of the short stories in Abad’s *Ligeros libertinajes sabáticos*, have a certain picaresque quality to them. Certainly, this is not to say that the collection of short stories possesses all the formal stylistic components of picaresque literature, but rather that it brings to mind this genre. This is one of the many baroque elements that Abad borrows, showing to varying degrees an indebtedness to the period.

“Pascualino y los globos,” another short story from the collection mentioned above, presents an interesting, and alternative, ‘coming of age’ narrative. The general structure of the story is stylistically indebted to the picaresque novel, yet the allusions to the genre are comically inverted, or at times exaggerated. The echoes of the picaresque are found in the simple and straightforward first-person narrative of the anti-picaro, Pascualino. I qualify the protagonist as anti-picaro because although he possesses many of the qualities and characteristics of the traditional picaresque narrative leading character, many of these appear comically inverted. For instance, whereas the traditional picaro is frequently young, poor, cunning, and mischievous or even criminal, Pascualino is middle-aged, affluent, stayed, dim-witted, and law-abiding to a fault. Even the developing arc of his narrative is inverted as his character progression appears, on the surface, to be one of declining morality, not the restitution and assimilation of socially imposed norms and mores by the protagonist typical of the genre.

In a narrative style deeply indebted to the picaresque, Pascualino sets out to relate his “vida trivial” to the audience. The timeline established at the outset of the story is also typical of the genre, as Pascualino looks back at his life as a fifty-seven-year-old man and reflects on the circumstances that have brought him to the present moment of the narration. In his case, the traditional end-of-life retrospective typical of the genre is particularly poignant, as he reveals that his life is in peril and could end at any moment. He finds himself in a predicament which is the
culmination of his entire life story, and which he asserts will end his life, as he slowly dies of asphyxia while performing oral sex on a large and corpulent woman. Abad’s irreverent style borders here on the grotesque and humorous, as this picaresque narrative becomes overtly sexualized and pornographic, aspects that though implicit in the picaresque genre, are rarely made explicit. This unique situation prompts the narrator to tell us his life-story in a concise manner, a life he describes as trivial, and luckily so, as he is running out of time:

Porque, efectivamente, si mi vida no hubiera sido trivial, ahora me vería obligado a entretenerte en mil y un vericuetos para contarla y les aseguro que no tengo tiempo para detenerme en detalles ni en filigranas literarias. Me limitaré a construcciones gramaticalmente correctas y renunciaré a mis siempre prorrogados pruritos literarios debido a las adversas circunstancias que me oprimen en este mismísimo instante el alma y, lo que es peor, también el cuerpo. (Abad 12)

Ironically, Pascualino asserts the need for straightforward and plain language in a long-winded and affected style, further emphasizing the absurdity of his situation, and preparing us for a story rife with satire.

After a protracted introduction Pascualino relates the story of his life, presenting us with the caricature of a small-minded man, lacking character and decisiveness, who is perpetually unable to assert himself. Through his narrative we encounter a fifty-seven-year-old man who has had little agency over his own life, freely disclosing that his decisions and choices have been made solely to appease his parents, wife, friends and society at large. Readily admitting that his lack of decision and will is his greatest fault, we find that in an interesting narrative twist Pascualino’s youthful indiscretions and criminality are antithetical to those of the traditional picaro. His truancy resides in a too malleable disposition, and acquiescent character, a law-
abiding attitude that chooses the path of least resistance. At his parents’ insistence that he pursue a more lucrative career he abandons the study of literature, and at the slightest sign of disapproval by his parents, abandons the woman he characterizes as the love of his life. In short, his life is marked by a total lack of subjectivity, yet it is done out of convenience rather than necessity: “Mi apatía era total. Llegó un momento en que ni siquiera tenía que decidir cómo debía vestirme o dónde me apetecía pasar las vacaciones: delegaba siempre en otros la responsabilidad de la elección y me acomodaba a todo” (14).

Pascualino confesses that his sudden awakening comes as a surprise: “Ni siquiera intuí que la cosa acabaría en hartazgo repentino, en estallido de repudio hacia todo y hacia todos, pero así fue. Ocurrió inesperadamente sin que siquiera me lo hubiera planteado seriamente” (16). The day of his fifty-seventh birthday, Pascualino notices that “[d]e repente aquella rutina se me antojó el más complicado de los esfuerzos habidos y por haber” (16) leading him to quit his job as a prestigious bank director. Later on, upon finding himself the guest of honor at his surprise birthday party, and forced to demure to the festivities, he is overcome and explodes in response to an acquaintance’s congratulations:

- Debes sentirte muy orgulloso - me dijo.

- ¿Orgulloso, dices? -contesté yo-, ¿orgulloso de qué? ¿Orgulloso de haber malgastado mi vida en pamplinas, orgulloso por haberme casado con una idiota u orgulloso por haber engendrado a los tres hijos más gilipollas que nunca hayan hollado esta tierra? ¿Qué supones que debería enorgullecerme? ¿Tal vez la cara de imbécil irredenta que pone mi mujer al escucharme? ¡Necia, más que necia! -le grité a una Albertine cuyo rostro se desencajaba por momentos-. Por cierto querida, he presentado mi dimisión en el banco y
he rechazado toda indemnización económica. A partir de ahora eres una mujer separada y pobre, además de idiota perdida. Lindo, ¿eh? (Abad 16).

The sudden liberation that follows this pronouncement leaves our protagonist in a state of elation. “Por fin me sentía libre de actuar a mis anchas y dar rienda suelta a mis deseo, mis maltratados y poco escuchados deseos,” (16) he tells us, opening the door to the pursuit of a long repressed desire: “aquel extraño y reprimido deseo de abrazar el cuerpo de una obesa, de un globo humano” (16). The excessive and grotesque language with which he goes on to express this wish, and describe his pursuit of it, brings to mind one of the most cited characteristics of the baroque aesthetic, its tendency towards excess. This excess, manifests in effusions of color, crowded and roiling imagery, wordiness and an overstimulation of the senses. The excessive baroque tableaus, and their indulgence to the appetites as they present veritable feasts for the eyes, are echoed in Abad’s text where she presents extravagant banquets, in this case, of erotic images and flesh. The baroque instant of debauchery and unrestraint to which Pascualino is inevitably headed as a direct result of decades of self-denial and self-repression, culminates in a final ecstatic moment, a grotesque excess of bodies and desires: “¡No la culpen de mi muerte, no la culpen, yo sabía lo que hacía, yo lo quise, yo muero en trance, en estado de gracia, gozando como nunca lo hice!” (18).

Through the appropriation and inversion of the picaresque genre, Abad exploits its tradition as a vehicle for social criticism denouncing the rigidness, conservatism, and complacency of Spanish society. It is precisely Pascualino’s success within the system—which is a direct result of a willful surrender of agency—that condemns him to a slow and grotesque death. As he himself acknowledges, his success is built on his ability to follow directions:

Como pese a esa fisura fundamental de mi carácter nunca me ha faltado precisamente
inteligencia, mi carrera en el mundo de la banca fue espectacular. Los jefes me cubrían de todo tipo de alabanzas y felicitaciones por la eficacia y la brillantez de mi trabajo. Juro que yo no hice jamás esfuerzo alguno: me limitaba a cumplir las órdenes que se me daba sin tomar iniciativa alguna. (Abad 14)

The inversion of the traditional picaro paradigm leads to the questioning of a social structure that condemns subjectivity and rewards passivity. If Pascualino is to be considered a picaro, it follows that the lifestyle he espouses before his reformation represents the basest and most despicable aspects of the society he inhabits. Therefore, the implicit criticism is that blind obedience, and resignation to authority, are among the basest and most reprehensible of human instincts. Pascualino’s life of monotony and inaction is the vice of his society, a system that is complicit in the creation of individuals who lack agency, and one that victimizes the disenfranchised. His greatest character flaw however, is not that he is subjected to this system, but rather that he willfully enters into it, relinquishing his subjectivity, a gesture made the more despicable when one considers that many are unwillingly victims of it. Above all it is the lack of will to escape the system which is most despised.

In Gender Trouble, Judith Butler states that “the loss of the sense of “the normal” […] can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when “the normal,” “the original” is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one can embody” (176). Parody thus is an important and valuable tool in the disruption of established social orders and gender roles. However, as Butler points out, parody on its own is not subversive. In order for this parody to be effective it must cause “loss of the sense of the normal” and avoid becoming “domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony” (177). The gender representations and meanings that Ana Rossetti and Mercedes Abad tamper with in the work analyzed in this
chapter, successfully disrupt the “sense of the normal” for “[a]lthough the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of hegemonic, misogynist culture, they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization” (176). Ana Rossetti’s appropriation of traditionally male discourse, as well as canonical literary genres and styles, for the purposes of female expressions of desire, successfully manipulates the expectations surrounding the “stylized repetition of acts” that constitute gender identity, successfully calling into question the notion of the ideal woman. In Ligeros libertinajes sabáticos, Mercedes Abad presents a wide range of sexual practices, ranging from the comical and mundane, to the bizarre and morbid. Each however, is treated with equal care and attention and presented in an unflinchingly straightforward and matter-of-fact style. This very act of presenting what Butler calls “minority gendered and sexual practices” challenges the reader to “think them before we come to any kind of conclusions about them” and disrupts the “habitual and violent presumptions” that would delegitimize them (viii).

All the authors we have seen in the preceding chapters bring to light the intrinsic flaws of the system in which their characters operate. Whether we consider Dulce Chacón’s frustrated and victimized Prudencia, Abad’s pathetic picaro Pascualino, or the audacious amorous language in Ana Rossetti’s poetry, we find these authors highlighting and laying bare the weaknesses of a stale and stifling social order. All of these authors subvert the order imposed on Spanish society by the Franco Regime by placing the aesthetic and ideological tools used by the Regime at the service of a critical, and in some cases, irreverent, project of literary sexual liberation. Their efforts to subvert these social constraints call into question the very notion of the “original,” that is, of an intrinsically true model of subject to be emulated, and thus open up space for difference.
Section II Abject Bodies

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva defines the concept of abjection in terms of rejection from the self; that which elicits a reaction of repulsion, and hybridizes the borders of the subject. She states that “the abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (1) and thus is not an object of desire although the subject is simultaneously drawn to, and repulsed, by it. In this section I explore manifestations of abject and grotesque bodies within the context of a baroque aesthetic in select writings by Mercedes Abad, Cristina Fernández Cubas, Menchu Gutiérrez, and Ana Rosetti, as well as the film *Te doy mis ojos* directed by Iciar Bollaín. I propose that both the manifestation of the grotesque and abject in their work, as well as the appropriation of the baroque aesthetic, serve as tools for resistance to the effects of the rigid and homogenizing Franco Regime. Christine Buci Glucksmann, Mikhail Bakhtin, Frances S. Conelly, Julia Kristeva, David Lavery, and Heinrich Wölfflin provide the theoretical framework for the analysis of these concepts in the literature selected.

In her formulation of what constitutes the abject, Kristeva includes a wide range of things that elicit disgust and unease: “Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me toward and separates me from them” (2).
Abjection arises then from the instinct to push away and reject that which we consider antithetical to our conceptualization of self. Furthermore, the role of the abject goes beyond the formation of the subject through the identification of that which it is not, to organize social constructs of what is acceptable: “Thus, by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism, which were imagined as representatives of sex and murder” (Kristeva 13). Despite its role in the process of defining the subject’s borders, it is by exposing the fluidity and permeability of these boundaries that abjection manifests. As Kristeva states “I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish myself” (3).

The hybridity and loss of borders that occurs when, according to Kristeva, the subject is confronted with the abject — for instance a corpse, which shows the subject “what [it] permanently thrusts aside in order to live” (3)— shares characteristics with the concept of the grotesque elaborated by Mikhail Bakhtin in his analysis of François Rabelais’ work. In discussing renaissance and baroque representations of the grotesque Bakhtin proposes that the grotesque body “is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world” (26). Just as in the case of the abject, Bakhtin’s grotesque resides in the space between the subject and that which it discards, or which repulses it. The grotesque more specifically “is defined by what it does to boundaries, transgressing, merging, overflowing, destabilizing them” (Conelly 2).
Both the term baroque and the term grotesque have connotations of the unusual, aberrant, bizarre, and even repulsive in popular usage. Although in both cases, the term has been developed into a concept that moves far beyond its limited meaning, the usage of the word grotesque within the context of baroque is neither surprising or misplaced. In his attempt to define more clearly the forms of the sixteenth and seventeenth century aesthetic, Wölfflin enumerates five pairs of concepts, of which I include, for the purposes of this discussion, three below:

1. The development from the linear to the painterly, *i.e.* the development of line as the path of vision and guide of the eye, and the gradual depreciation of line: in more general terms, the perception of the object by its tangible character—in outline and surfaces—on the one hand, and on the other, a perception which is by way of surrendering itself to the mere visual appearance and can abandon “tangible” design. In the former case the stress is laid on the limits of things; in the other the work tends to look limitless. Seeing by volumes and outlines isolates objects: for the painterly eye, they merge. In the one case interest lies more in the perception of individual material objects as solid, tangible bodies; in the other, in the apprehension of the world as a shifting semblance.

2. [...] 

3. The development from closed to open form. Every work of art must be a finite whole, and it is a defect if we do not feel that it is self-contained, but the interpretation of this demand in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is so different that, in comparison with the loose form of the Baroque, classic design may be taken as *the* form of closed composition. [...]
4 [...] 
5 The absolute and the relative clarity of the subject. This is a contrast which at first 
borders on the contrast between linear and painterly. The representation of things as 
they look, seen as a whole, and rather by their non-plastic qualities. But it is a special 
feature of the classic age that it developed an ideal of perfect clarity which the 
fifteenth century only vaguely suspected, and which the seventeenth voluntarily 
sacrificed. Not that artistic form had become confused, for that always produces an 
unpleasing effect, but that explicitness of the subject is no longer the sole purpose of 
the presentment. Composition, light, and colour no longer merely serve to define 
form, but have their own life. There are cases in which absolute clarity has been 
abandoned merely to enhance effect, but “relative” clarity, as a great all-embracing 
mode of representation, first entered the history of art at the moment at which reality 
is beheld with an eye to other effects. (“Principles of Art History” 51-52) 

The stylistic changes that Wölfflin attributes to the baroque—from linear to painterly, from 
closed to open form, and from absolute to relative clarity—show an affinity between the baroque 
aesthetic and the grotesque concept as defined above. The fluidity of borders, and the 
expansiveness of the subject identified by Bahktin and Connell, as well as what Philip Thomson 
posits in *The Grotesque* as a “basic definition of the grotesque: the unresolved clash of 
incompatibles in work and response,” (3) suggest that the grotesque is easily at play in the 
“apprehension of the world as a shifting semblance” (Wölfflin 51). 

Baroque cultural production is rich in depictions of undefined and corruptible subjects, a 
characteristic of it that is fruitful for considering the Spanish authors analyzed here as they 
explore alternate ways of constructing subjectivities that embody hybridity and ambiguity. I
propose that the abject and grotesque appear in the work of these contemporary Spanish women as reverberations of a rich historic baroque aesthetic, its revival during the Franco Regime, and its reterritorialization by marginalized and oppressed constituencies as space for protest and criticism against this regime. In addition, these concepts are useful literary devices for the expression of hybridity, ambiguity, and shifting boundaries in literary work that seeks to establish new paradigms for the construction of identity. In the following chapters I identify grotesque and abject bodies along three thematic veins: In the chapter entitled “Grotesque Optics: Mirrors, Doubles, and Madness” I analyze the split subject as it manifests in mirrors, doubles, and projections. In “Fluid Bodies and Bodily Fluids: Constructing Porous and Hybrid Subjectivities in Post-Franco Spain” I identify fluidity as an essential characteristic of the baroque body whose subjectivity is in flux, and the role that disgust plays in this process. Finally, in “Body [in] Parts: Violence and Dismemberment as Appropriation and Liberation” I consider gender violence as a form of bodily objectification and control over female subjects and the appropriation of this violence by women writers.
Narcissus so himself himself forsook,
And died to kiss his shadow in the brook.
—William Shakespeare

In the climactic scene of the short story “Helicón,” by Cristina Fernández Cubas, the main character, Marcos, prepares to attend a previously arranged meeting with his lover, Ángela. Although the meeting never takes place, the revelation he experiences as he peers into the restaurant where she awaits him is the pivotal moment that propels the narrative to its unexpected conclusion. As he prepares to enter the establishment he notices that, “[s]u desafortada pasión por la simetría la había conducido a sentarse frente al espejo, junto a dos sillas vacías” (144). This observation, however, is soon revealed as an illusion. Almost immediately, and to his apparent dismay, Marcos tells us: “comprendí consternado que en aquella mesa del rincón, frente a Ángela y a las dos sillas que me aguardaban, no había existido jamás un espejo” (145). This moment sets in motion the final unraveling of the main character. The sudden realization that what Marcos believed to be a reflection of Ángela was not produced by a mirror, but rather, by another human being, summons a baroque unease with perception and vision in which, as Christine Buci Glucksmann describes in Madness of Vision, “[t]he world is simultaneously a mirror of mirrors, a book of books, and an aesthetic universe of form-forces in permanent equilibrium/disequilibrium” (ch. 2). The horror and disgust elicited by twins, doubles,
and clones could be construed as a manifestation of abjection. The perception of the twin or clone as aberrant destabilizes the notion of self. Although the preoccupation with reflections, mirrors, distorted and splintered identities predates the conceptualization of the abject as presented by Kristeva, it is valuable to trace this connection and its convergence with the long history of the grotesque as identified by Mikhail Bakhtin in renaissance and baroque cultural production. Vision, perception, and fears surrounding our flawed ability to define ourselves and the world around us play a central role in baroque aesthetic. These insecurities fuel, and are fed, by an interest in the science of optics.

There is perhaps no more appropriate image to encapsulate the sixteenth and seventeenth century compulsion for the science of optics, than that of Isaac Newton inserting a bodkin needle between his eye and socket in order to manipulate his cornea and record his scientific observations. During the baroque period, lenses and mirrors became popular curiosities and readily available, fueling the period interest in optics, and facilitating experimentation. The eye particularly, as an instrument of perception, permeates baroque thought, and is central to an epistemic shift. In *The Madness of Vision*, Christine Buci Glucksmann describes the role of the gaze in the baroque aesthetic:

> To Be Is to See: with this, the baroque eye positions itself from its very beginning within a new category of seeing that ascribes an epistemological and aesthetic capacity, an ontological *optikon*, to the gaze. Because the eye is truly the *miembro divino* that Gracián spoke of, a “member” that “allows a certain universality that resembles omnipotence.”

(ch. 1)

In this chapter I explore the effects of baroque optics on representations of the body in *El ojo de Newton* and *Basenji* by Menchu Gutiérrez, and the short story “Helicón” by Cristina Fernández
Cubas. The selected literature employs reflection, replication, distortion, and illusion, to create unsettling and decentering conditions for its protagonists and readers, and I analyze the doubts these optical phenomena engender regarding the reliability of vision as a tool to discern and perceive reality. The implications of these uncertainties surrounding vision—as well as the questions that derive of a reassessment of our capacity to perceive accurately, and therefore to formulate a concept of reality—lead us to consider the significant epistemic shift that these doubts precipitated. In addition, the various forms which the confrontation with these doubts engenders—madness, repulsion, fear, and repression—can be analyzed as manifestations of abjection, and consequently forms of constructing the subject.

At the heart of the baroque anxiety surrounding optics is the fundamental shift in understanding of the world that occurs with the discovery and observation of the effects of light on vision and perception (Gal and Chen-Morris). The development of the camera obscura, with its ability to imprint an image on a screen, effectively removes the observer from the visual equation. That is, it suggests that human observation is not necessary for the image to occur. This discovery bodes well for Kepler as he hopes to prove that observation of the celestial bodies through instruments is not only possible but reliable. However, as Gal and Chen-Morris tell us:

…this trust comes with a steep epistemological price tag: if the instrument is not prone to error more than the eye, then the eye is as vulnerable to error as the instrument. Passively receiving ‘illumination’ like any instrument, the eye is not merely comparable to ‘a closed chamber’—it is one: ‘the pupil takes the place of the window.’ The cornea is truly nothing but a lens; the retina nothing but a screen, essentially the same as the paper or the pavement. (199)
The realization that the eye is merely an instrument that perceives an image (a material object that consists of a stain on a screen) that in turn is a reflection of another material object, complicates prior conceptions of perception. The eye does not absorb or perceive the essence of that which it observes, it merely reproduces an inverted reflection of it. Thus, it becomes central as a baroque motif: precisely as it loses its infallibility as tool for perception and is replaced by the concept of the image, it becomes central to the formulation of doubts about our perception of reality. This epistemic shift manifests in myriad ways in baroque art and literature, with motifs such as Narcissus patent in the artistic imagination, and imagery related to optics displayed prominently in period artwork, the “[c]entral physical organ of the baroque system, this eye-world is illustrated in the many Allegories of Sight throughout sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings” (Madness ch.1). In contemporary writers Menchu Gutiérrez, and Cristina Fernández Cubas we see a preoccupation with these motifs as well. Each delving into optical questions of perception, refraction, and reflection, along with derived and related obsessions with twins, copies, mimics, and doubles.

The most overt evocation of the baroque and its obsession with optics among the selected authors is found in Menchu Gutiérrez. Her long poem entitled El ojo de Newton (2005), takes us on a parallel poetic exploration of Newton’s experiments into optics. This clear connection to Isaac Newton, and the earlier mentioned anecdote in which he probes his eye to better understand light and refraction, is observed throughout the poem:

De nuevo, los hechos.

En 1665, Newton está en su habitación de estudiante del Trinity College de Cambridge.

Su ojo pide más visión salvaje. Bien puede embarcar ese precioso ojo suyo en otra apuesta. La voz le dice un poco más lejos, y nada impide que se introduzca un punzón
por encima del lagrimal, entre el ojo y el hueso, un poco más lejos, más cerca del vado permanente, que altere la curvatura de la retina y observe los círculos coloreados que aparecen al presionar, en ese espacio que parecía reservado al crecimiento del azar.

¿Es esto la magia? (18)

The central symbol of the poem, Newton’s eye—which the poetic voice describes a single eye in the center of her forehead—as well as the constant striving to activate it, see through it, and experience its alternate vision, is what moves the poem forward. Newton’s eye metaphorically represents our perception of reality, or rather the tool through which we experience this reality.

In a metaphysical journey of perception, the eye provides the poetic voice with an alternate mode of vision, one that lets her escape the mundane, or perhaps simply see it from a different perspective, during the moments it is open. There is a constant tension between her ‘common eyes’ and the third eye, they are often open at different times and the nature of their perception is fundamentally different. Buci Glucksmann refers to this as “the doubled and divided gaze” of the baroque, and illustrates it by discussing “Bettini’s Eye of Cardinal Colonna (ch. 5), an anamorphosis in a cylindrical mirror”, which “displays two eyes: one is precise and almost scientific but does not see; the other is deformed, bloated, and registers an unknown depravity or terror” (ch. 5). Whereas in the poem the poetic voice states “[l]os ojos comunes me permiten abarcar la inmediatez de esta habitación,” (Gutiérrez 24) Newton’s eye opens up an entirely new and unexpected reality. The poetic voice describes this experience as altering the fabric of space and time, allowing her to bend the natural laws of physics:

He salido tres veces de la habitación y entrado cuatro. Sin embargo, estoy fuera. Esto sucede gracias al ojo de Newton.
El ojo se ha abierto con naturalidad de ojo heredado, y los dos ojos pobres se han cerrado casi al mismo tiempo, yo diría que simultáneamente, cegados por el resplandor del ángulo superior del triángulo. Los ha puesto a dormir, les ha quitado su alcance, y con ellos, la habitación ha desaparecido. (25)

It is clear that the different sets of eyes are incompatible, they cannot all see at once. Further on in the poem this becomes even more apparent as the poetic voice laments that she is blind when all of her eyes are open, as the vision that each affords appears to cancel the other out.

Ultimately, the protagonist cannot live simultaneously in both realities as rendered through both her ‘regular’ eyes and the eye of Newton.

The alternative mode of perception that the eye of Newton gives the poetic voice becomes an object of desire despite its problematic nature: “El ojo de Newton se convierte en una obsesión. Obsesivamente, lo quiero” (18). This obsession leads her to a gradual distancing from her mother, who does not approve of this alternate mode of perception or alternate reality.

Her mother’s fear can be attributed to the nature of this alternate vision: “the baroque eye of the marvelous, of multiple pleasures, of difference is also the eye of disillusion (desengaño), a fatal spectacle, a theater of affliction and mourning” (Buci Glucksmann, *Madness* ch.1). The poetic voice recites the lines of a lullaby that she attributes ambiguously to her mother: “[c]iego es el ojo, creándose./Antes y después, ciego./Pena de muerte pare el ojo recién nacido” (40). She tells us that this nighttime ritual, during which she sings to her and then kisses her eyelids before tucking her in, is her mother’s way of protecting her. Her mother’s fear of the light and the revelations that being ‘reborn’ in the light bring are passed on to her daughter through the lullaby. In the protagonist’s state, almost delusional at times, it is unclear whether these are the actual words of the lullaby, or simply what she hears through them: “Seguramente las palabras
de la canción eran otras; quizá, también, la frase con la que se despedía de mí era ‘buenas noches’. Da lo mismo: ‘Duerme, mi bien’ significaba ‘Pena de muerte para el ojo recién nacido’ y ‘desconfía’ era la forma oscura con la que su amor de madre quería protegerme. ¡Mi pobre madre!’ (40).

The mother’s desire to protect the poetic voice from the light’s revelations is ultimately futile. The mother, who has refuged herself in ‘the color of her religion’ from the transformative light of the eye, dies in the end in apparent simultaneous rejection and acceptance of the protagonist who has now completely given over to the eye of Newton that “opera en el misterio sin alterarlo” (48).

The duality that the alternate vision of the eye engenders in the poetic voice of El ojo de Newton is a theme that Gutiérrez had explored a decade earlier in her existential exploration of self and madness, Basenji (1995). Like the poetic voice in El ojo, the protagonist (the keeper of the lighthouse) experiences an obsession with the ‘eye.’ In this case the all-seeing eye is the light atop the lighthouse, a vantage point, from which the keeper observes, godlike, safe, and removed from the world that overwhelms his senses. The keeper’s relationship to this eye, however, takes a darker and more sinister turn, as we see him day after day abject in his despair, falling deeper into alcoholism and apparent madness: “[t]ambién, a veces, siento el deseo de arrancar al faro su ojo de silicio y verlo desangrarse en su propia luz. Así, quizá, sabría cuánto lo necesito” (XIII).

His obsession with the light takes on an irrational and desperate edge. We see him fading into nothingness, a pale, skeletal figure, each day more removed from the outside world, refusing to answer the phone, hiding from the workers who have come to restore power to the lighthouse and who comment on “los ojos de loco de este tipo” (VIII).
The keeper’s relationship with the lighthouse is one of yearning and need. He describes himself as suffering from an illness that he struggles to identify:

Tampoco yo me rebelo contra la sirena, contra la niebla; no me escondo, y sin embargo es difícil tolerar tanta ceguera.

La niebla se parece a mi enfermedad, parece haberse introducido en mi cabeza y logrado ocultar todos sus archivos. No puedo acceder a la información de mi sistema central. (III)

The last lines of the short story “El faro por dentro” that acts as prelude to “Basenji” quote what appears to be the diary of the light keeper. We see in these, what we presume to be his own words, that the malaise described above permeates his entire being, the eye, and the vision it provides him, however, counteract the blindness of the fog. Yet, its clarity and vision come at a price, as it threatens to sever his head from his body:

Estoy en el primer peldaño e imagino que al llegar al último me encontrará con una guillotina mortal, compuesta por tres largas cuchillas de luz. Recuerdo un bello libro en el que un condenado a muerte sube lentamente la escalera hacia el patíbulo en el que será decapitado, y en cada peldaño se detiene para componer un poema en recuerdo de cada noche de intensa pasión que pasó en compañía de su amada. Cada peldaño de la escalera es una estación del tiempo. ¿Tengo tiempo todavía? ¿Podría lanzar una última pregunta al faro? Lo único que sé con certeza, mientras levanto un pie y luego otro, es que esta escalera, igual que la del patíbulo, sólo puede ser ascendida y que nunca descenderé estos peldaños. Igual que había imaginado cómo los haces del faro terminarían por talar algún día los árboles del jardín, pienso que mi cabeza, segada por la luz, quedará separada del tronco, y rodará escaleras abajo, hasta los pies de Basenji, con todos mis recuerdos. (“El faro por dentro”)
Blindness and loss of memory become synonymous with his illness, yet this is an illness of double visions. Just as in the previous poem the modes of vision are incompatible, the vision afforded by one, creates blindness in the other. His compulsive need for the eye represents his urgent desire to escape the mundane vision that plunges him into oblivion. His trips to the top of the lighthouse are his moments of true sight, moments in which he has seen through the eye. The descent and return to his pedestrian self causes him pain, and he is presented to us in an imagined splintered state, his head “guillotinada” as in the previous image, or by the mirror surface of his bath water, in yet another. He is often almost outside of himself, as when he ponders whether Basenji is a dog or a refraction of himself: “A veces pienso que Basenji no existe, que soy yo resucitado, un corsé de hierro que me ayuda a caminar” (I). This splitting or refraction of the keeper brings to mind Kristeva’s theory as she identifies the simultaneous draw and repulsion of the abject: “But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself” (3).

This mad state of double vision could be paralleled to Il furore described in The Madness of Vision, Christine Buci Glucksmann’s treatise on Baroque aesthetic and thought: “the extreme limit of the baroque esthetic of alterity, ‘the Alteration of the Mind (Alterazione della mente) caused by Passion, Enthusiasm, or Madness” (ch. 4). We have little information about the keeper prior to the altered state in which we encounter him yet we know from the opening lines, and throughout the narrative, that he has a constant companion, Basenji, a dog which appears at times to be nothing more than a canine, while at others a specter or demonic entity, bringing to mind Buci Glucksmann once again: “Within this mad vision, equivalent to other forms of vision (that
of inspiration, fury, or ingegno), ‘mental images’ (fantasmi) are transformed into something completely different, a phantasmagoria” (ch. 4). The dual nature of the dog haunts the keeper and creates a sense of the surreal in the narrative: “Basenji es mi perro africano. Un perro desalmado, mudo como las piedras, cerrado” (I). The narrator mentions Basenji constantly throughout the narrative, describing the dog in parallel with himself, yet he is consistently portrayed as ambiguous and otherworldly: “…para hablar de Basenji es preciso estar muerto” (I), “…Basenji no duerme utiliza la noche para absorber energía” (I).

Among Basenji’s queer traits, the most prominent is his curious quality of appearing as the keeper’s projection or double. His reliance on Basenji for company and reflection becomes increasingly apparent throughout the narrative, as his relationship to the dog mirrors the obsession he has with the lighthouse. Yet, this relationship is one of familiarity and intimacy, unlike his yearning for the eye. The keeper suggests that separating himself from the spectral dog is impossible as he wonders whether “decir ‘Basenji’ es igual a decir ‘yo’” (IV). Further on, the consubstantiation of the two becomes even clearer as the narrator finds Basenji sitting next to a pit, described as a tomb carved out by the dog. The keeper wonders out loud whether it has been prepared for him by the strange dog, yet shortly after he shares with the reader clear signs that he himself has been digging: “Al despertar, esta mañana, sobre la cama, sentí un intenso dolor en las manos. Los dedos estaban llenos de rasguños y heridas; las uñas, negras de tierra” (XLII).

The eerie and ambiguous nature of Basenji is never resolved in the narrative yet the keeper finds solace from his haunting presence on occasion. His care-taking duties are punctuated by forays into chemistry during which he concocts absolute alcohol, which he drinks to the point of intoxication:
A estas horas, en las que he pasado revista a todo y he olvidado todo, la semirrealidad en
la que vivo despierta invariablemente en mí la sed del alcohol. He construido un
alambique y he aprendido la fórmula de un alcohol absoluto. La cocina es mi farmacia, y
mi medicina, destilación tras destilación, me espera sobre la mesa. (II)

It is in these moments, just before the alcohol wins him over completely, but as it is working its
way through his system, that the keeper appears to have brief flashes of lucidity and peace:

“It is in these moments, just before the alcohol wins him over completely, but as it is working its
way through his system, that the keeper appears to have brief flashes of lucidity and peace:

“Durante unas horas, mis células se hermanan, se multiplican en una carrera sin tropiezos hacia
una meta feliz. Esto hace el alcohol por mí, por eso lo inventé” (II). Though the details of his
reality are muddied and unclear, often ambiguous as we observe it through his own eyes and
feverish state, we find that the alcohol temporarily dulls the “ángulo superior” provided by his
alternate vision, providing a much more mundane experience of reality and relieving him
temporarily from the haunting specter that is his double: “Veo a Basenji distinto: un perro amigo
que se desvive por darme calor, me lame los zapatos. Sus ojos de pupilas infrarrojas tienen sueño
y placer, y se cierran con los míos” (I).

In *Madness of Vision*, Buci Glucksmann proposes that “[a]bjection, distortion, ugliness,
misery, violence, and need must exist, not so that the world may be ‘the best of all possible
worlds,’ but so that it may be” (Buci Glucksmann ch. 4). The mad and distorted visage of the
keeper, when he is in his moments of abjection, described as agonizing and grotesque, echo the
story we began with in this chapter, “Helicón” by Cristina Fernández Cubas. In *Basenji*, the
keeper presents two sides of himself to us: we know that he is mired in filth, bodily fluids, and
slipping into madness, yet we find him taking part in a meticulous preparation of himself and the
lighthouse in advance of receiving a guest. His cleaning and grooming take on a ritualistic
fervor, as he even cuts himself in the process of shaving, rushing to hide those aspects of himself
deemed unacceptable to the wider world: “[t]odo esto, este regalo atroz que le hacía a mi cuerpo, tenía su origen en la llegada de un técnico del Instituto Meteorológico, anunciada para las diez” (XXV). Kristeva suggests that in the conceptualization of abjection cleanliness becomes synonymous with the proper. Thus, uncleanliness does not signify simply the presence of filth but rather “what disturbs identity, system, order” (4). The keeper’s desire to cleanse himself speaks to a need to eliminate from himself that which he finds repulsive in order to present himself as a proper and acceptable subject in the eyes of the technician. We see the same dynamic in “Helicón” in an unexpected narrative twist by which we meet Cosme, the fictional twin brother of the protagonist, Marcos.

The story begins with an obsession with doubles and twins, as Marcos’s date Ángela quickly shows herself to have an odd and consuming interest in them. We begin the narrative with what he calls his “error” as he finds himself taking her, whom he clearly wishes to impress, to an establishment he frequents with his friends. This in of itself does not constitute a problem, however his date’s peculiar dislike for doubles, which she manifests through conversation and her repugnance at having been served a drink made out of “[u]n plátano gemelo,” soon becomes apparent: “— Un plátano gemelo —murmuró—. Ha querido decir plátanos gemelos... Y enseguida, como accionada por un resorte, empezó a enumerar toda suerte de fenómenos, para ella repugnantes, con los que nos mortificaba la Madre Naturaleza” (131, emphasis in original). Marcos’s fear is that Ángela with her unusual and pronounced dislike of twins will discover through his friends that he has a twin brother, though we are later to find out that his twin is a fiction created by him.

Although Marcos is scared to reveal the existence, or non-existence, of his twin to Ángela, his fear proves to be altogether unfounded. His friends join them just as his date is
feverishly narrating the details of a news article describing the death of twin sisters found in their apartment: “Ángela estaba dispuesta a jurar por su honor que no murieron en idéntica posición.

Una de ellas —¿María Asunción acaso?—, rígida, perfecta, como en el fondo debió de haber sido siempre. La otra —¿María de las Mercedes?—, un tanto más demadejada y omisa, como nunca pudo dejar de ser…” (134). In this way we observe that Ángela’s obsession lies not in what appears to be at first glance repugnance towards doubles and twins, but rather in an uncontrollable desire to see difference in them. She is keen to observe that it is not a single twin banana that makes up her drink, but twin bananas, she ponders the intricate details of the death of the sisters asserting that despite their similitude they are intrinsically different, she laments the expected end of an egg with two yolks that must be forever doomed to “reproducir, sobre la sartén, su dualidad congénita e inquietante” (132).

In the revelation of what we know to be the fictional twin brother of Marcos—created by him to deflect the scorn of his friends when he is discovered in a compromising situation—Ángela becomes even more attracted to Marcos. In an interesting narrative twist, it is in fact Cosme, his nonexistent twin, which becomes of greatest interest. Though it is not until later in the narrative that we discover that Angela’s obsessive relationship with the idea of twins has everything to do with her own situation, it is clear that she has unique notions surrounding them, and an almost dark and sinister attitude regarding the fate of these doubles. She is particularly drawn to the characterization of Cosme as Violeta describes him: “en cierta forma es como si una parte de Marcos estuviera enloqueciendo” (134). The redeeming quality of the dynamic is precisely in the difference exhibited between the two. Cosme is to Marcos a mirror image, or a negative, not a double, that is an inverted version of him. This interest becomes even clearer
when the morning after their date, as they wake up in bed together, she finishes the tale of the twin yolks assuring him that:

[v]enció la diferencia, ¿sabes?… Porque una, la primera, perció burdamente aplastada contra la rejilla. La otra, en cambio, sinuosa, incitante, se deslizó con envidiable elegancia por la tubería.

Después me miró arrobada y acercó sus labios a los míos. Era obvio que, tras aquel desigual desfile de modelos en el fregadero, Ángela veía en mí la reencarnación de la yema B, la sinuosa maniquí del sumidero de la izquierda (135).

Ángela’s theory that difference ultimately wins, and her heightened attraction towards Marcos make it clear that in the battle between Marcos’s and Cosme’s survival, she anticipates Marcos to be the victor. She appears certain that he will once and for all manage to rid himself of his negative, the being that embodies his dark side, his abject. Yet unbeknownst to her, Cosme is, and must remain, an integral and inseparable part of Marcos.

Marcos narrates the birth of his twin, confiding that in a moment of imprudence he gave a set of keys to his friend Violeta, having overlooked the fact that she could arrive unannounced at any time. One such occasion, in which she sneaks into his apartment and tiptoes into his room, is the genesis of Cosme. Marcos tells us, almost apologetically, how on occasion he indulges in periods of reclusiveness spent with himself:

¿Tenía algo de raro, de inquietante, de espectacular que me gustara deambular desnudo por el piso? ¿Que dejaría transcurrir los días sin darme un baño, observara complacido cómo la cerveza discurría por mi pecho o acumulara basuras y basuras durante semanas? […] Era un extraño placer al quecurría muy rara vez, cuando notaba llegado el momento, que exigía una aplicada preparación y sobre el que, como he dicho, no me he
formulado demasiadas preguntas. Pero ahora sé que era muy semejante a descender a los infiernos que, sin proponérmelo, los gruñidos que brotaban del helicón, mi propio aspecto, las terribles miasmas que surgían del baño, de la cocina, de la ropa hedionda amontonada en cualquier rincón de la casa operaban como invocaciones a elementales, a íncubos de la más baja estofa, a poderes de la peor categoría. (137)

When he finds himself in these states of depravity, Marcos suggests he is no longer himself, but an altered being. Returning to *Madness of Vision*, Buci Glucksmann poses that madness, or alterity, is a form of escape as the subject becomes a “furiosus: a man who is considered to be insane or otherwise mad and thus deemed not responsible for his actions…” (ch. 4). The double takes this a step further by transferring the uncomfortable or embarrassing aspects of the one onto the other, the alternate self, the abject. Thus Marcos, by inventing a twin that embodies all those negative aspects of himself that he is too embarrassed to share with his friends, and by extension society at large, effectively rids himself of responsibility for his *furiosus* self. This altered self is a source of great distress for him, but only at the moment that he sees himself through the gaze of Violeta does he become so repulsed by it as to reject it:

Todo esto lo supe de golpe. Supe lo que mi arte tenía de vil, rastrero, impresentable y bochornoso. Y comprendí también por qué después de aquellos trances me sentía renacido, puro, el Marcos amable y tímido que conocían los demás. El Marcos que acababa de regresar de las profundidades del abismo… Lo supe de golpe, he dicho. Cuando la palabra *abyección* fue la única que me escupieron aquellos ojos redondeados por el espanto, por la vergüenza, por el asco. (137, emphasis in original)

His abject self, the one who sits in his apartment in his own filth, awaiting the enlightenment that comes after, is the self he cannot disclose or come to terms with. And yet, as we will see, despite
his attempts to suppress and hide this alternative self it is ultimately an expression of his truest nature.

Returning for a moment to *Basenji*, we observe that the lighthouse keeper’s mad state functions in parallel to Marcos’s reflection, allowing him to explore those aspects of himself that the exterior world finds strange or unacceptable, while distancing him from it. In the final scenes of the narrative, however we find this state of duality to be unsustainable. Basenji (the keeper’s spectral projection), and the keeper are increasingly at odds with each other. Basenji becomes more sinister and prowling, and the keeper’s paranoia grows. He is convinced that the dog will be, or is—since time is fluid in the narrative and the keeper cannot assert whether he is already dead or not—responsible for his death. In what appears to be a vivid dream or hallucination Basenji transforms into an Egyptian god and performs an embalming ritual on the keeper. After this Basenji no longer appears in the narrative, and the keeper refers to himself as deceased. The final lines of the narrative suggest the keeper is about to perform and autopsy on himself: “[p]ero la autopsia no se detiene…” (XLIV).

In similar fashion, the ending of “Helicón” underscores the tension inherent in the doubled or split identity, and the constant baroque dynamic of difference vs homogeneity. In the scene I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, we see Marcos about to enter the restaurant where Ángela is waiting for him. The purpose for this meeting is to confront her about what Marcos perceives to be an infidelity or sinister ploy on her part. Marcos recounts how while walking around the city during a night of drinking, he finds himself at the receiving end of a pot of food waste hurled out of a window. In this soiled state he decides to head home. Suddenly he finds himself being chased by a blond woman, whom he believes to be Ángela. She appears altered, that is she looks like herself but there is a perceptible difference in her attitude and
general disposition. This altered Angela kisses him passionately, and calls him Cosme. Marcos seems less angry about the fact that Ángela would choose to kiss his twin, whom she does not know is simply Marcos himself, but moreso by the transfigured state in which she does this. He feels as if she reserves her most passionate and warm attitude for Cosme, giving him only a cold and dispassionate part of herself:

Después me besó en la frente y empezó a ronronear como un gato.

No recuerdo la sarta de estupideces con que me obsequiaba entre murmullo y murmullo, pero sí su beso. Un beso insípido, cortés, un beso de muchachita bien rangée. Un beso distante años luz de los que reservaba para mi hermano Cosme. (143)

It is thus that he chooses to confront her, asking her to come to the restaurant and meet him and his twin in person. He hopes of course in this way to force her into a confession of her infidelity, yet the one who is shocked is him. What he does not know is that the image which at first he had perceived as her reflection in the mirror, was in fact her twin, Eva. Ángela apologetically explains, over the phone, that the night in question her twin sister saw him through the window of a café, and ran after him. She of course did not know that the man that was walking by was Marcos himself, and not Cosme. The experience appears to propel Marcos into a state of self-examination from which he emerges determined to resolve this tension: “Me permitiría unos días de descanso. En el mar, en el campo, en la montaña. Y me aceptaría tal como soy. Sin tapujos ni simulaciones. Con la verdad por delante” (147). In the final lines of the story, Marcos proposes to end the “odiosa pesadilla” of his unresolved duality. We see him dial Ángela’s number and we anticipate a reconciliation between them:

Y marqué un número. Un número que conocía de memoria. Un número para el que no necesitaba papeles ni agendas.
—¿Sí?— dijo Ángela al otro lado del auricular.

Parecía triste y abatida. No supe por dónde empezar y, como tantas veces en los últimos tiempos, me refugié en el silencio.

—¿Marcos?— ahora en su voz había un deje de ilusión. —Porque eres Marcos, ¿verdad?
—No— dije con voz firme.

Y pregunté por Eva. (147)

The ambiguous and unresolved endings of both narratives underscore the impossibility of a resolution or rather underline the necessity of the abject as part of the formation of the subject.

In the socio-historical context of the literature in question, this constant struggle with, yet recognition of the necessity of the repressed, aberrant self, is a direct contradiction to the homogenizing forces of the Franco Regime. In “The Material Reality of State Power” Mike Richards states that “[t]he basis for the Francoist ‘New State’ was founded on the systematic exclusion of what were seen as the socially unacceptable elements” and that the “notion of a kind of collective purging through sacrifice [permeated] Francoist proclamations” (Spanish Cultural Studies 176). This collective cleansing took place through the systematic and cruel imposition of punishments for those who had broken the loose, and purposely ambiguous, laws imposed in 1936 by the Nationalists. The broadness of the crimes gathered under these new regulations, as well as the lack of uniformity in their application, created a sense of fear and constant self-reflection in Spanish citizens who were unsure of whether their actions could, or would, be considered crimes. The severity of the punishments including death, torture, interment, forced labor, imposed poverty, and marginalization that became the fate of thousands after the war was not equivalent to the severity of the crimes, and often indiscriminately affected innocent citizens. Thus, it can be argued that a reformulation, and bringing to the forefront, of those elements
considered repulsive, impure, unclean and forcefully repressed during the Regime, would become central to the artistic explorations of identity during the transition and post dictatorship. This fragmentation of self not only appears at the individual level, but extends to the national body. While individual subjectivities are being torn apart, divided and reformulated as individuals question and try to create narratives of themselves, the nation is operating under a similar state of fragmentation.

The constant and unresolved tension between the doubles, twins, reflections of each other, or simply two halves of a whole seen in the literature analyzed in this chapter, can be illustrated by another trope of the Baroque period: the ellipse. Just as baroque forays into optics produce a fundamental shift in the science of perception, they also pave the way for Kepler’s orbital theories. Epistemologically a fundamental change occurs when the centrality of the circle, which possesses one axis point, is replaced by the ellipse. The double foci of the ellipse consist of a visible and an invisible axis, constantly in tension. In the following chapter I explore how the tension of the ellipse, and its optical counterpart, the mirror image, affect the body and its representation.
Chapter 5 Bodies and Bodily Fluids: Constructing Porous and Hybrid Subjectivities

However, as we have shown above that a distension of the vessels of the brain seems to accompany epilepsy, and that a turgescence of blood in the vessels of the lungs seems to produce asthma; so analogy leads me to suppose that a turgescence of blood in the uterus, or in other parts of the genital system, may occasion the spasmodic convulsions which appear in hysteria.

— Robert Lee

In the previous chapter I noted how the dual nature of the subject, and the tension that this duality produces, can destroy the individual, leading to madness, or even death. The tension produced between these competing selves, just as between the foci of the ellipse, produces a rupture, or break, in the body that is rigid. Fluidity then becomes a necessary quality of the baroque body in order for it to exist at all. Fluids, and fluidity as a quality, both occupy space in the baroque aesthetic, the one as a manifestation of the grotesque and the other as a stylistic element. In this chapter I will examine how these concepts interact and relate to each other in the context of allowing the body under tension to exist, if only temporarily, in a state of equilibrium. Fluidity of form enables the baroque body to occupy both the negative and the positive, the beautiful and the grotesque, the pleasurable and the painful, the good and the evil, that is, a
plethora of opposing dualities that simultaneously repel and require each other, until the tension proves too much and the body is ruptured.

In the short story “Lúnula y Violeta” by Cristina Fernández Cubas the primary character(s) operate under a dichotomous system that sets them up in opposition to each other creating the sort of tension alluded to. The short story is ambiguous and unresolved, causing the reader to question whether Lúnula and Violeta who appear as separate individuals at the beginning, are simply two aspects of the same individual. This differentiation however appears unimportant to the dynamic of the story. That is, whether they are two separate individuals or parts of the same, is secondary to the fluid relationship between the two and the tension between them. The beginning lines of the narrative establish this ambiguity and duality from the outset:

Llegué hasta aquí casi por casualidad. Si aquella tarde no me hubiera sentido especialmente sola en el húmedo cuarto de la pensión, si la luz de una bombilla cubierta de cadáveres de insectos no me hubiera incitado a salir y buscar el contacto directo del sol, si no me hubiera refugiado, en fin, en aquel bar de mesas plastificadas y olor a detergente, jamás habría conocido a Lúnula. Fueron quizá mis ansias desmesuradas de conversar con un ser humano de algo más que del precio del café, o tal vez la necesidad, apenas disimulada, de repetir en alta voz los monólogos tantas veces ensayados frente al espejo, lo que me hizo responder con excesiva vivacidad a la pregunta ritual de una mujer desconocida. (18)

In the passage above the narrator and protagonist indicates a desire to speak to another human being about something other than “el precio del café.” This desire for interaction with another, the need to escape solitude, coupled with the repulsion that her room engenders in her, lead her to leave her dark, and dank dwelling in exchange for a café where she encounters Lúnula.
There is an interesting play on the name Lúnula, and “la luna desgastada de aquel espejo empeñado en devolverme día tras día mi aborrecida imagen” (18). The crescent moon shape of the mirror on Violeta’s armoire brings to mind the moon as reflector for the sun. Thus also, Lúnula, as a crescent moon, appears to take her place as looking glass for Violeta. In the quote above Violeta indicates her reliance on the mirror in her room to practice her ‘monologues’—greetings and conversation starters she has committed to memory, and which she repeats almost impulsively in her desperation to engage Lúnula. We know by the narrator’s first entry in her diary that their initial encounter leads to cohabitation and friendship, and that it is now Lúnula who is the recipient of Violeta’s rehearsed, and non-rehearsed, conversation: “Lúnula me pregunta interesada por mi vida, por mis estudios, por aquella ida a la ciudad en busca de trabajo” (21). Prior to this however, the notion that Lúnula has now taken the place of the mirror for Violeta is foreshadowed early on as Violeta prepares to leave her room, casting a final glance towards the mirror on her armoire and stating: “Sentí un fuerte impulso y lo seguí. Desde el suelo cientos de cristales de las más caprichosas formas se retorcieron durante un largo rato bajo el impacto de mi golpe” (19). This scene which comes immediately after the first encounter with Lúnula, but by which time we are not yet aware of how their encounter ends, presents us with an enigmatically happy Violeta. Just moments before she is entering the scene exhuberant: “[s]ubí los escalones de dos en dos, con la felicidad de la pesadilla que termina, sonriendo, cantando por primera vez desde mi llegada a aquella ciudad inhóspita y difícil. Subía brincando como una colegiala estúpida, reteniendo en mi nariz aquellos olores que se me habían hecho cotidianos” (18).

The reason for Violeta’s newfound energy and happiness becomes clearer as we read the first entry of her diary. Violeta recounts how she met Lúnula, and highlights their fundamental
differences. Whereas Violeita is timid, quiet and insecure, though attractive, Lúnula is large, loud, exuberant, energetic, and physically unattractive. The shattered glass writhing on the floor of Violeta’s room is not the last time we encounter the mirror. Both the crescent and the mirror appear once more as the protagonist(s) are trying on hats in the store Violeta had always admired, but never entered. Lúnula’s forward and energetic personality is what finally prompts Violeta to venture into the “tienda fascinante” (20). In the store we see, for the last time, the mirror returning their reflection. Violeta observes Lúnula as: “Los espejos, soldados en abanico, devolvían desde todos los ángulos posibles su feliz y sonrosada cara de campesina, el extraño contraste entre su exuberancia sin límites y el bonito vestido de raso pensado, con toda seguridad, para una mujer diez tallas más menuda” (20).

The multiple reflections of Lúnula only emphasize her overwhelming and exuberant personality. She is in Violeta’s own words, excessive, her body “desmesuradamente obeso”, her teeth “descascarillados y enfermizos”, her laugh loud and strange, in conclusion “lo más distante a una mujer hermosa” (20). Just as this contrasting pair is about to leave the store, we find them admiring themselves once more: “[l]uego, a la salida, nos contemplamos por última vez ante la luna del escaparate” (20). Interestingly, though the narrator dwells on Lúnula’s appearance while in the store, she refrains from describing either Lúnula or Violeta as they observe themselves in their reflection. This adds to the ambiguity of the narrative, as once again we are unable to surmise whether they are observing themselves side-by-side, or whether the reflection of both is merely that of one individual with multiple personas. Further on in the narrative we encounter a similar image as Violeta recalls an outing together: “Recuerdo nuestra visita al viejo almacén e imagino nuestro aspecto en el café: una mujer sentada junto a un bulto del que, a primera vista, resultaba difícil distinguir el sexo” (22). Echoing the scene in the hat shop, the description of
Lúnula offered by Violeta reveals a certain repulsion towards her. Just as Kristeva suggests when defining the abject, Violeta is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by Lúnula, as after her negative observations regarding Lunula’s appearance, Violeta confesses that “[l]e gustó su decisión,” and that concludes that “[s]in embargo, algo mágico debía de haber en sus ojos, en el magnetism de su sonrisa exagerada” (20).

The contrasting characteristics of the two appear to complement one another at the outset of the narrative. Lúnula’s outgoing and exuberant personality allows Violeta to escape the drabness of her living situation, as well as her state of depression and solitude. In stark contrast to Lúnula, Violeta is the opposite of exuberant. Quiet, and almost fragile her personality seeks and relishes the energy that Lúnula exudes. When we encounter her at the beginning of the narrative we are presented with an insecure, quiet, and fearful individual. She is lonely and overwhelmed, paranoid, as she feels observed on the streets, unhappy in her apartment yet equally terrified to be out in public. Lúnula, with her outgoing personality, appears to break her out of her shell. After their adventure in the store Lúnula tells her “[v]ente a vivir conmigo” (20).

Their cohabitation begins well. Lúnula pours her energy into making Violeta feel welcome and Violeta receives her attentions willingly, allowing herself to be pampered and cared for: ‘En nuestros primeros días de convivencia Lúnula se mostraba preocupada porque me encontrara a gusto en todo momento. Cocinaba mis platos preferidos con una habilidad extraordinaria, escuchaba interesada mis confesiones en el zaguán y parecía disfrutar sinceramente de mi compañía’ (22).

Their relationship at the outset is positive and smooth. They appear to relish each other’s company, they complement each other, and Violeta soon learns of Lúnulas uncanny talent for storytelling. The fluidity of language that Lúnula possesses is a cause of admiration for Violeta
who finds her stories fascinating, but more than that, marvels at Lúnula’s ease with words. This quality of Lúnula’s highlights Violeta’s apparent lack. Whereas Lúnula “se movía con absoluta seguridad” in “[e]l arte de la palabra, el dominio del tono, el conocimiento de la pausa y el silencio,” (22) Violeta confesses to her friend that she has been unable to write. Her barrenness when it comes to words and expression, alongside her need to practice her conversations, reveal her deficiency in the arenas where Lúnula excels. Perhaps because of this contrast Lúnula finds an eager listener and admirer in Violeta. Lúnula’s endless energy is channeled into a willing recipient, Violeta, who appears to absorb the unlimited exuberance of her friend.

The state of harmony and equilibrium that the women enjoy is, however, not to last. Before long Violeta remarks that a change has taken place, which she cannot describe, though she makes it clear that their relationship has been altered fundamentally:

Pero desde hace unos días Lúnula no se ha levantado de la cama. Tiene un poco de fiebre y me ha pedido que retrase mi vuelta a la ciudad. No he sabido negarme ni me he sentido disgustada ante la posibilidad de postergar un poco mi enfrentamiento con el mundo. Sin embargo, hay algo en nuestra convivencia que ha cambiado desde que estoy aquí y que, a ratos, me hace sentirme incómoda. (21)

The change that Violeta senses appears to be triggered by two related incidents. The onset of Lúnula’s fever, which is later described as an illness, is the inflection point at which we discover through Violeta that their relationship is changing. The cause of the change however precedes this and appears to be linked to Violeta’s conversation regarding her inability to write, or more precisely, to the result of that conversation which is Lúnula’s avid interest in reading Violeta’s manuscript:
Le he hablado a mi amiga de la imposibilidad de escribir una línea en aquel cuarto maldito de mi antigua pensión, de la necesidad imperiosa de aire libre, de conversar, de mostrar a alguien el producto de mi trabajo. Lúnula ha escuchado atentamente, descuidando sobre la mesa el consabido solitario a punto de concluir, asintiendo con la sonrisa compasiva de quien conoce ya de antemano lo que finge oír por vez primera. Luego me ha pedido el manuscrito y lo ha devorado ávidamente bajo la higuera, algo alejada del zaguán. (21)

Lúnula seems to throw herself into Violeta’s manuscript with the same energy and determination that she exhibits in all other endeavors. Her fever appears to be a projection of her feverish consumption of the text. She reads late into the night and Violeta feels as though she is intruding on in intimate act when she inadvertently interrupts her.

Regardless of whether the text is indeed the source of her illness or not, two things become abundantly clear. The first, that Lúnula’s illness throws the household into disarray, and the second, that Violeta’s opinion of Lúnula is damaged considerably by the discovery that her friend has been editing her manuscript. The gradual transfiguration, one could say decay, of their relationship appears to parallel the revelation of increasingly more intrusive notations on Violeta’s text by Lúnula. Violeta’s first encounter with the markings causes her surprise and anger, yet the incident is soon smoothed over. It is not until she discovers the extent of the editing that she becomes angry enough to determine to leave:

Pero luego, cuando sobre la mesa de nogal pretendía releer el manuscrito, mi disgusto ha ido en aumento. Lo que en algunas hojas no son más que simples indicaciones escritas a lápiz, correcciones personales que Lúnula, con mi aquiescencia, se tomó el trabajo de incluir, en otras se convierten en verdaderos textos superpuestos, con su propia identidad,
sus propias llamadas y sub-anotaciones. A medida que avanzo en la lectura veo que el lápiz, tímido y respetuoso, ha sido sustituido por una agresiva tinta roja. En algunos puntos apenas puedo reconocer lo que yo había escrito. En otros tal operación es sencillamente imposible: mis párrafos han sido tachados y destruidos. (21-22)

Violeta’s change in attitude towards Lúnula’s notations increases as she observes the progressive liberties that she has taken with her text. What began as timid markings in pencil culminate in entire paragraphs being rewritten, and the original text destroyed, in a literal manifestation of her “devouring” of the text. The symbiotic relationship of the two women, marked by their harmony and fluidity—where one fed and poured herself into the other and vice versa—begins to lose its balance. The conflict seems to rise from the attempted superimposition of Lúnula over Violeta, the eclipsing of her personality and identity, by that of the other woman. The stasis, or equilibrium in the relationship between the two is broken as one overtakes the other. In plane geometry the lúnula is the convex-concave (crescent) shape formed by two intersecting circles. Just as in geometry, Lúnula grows as she eclipses Violeta, taking over her identity with her torrent of flowing words, both spoken and written. The tension of this relationship, just as in the deformed circle with two centers—the ellipse posited by Severo Sarduy as the preeminent figure of the baroque—can only be maintained through equilibrium and is susceptible to mutability:

Rather than consider the ellipse as a concluded, paralyzed form, its geometry must be assimilated to a given moment in a formal dialectic: multiple dynamic components, capable of being projected into other forms, generative. The supposedly definitive ellipse could in turn decompose, convert itself into other conic figures, reduce itself to an interaction of two nuclei or the division of a single, central one, that disappears, to the dilation of a circle, and so on. (Baroque New Worlds 293)
Lúnula’s transgression during her feverish state, her attempt to impose her identity over Violeta’s manuscript, disrupts this already precarious state. As Lúnula begins to eclipse Violeta their boundaries erode, the fluidity between them increases and we find that a redistribution and redrawing of boundaries takes place.

The highest point of hybridity and porousness between the two protagonists appears to coincide with the most intense depictions of the abject and the grotesque in the narrative. The encounter with death and bodily fluids, as Violeta attempts to slaughter a rooster for food, is a vivid and unsettling scene: The struggling form of the rooster as she clumsily attempts to butcher it amid flying feathers, blood guts, tears and sweat, reverberates intensely with baroque aesthetic. Violeta admits her lack of skill and confesses “He sentido náuseas y, por un momento, he abandonado corriendo el corral” (23). Her repulsion is only overcome through Lúnula’s incessant and loud instructions as she talks Violeta through the slaughter, alternately directing and encouraging her. From her vantage point in the window Lúnula exercises power over Violeta. She looks down on the other woman and establishes a power dynamic in which she, in spite of the illness that keeps her confined to her bed, is in control. Whereas Lúnula is left in a position of power and control, we find Violeta completely overwhelmed by the act she is performing: “Y yo me he quedado un buen rato aún junto al charco de entrañas y sangre, de plumas teñidas de rojo, como mis manos, mi delantal, mis cabellos. Llorando también lágrimas rojas, sudando rojo, soñando más tarde sólo en rojo una vez acostada en mi dormitorio” (23).

Immediately following this slaughter Violeta is left in a state of shock. Dreaming in “rojo” as she finds the act she has committed, the profusion of fluids from the rooster and herself, hard to put aside. We understand her to be in a state of dejectedness and a tangible change in her mood takes place. The mention of the “cuarto angosto sin ventilación” that is
highlighted in her diary, and which suffocates her in much the same way as the room in the pension she inhabits at the opening of the narrative, underscores this alteration. The source of her alteration appears to be this unshakeable encounter and repulsion by death: “The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irretrievably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance” (Kristeva 3). The shock of permeability, the realization of her own death, or that which she “discards” in her separation from death creates a moment of fluidity of borders. In the narrative, this moment appears also to precipitate a definitive shifting in boundaries between Lúnula and Violeta, a rearranging of essential characteristics, or an opening up of these boundaries that ultimately results in a complete shifting of places between the two.

The morning finds both women altered: “Esta mañana me he sentido un poco mareada. Lúnula, en cambio, parece restablecida por completo” (24). The transference of symptoms of one to the other appears to be the beginning of a greater shift of subjectivities. As Lúnula rises from her illness with even greater energy than she displayed prior to it, Violeta finds herself falling into it, feverish and sweaty, her thoughts muddled. “Pero no tengo fuerzas” (24) she declares as she contemplates her suitcase, which only days before she had filled in her determination to leave, now finding she cannot recall why it is there. Her intense exhaustion is in stark contrast to Lúnula who appears “renacida” completing an unending list of chores with ease and almost uncanny strength and stamina. Lúnula’s comments regarding Violeta begin to hint at an uncanny change as well. Whereas it was once Violeta who commented on the grotesque bodily exuberance of Lúnula, we now find the relationship reversed: “¿Qué te pasa, Violeta? […] Te noto deformada, extraña.’ Intenta disimular una mueca de repulsión pero yo la adivino bajo su
boca entrecerrada. ‘Y esas carnes que te cuelgan por el costado.’ Ahora me rodea la cintura con sus brazos. ‘Tienes que cuidarte, Violeta. Te estás abandonando’” (24).

The final entries of the diary suggest the eerie possibility that Violeta and Lúnula have somehow traded places. The change is not complete, however, as Lúnula appears to have retained all the positive aspects of both. It is also not clear whether a total transference, a body swap in essence, has taken place. We do know that the narrator’s positioning changes, as once it was Lúnula who embodied the grotesque characteristics that the narrator is being criticized for. Violeta had been the beautiful one, yet now she bestows that description on the other woman as she tells us: “Lúnula, esta tarde, se ha marchado a la ciudad. […] Vestía un traje de satén negro y llevaba el pelo recogido tras las orejas. Estaba hermosa” (26). As Lúnula’s eyes become more luminous and blue by the day, Violeta’s identity is erased, her writing utensils destroyed and her purpose becomes solely caring for Lúnula and the house. Her identity remains unresolved as well as she asks “¿Dónde termino yo y dónde empieza ella?” that fuzzy border between subject and the abject appearing once more in the narrative.

The short story ends with a literary device that further obscures the already ambiguous and complex relationship between Lúnula and Violeta. The final text is a purported editors’ note that claims that the preceding text was found in disarray in a house in the country, alongside the corpse of a woman. The text details the circumstances in which the diary was discovered and the inability of confirming whether the women who appear in it resided in the household. This epilogue of sorts reinforces the doubt and ambiguity of the story, leaving the nature of the relationship between Lúnula and Violeta up to interpretation.

In her article “Esquizofrenia en ‘Lúnula y Violeta’ El crecimiento caprichoso del doble,” Anne Marie Poelen states that:
No es casual que este relato surgiera en plena época de la transición política, período en el que las mujeres escritoras intentaban llamar la atención sobre el sujeto femenino, ignorado a lo largo de la historia. Y es que Fernández Cubas nos presenta en este relato (y en todos los cuentos del libro) relaciones en las que predominan la dependencia y el abuso, representados mediante procesos de apropiación de la identidad ajena y resignación ante la propia destrucción. El tema de la doble personalidad es muy representativo de las obras producidas por autoras de esta época, cuando las mujeres van en busca de su identidad, rompiendo con el rol que les había sido asignado, y demuestran que la identidad femenina es muy compleja y a menudo escindida. (245)

The end of the Franco Regime signified the end of the state imposition of the repressive forms of subjectivity it had furthered. Despite the fact that these limiting and oppressive models and norms for identity construction would not disappear suddenly, as their dismantling requires a protracted and systematic process, women found themselves confronted with many more possibilities for self-expression. Along with them, however, came fear and doubt as women explored these new frontiers. I agree with Poelen that it is not merely coincidental that this short story, along with the literature analyzed in the previous chapter, was published during this period. The process of establishing an identity in the absence of the guiding authoritarian oversight provided by the Regime is in itself an ambiguous process, simultaneously exciting and frightening. Thus also, I find it not unusual that the narrative contains both an appropriation of the baroque aesthetic, and exploration of fluids, specifically bodily fluids and the disgust they elicit, as central to the formation of identity. The implications of female bodily fluids, and their role in the historically repressive medical diagnoses of women are echoed in the ideas of potential madness and undefined illnesses. In “El papel del género en la construcción histórica
del conocimiento científico sobre la mujer”, Teresa Ortiz Gómez explores the role that gender played in the notions surrounding female anatomy and bodily functions in Spanish medicine. She traces a chronological line from the Greco-Roman period based on Hippocrates’ and Galen’s concept of bodily humors—blood, bile, and phlegm—and their effects on the body. The concept of humors survived long into the 19th century, and generally associated women with the wet and cold humors, as well as the attending characteristics of those constitutions which included cowardice, weakness, laziness, and sentimentality among other things. Bodily fluids were considered thus an essential aspect of women’s dispositions, and led some medical doctors to assert that women, in their difference, were entirely subject to their body chemistry and unfit to exercise the right to vote for instance, along with a wide range of social responsibilities and freedoms:

¿Por qué hemos de conceder a la mujer los mismos títulos y derechos políticos que al hombre? (...) ¿Son acaso organismos igualmente capacitados? (...) Es en mi ésta la expresión de una convicción biológica de que los sexos no son desiguales sino diversos simplemente (...). El histerismo no es una enfermedad, es la propia estructura de la mujer, la mujer es eso: histerismo’ Nóvoa Santos (1931), Cortes españolas. Debate acerca del sufragio femenino. (Gómez 37)

As Simone de Beauvoir so eloquently argues in the Second Sex, originally published in 1949, female anatomy has historically been used as foundation for arguments to perpetuate the subjugation of women to men. Whether women are deemed inferior to males, due to the female anatomy being construed as an imperfect copy of that of men, or whether female anatomical differences are being used to essentialize gender characteristics, the role of anatomy and chemistry is deeply interlaced with gender dynamics. Diagnoses of hysteria abound in the history
of medicine, a malady particularly prevalent in females, and debilitating to the sufferer. The blanket application of this malady to women led to the false diagnoses of many healthy women who were merely acting in ways contrary to prevalent social norms, and the oversight of truly ill women who were suffering from real diseases which were being dismissed as hysteria. In either case it is clear that the prevailing medical and social attitudes towards women’s illness was, and in many ways continue to be, those of condescension and infantilization (King).

Female bodily fluids play an important role in the ostracizing of female bodies as well. Women’s menstrual flow has historically carried connotations of uncleanliness, leading at times to the cruel treatment of women, ranging from embarrassment to actual physical harm. Female bodies are expected to hide their production of sweat, urine, and excrement, their bodily fluids in general deemed too disgusting, and particularly unfeminine. The open display of bodily fluids in Lúnula y Violeta, the abjection Violeta experiences when confronted with them, and their role in the boundary erasure of the subject, rewrite the traditional gendered narrative of bodily fluids. Cubas brings her characters face to face with abjection and the grotesque, detailing their encounters with blood and sweat within a context that does not stigmatize them. It is precisely at the moment that both women are experiencing these effluences of fluids—the blood of the slaughter, the sweat produced by their fevers—that they begin a process of transformation. Fluids and fluidity, both in physical form, and as a concept, feature prominently in the narrative. The boundary dissolution and fluid exchange between bodies is an important theme in the narrative and underscores both the importance of hybridity and porosity as mechanism for the formation of subjects, and their potential dangers.
They surround him on every side, sinking their jaws into his flesh, tearing their master to pieces in the deceptive shape of the deer. They say Diana the Quiver-bearer’s anger was not appeased, until his life had ended in innumerable wounds.

— Ovid *Metamorphoses*

Partial and incomplete body representations, whether through omission or dismemberment, are prominent aesthetic recurrences in the baroque period. In this chapter I analyze various types of dismemberment present in the baroque aesthetic and their different incarnations in select writings by Maria de Zayas, Mercedes Abad, Ana Rossetti, and the film *Te doy mis ojos* by Iciar Bollaín. This analysis will focus on tracing dismemberment both as an aesthetic technique typical of baroque period art as well as a theme recurrent in the literary representations of gendered violence against women by Spanish women writers. We will begin by examining the theme of dismemberment of female bodies in Maria de Zayas’ short fiction. The contemporary representations of gendered violence found in “Crucifixión del círculo” by Mercedes Abad, and the film *Te doy mis ojos* by Iciar Bollaín will be considered individually and in relation to the literary tradition found in Zayas. Finally, we will consider dismemberment...
and incomplete body representations abstractly, and in the context of baroque aesthetic as a
vehicle for expressing hybrid subjectivities in Ana Rossetti.

In The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare Lynn Enterline traces
dismemberment as both a thematic and stylistic element found in Ovid’s Metamorphoses. She
suggests that Francesco Petrarca was heavily influenced by the Metamorphoses adopting this
stylistic detail along with innovative representations of subjectivity in his own artistic
production. It has already been well established that Spanish literary production of the
renaissance and baroque is stylistically indebted to Petrarch, the poet Juan Boscán having singled
him out as a model for a new poetry of Spain (for an introduction to Petrarchism see Navarette).
In the narrative of Maria de Zayas the baroque stylistic predilection for enumerating the parts of
a woman’s body individually, thus creating the effect of a dismembered and disjointed subject,
becomes quite literal. The Desengaños amorosos (1647), presented as cautionary tales of love
and disillusion, are rife with implicit and explicit depictions of violence, and her darkest tales
include gruesome tortures, and even decapitation. Much has been written regarding Zayas’
attitude towards the gender norms of her period, and the extent to which a feminist reading of her
work is justified or fruitful, questioned. For the purposes of this analysis however, her position
regarding these issues is not a subject of primary concern. The presentation of violence as a
stylistic and thematic literary device however, is of interest to us, as well as its legacy reflected
in post-war Spain literary production.

In Desengaños amorosos Zayas presents a series of stories, told in turn by guests at a
sarao. The purported intent of the tales is to caution young women on the many arts that men
employ in the pursuit of their ladies, and the cruelty that many of them experience. The opening
story is told by Zelima, a Moorish woman of great beauty who is ill-used by a lover who pursues
her. Her audience discovers that despite her innocence she suffers greatly: “[m]andásteme, señora mía, que contase esta noche un desengaño para que las damas se avisen de los engaños y cautelas de los hombres para que vuelvan por su fama en tiempo que la tienen tan perdida” (45). Zelima’s tale is the beginning of a series of stories told over the course of two nights. There is no real consistency in the tales in terms of their morality. That is, the fate of the women in the tales, as well as the men, does not follow a predetermined formula. Whether the women are innocent or guilty to varying degrees of the acts for which they are accused of does not determine their fate. Perhaps in as true a reflection as one could hope of the unpredictable nature of life, we see women pursued and raped by suitors, some are murdered by spouses, fathers, or brothers to redeem their honor, while in other cases they are saved and avenged. We hear of women who are unwillingly pursued, or falsely and unjustly accused and punished for acts not committed, while others lie, connive, and cheat without consequence.

The second part of the Sarao y entretenimiento honesto, the “Desengaños”, are with the exception of one, rife with violence against female bodies. These tales of murder and torture sometimes veer into the fantastical as they present us with bodies and body parts that don’t decompose, impossibly long suffering and stoic martyrs, or dead bodies that speak and impart messages from beyond the grave. Blood is a central element in the tales, playing an important role in various iterations: Blood either visible or not, as in the case of proof of virginity, blood in terms of lineage, filial ties, and family honor, and blood spilled in the various ways the women are tortured or killed, is prominent throughout. In the tale “El verdugo de su esposa”, Laurela’s husband causes her to bleed to death by uncovering the wounds made by the doctor to reduce her fever through bloodletting. In a more gruesome scene in “Mal presagio casar lejos”, Blanca is bled to death by her father in-law, her husband and his lover: “la abrieron las venas de entrambos
brazos, para que por tan pequeñas heridas saliese el alma, envuelta en sangre, de aquella inocente víctima sacrificada en el rigor de tan crueles enemigos” (184). In “El traidor contra su sangre”, Doña Mencia’s husband finds her “bañada en sangre (que con estar muerta desde mediodía, corría entonces de las heridas como si se las acabaran de dar), y junto a ella un lago del sangriento humor,” (169) having been stabbed by her own brother who could not allow his family blood to mingle with that of Don Enrique, his brother in-law.

As we will see later in the narrative the vindictive brother of “El traidor contra su sangre,” Don Alonso is to commit another murder, this time even more gruesome than that of his sister; the decapitation of his wife:

…estando la descuidada doña Ana comiendo de la empanada, fingiendo don Alonso levantarse por algo que le faltaba, se llegó por detrás, y con un cuchillón grande que él traía apercebido y aquel día había hecho amolar, le dio en la garganta tan cruel golpe que le derribó la cabeza sobre la misma mesa. Hecho el sacrificio la echaron en un pozo que había en el mismo jardín, y el cuchillo con ella, y tomando la cabeza se salieron, y cerrando la puerta, echaron la llave por debajo. (202)

The shocking image of the decapitation of Doña Ana is unique among Zayas’ tales, not for its cruelty or appalling violence, but in its explicit dismemberment. The act of dismemberment however remains implicit in many of the acts of violence presented in other stories.

Dismemberment, or bodily fragmentation is a pervasive baroque topic. The period fascination with the fragmented body, and by extension subject, is reflected in Zayas’ stories. Her gory depictions of mutilated female bodies are in keeping with a baroque aesthetic that is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by the spectacle of the dissected body. This interest in bodily fragmentation can be attributed at least in part, to medical discourse surrounding the
anatomical dismemberment of corpses and the spectacle of the *theatrum anatomicum*. In *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition*, John Joseph McCole attributes the baroque obsession with fragmented bodies to the regard of decay as a natural and immutable force: “[d]eath ‘prepares’ the body for allegorical dismemberment, for an emblematic ‘distribution’ of its parts ‘to the manifold regions of significance.’ The baroque obsession with rubble, both architectural and human, thus expresses the primacy of the the thinglike over the personal, of the fragmentary over the total” (141). Ritual dismemberment, too, formed part of the Spanish baroque psyche as an exotic practice of the Americas. The otherwise abject and repulsive depictions of bodily sacrifice are purified through their sacralization:

Abjection appears as a rite of defilement and pollution in the paganism that accompanies societies with a dominant or surviving matrilinear character. It takes on the form of the *exclusion* of a substance (nutritive or linked to sexuality), the execution of which coincides with the sacred since it sets it up.

Abjection persists as *exclusion* or taboo (dietary or other) in monotheistic religions, Judaism in particular, but drifts over to more “secondary” forms such as *transgression* (of the Law) within the same monotheistic economy. It finally encounters, with Christian sin, a dialectic elaboration, as it becomes integrated in the Christian Word as a threatening otherness—but always totalizeable. (Kristeva 17, emphasis in original)

The purification of the mutilated bodies in Zayas’ narratives is done by way of her consistent beatification of the victims, and their contextualization as martyrs. In almost every case we find the victims of these crimes praying and adopting saintly poses as they near death. In many cases, the bodies of the women are miraculously preserved, luminous and glowing, and showing no
signs of decay. These images are evocative of religious iconography like Jesus and Mary rising to heaven in rays of light, or saints whose body parts have not decomposed for centuries.

In “Crucifixión del círculo” Mercedes Abad echoes the violence and spectacle of Zayas’ cautionary tales. The notions of sacrifice and martyrdom, too, are evoked, beginning with the title of the story that makes crucifixion explicit. This macabre and gruesome story leaves nothing to the imagination as it describes in great detail the sexual encounter between a man and a woman that involves mutilation and ultimate death of the female. The first-person narrator suggests the encounter is consensual, yet as readers we have no access to the woman’s point of view regarding the event. What is more, we know nothing about her but what the male protagonist shares with us, not even her name. The nameless female in the story is described as sexually promiscuous, as well as untrustworthy, yet the source of this information is what we increasingly sense to be an unreliable narrator. The descriptions of the woman are saturated with demeaning and objectifying expletives, and create a sense of repressed anger and violence from the opening lines: “[p]uta arrabalera, quiste bien incrustado en mi cerebro” (Abad 34).

The woman’s presence in the story is primarily marked by her absence, as she does not physically materialize in the narrative until two thirds of the way into the story. This absence is a driving engine for the narrative, appearing to be the cause of the narrator’s smoldering rage. As we observe him crossing out the days of the calendar on which he has not seen her it is clear that the woman’s absence is a source of indignation for the man, yet it fuels his desire for her. This desire in turn manifests in sexual arousal and increased threats of violence against her. The narrator’s position is one that is likely familiar to the reader: a slighted lover, ill-used by the woman who chooses to stay away to increase his suffering, waging an internal battle between his desire and the repulsion she elicits in his injured ego. The narrator presents himself as slighted
and injured, yet the careful reader soon recognizes the signs of a violent and abusive partner in his obsessive and demeaning attitude towards the woman.

Just as in Zayas’ tales, desire and possessiveness are the motivating factors for the man’s compulsive attitude towards the woman. He displays an overwhelming desire to be wanted and pursued by her. When the phone rings in his house after days of waiting to hear from her he refuses to answer and indulges in sexually explicit fantasies in which he imagines her lusting after him and begging him to penetrate her. This attitude on the part of the man echoes that of the injured egos in the Desengaños, the narrator’s attitude towards the woman oscillating between blatant sexual desire and hatred:

Esta noche, mi delirio ha atestiguado una vez más lo mal preparado que estoy para la vida. En mi sueño infectado veo un sendero ribeteado de cruces. Cuento diecinueve antes de llegar al círculo. Me acerco convertido en un muñón, renqueante y mutilado de espera. Imagino el reflejo de mi imagen en un espejo y me sacude una náusea. Pero entonces te veo sonriente y apoyada en el círculo, mi bienestar, mi medicina, mis aguas termales. Se me funde el odio en una sonrisa enamorada de galán feliz porque ella lo espera sonriente, tentadora y apoyada en un círculo. Amor mío, mayúscula afectiva, serás mía en un círculo, amor de pecera, te tocaré las escamas; tú, agradecida, menearás la cola. (34)

An essential aspect of the relationship for the narrator is the certainty of being wanted. A large portion of the story is devoted to his deflection of her attempts to contact him. As readers, we are left with the vague notion that the narrator eludes the woman as retaliation for her prolonged absence, yet we are left questioning how much of this absence is intentional on her part, and how much caused by the narrator himself.
The narrator’s pleasure in her pursuit of him is made explicit on multiple occasions. In one of the final instances in which we find her attempting to communicate with him prior to their final encounter she is ringing the doorbell as he luxuriates in the moment: “Gozo tumbado en el suelo, mis oídos más receptivos que nunca, henchidos de placer, llenos de ese sonido celestial que produce tu impaciencia, tus dedos tensos de espera, tu coño ávido que hoy no visitaré” (36). Just as earlier he enjoys letting the phone ring, we find him relishing the power that he wields over her by refusing to answer. These moments reveal possession and control as the fundamental force at play in his desire for her. The narrator displays a series of possessive behaviors prior to their sexual encounter, yet these become overt once they are engaged in the sexual act.

The power dynamic associated with desire, longing, and pursuit plays a crucial role in the narrative, and comes to a climax towards the end of the story. Despite his resolve to deny the woman his attentions, and his determination to deny her the pleasure he imagines she seeks from him, he succumbs to his own desire for her. At the moment that he is most vulnerable he looks into her eyes and perceives her gaze as triumphant: “Cuando volví a clavar mi mirada en la suya, vi como ELLA se extasiaba en mi dolor; se sentía dueña, me sentía SUYO” (38). His interpretation of her ownership over him is the final transgression. The most injurious act that she can commit is that of attempting to objectify him by possessing him. In the patriarchal power dynamic, this is an inexcusable act. Just as we saw in the Desengaños once the transgression is committed, the punishment enacted is left to the male. In “Crucifixión,” the increasingly possessive and violent acts that the narrator perpetrates on the woman (pulling her hair, grabbing her body, injuring her) culminate in strangulation.
The narrator’s insistence until the end that the woman consents to the violence perpetrated on her demands analysis. On the one hand, the apparent agency of the woman suggests an appropriation of this violence, which in turn removes the power from the perpetrator, and returns it to the victim. His assertions that “[e]lla sonrió satisfecha hasta el final,” (38) however, hide perhaps a more disturbing and sinister conclusion. I propose that Abad’s short story traces the characteristics of an inherited gender violence that justifies itself through the projected agency of the woman. That is, the perpetrator justifies his actions, no matter how atrocious, by rationalizing the violence as something that is desired by the victim.

In both Abad and Zayas’ work, the violent act itself, which inscribes male aggression onto the female body, be it by knife wound, crushing, strangulation, or decapitation, robs the female of bodily autonomy, and threatens her subjectivity. Her injured or mutilated body becomes an object of desire. The exertion of violence over female subjects by the males (or women acting as proxy for patriarchal authority) in the narratives serves in each case as an establishment of gendered power dynamics. Furthermore, if we consider women’s bodies symbolic sites of the nation, the exertion of violence over them is thus a representation of political authority and control.

In all cases an actual or perceived transgression on the part of the woman is the catalyst for the violence. The women are found to be transgressors on various levels. Regardless of whether they actively seek, or merely fall victims to the advances of males, they are all at fault in the patriarchal economy. If we consider the Desengaños, we find that although the women are often presented to us as martyrs, lambs who fell prey to male desire, it is clear that they have transgressed by denying the men in the tales something. Whether they deny their suitors a return in affection, or a sibling or father their honor, the women in the tales are doomed to pay a high
price for disrupting the male space. Whereas the men who transgress are subject to established and universally accepted punishments commensurate with their crime, female bodies are subject to the inconsistent, and arbitrary consequences imposed, without interference from society at large, and by the males in their immediate circle. The matter becomes thus a domestic and private affair, which paradoxically, excludes the involvement of society at large in the punishment, despite the fact that the punishment is intended to reinforce a greater social order.

In “Crucifixión del círculo” the woman’s transgression is both erotically charged and established as a catalyst for the violence enacted upon her body. In this case the suffering and mutilated body is presented as a willing recipient of such violence. The already discussed willingness of the victim and the psychological justification this creates for the perpetrator, can be applied to the formulation of woman’s body as proxy for the nation-state. Abad’s woman that is martyred as a result of her transgressions, perceived or real, echoes the Spanish nation-state that had to be forcefully punished for its transgressions against the patriarchal triumvirate of monarch, church, and military. Just as the woman in crucifixion apparently willingly submits herself to violation, subjugation, and the extirpation of parts of her body, the nation was subjected to radical rehabilitation, often a violent process through which sectors were subjugated, reformed, or eliminated. This process was presented in the national media as voluntary, welcomed, and necessary for the well-being and survival of Spain:

After the war, Franco’s dictatorship took hold by means of violence and also by an effective exercise of cultural hegemony, understood in a Gramscian sense. Jo Labanyi has reformulated the commonly accepted idea that Francoism did not have a coherent cultural project: she has argued that the dictatorship had a sophisticated understanding of
hegemony, as it appreciated that this involved ‘complex, shifting negotiations between heterogenous cultural forms.’ (Haro García and Díaz Sánchez 738)

The ultimate suffocation of the woman/nation is the inevitable result of this power dynamic however as it results in the erasure of identity and annulation of the subject, in favor of that imposed by the Regime.

In *Te doy mis ojos* by Iciar Bollaín the protagonist, Pilar, embodies the suppressed subjectivity discussed above. We encounter Pilar with her young son taking refuge at her sister’s house after what we understand to be a particularly violent outbreak by her husband. The film focuses on the details of the battered woman’s life, attempting to paint a detailed picture of the circumstances that have led her to, and keep her, in this abusive relationship. It attempts to portray fairly the complexities of such a relationship and the complicity of all parties involved. In the course of the film we see Pilar leave her house, return to her husband after a reconciliation, fall into the abusive cycle once more, and finally leave for what we are led to, or perhaps simply wish to, believe will be the last time. The film seems to end on a hopeful note, yet presents the viewer with the bleak and difficult reality of women in the situation Pilar is in. It is clear that Pilar’s escape is an anomaly, and that the support network that she needs in order to escape is hard to come by for most women. Pilar’s family, the authorities, and the social services (as exemplified by the psychologist her husband is persuaded to visit) all in turn fail her. Ultimately it is the eclectic group of friends she has made during her brief escape into society and the work force that rally around her and presumably pull her out of the abusive cycle. Yet even the ending’s hope is tenuous if we consider the statistical reality of most battered and abused women.
The same dynamic of possessiveness that we see unfold in Zayas and Abad is at play in the film as we see Pilar’s husband overtly and explicitly request not only her love but her body. In the only love scene we see between the two, which comes shortly after their reconciliation, Antonio takes possession of her in a scene reminiscent, though considerably less violent, than that of “Crucifixión del círculo”:

ANTONIO. *(Acariciándola.*) Hace mucho que no me regalas nada...
como esas orejas o esa nariz.
PILAR. Di lo que quieres y yo te lo doy.
ANTONIO. Todo, lo quiero todo. Desde allí hasta aquí. *(Señalando con el dedo desde los pies hasta la cabeza.)*
PILAR. Ya lo tienes.
ANTONIO. No, quiero que me lo des.
PILAR. *(Reticente.*) Te lo doy.
ANTONIO. Pero todo... lo quiero todo. Todo... los brazos, las piernas, los dedos...
Me tienes que dar todo. Dímelo.
PILAR. Te doy mis brazos. *(Se besan.)*
ANTONIO. Las piernas...
PILAR. Te doy mis piernas. *(La penetra.)*
ANTONIO. Los dedos...
PILAR. Te doy mis dedos.
ANTONIO. El cuello...
PILAR. Te doy mi... mi cuello. *(Hay más pasión.)*
ANTONIO. Los pechos...
PILAR. Te doy mis pechos.

ANTONIO. Tu espalda... tus hombros... (Poseyéndola)

PILAR. (Entre suspiros.) Mi espalda... mis pies... Te doy... te doy mis ojos...
y mi boca...

In the symbolic dismemberment of Pilar, Antonio takes possession of her entire body, yet it is done piece by piece, and he demands that it be done voluntarily. Again, we see the need of the abuser for the act to be construed as a welcome one. When Pilar responds that he already possesses her, he insists that the establishment of his possession over her must, at least in appearance, be one of willing submission on her part. Thus, in what is a reenactment of their relationship in diminutive, he requests and she volunteers herself. Yet, it is clear that the request is rhetorical as there is no room for her to deny him of herself. In the ultimate relinquishing of her identity and subjectivity Pilar offers her eyes and mouth, giving up her ability to see and to speak.

The metaphorical dismemberment of Pilar makes explicit the relationship between violence, possession, and eroticism. This scene echoes the enumeration of body parts so prevalent in renaissance and baroque love poetry, which we saw in chapter one clearly appropriated by Ana Rossetti as a poetic device. The bringing to bear of this classical literary technique, which in the context does not seem accidental given Pilar’s newfound passion for El Greco, both highlights the implicit violence of the act of literary dismemberment of the female body, and the persistent ubiquity of violence against women.

Though dismemberment of the female body whether as baroque literary device, direct physical violence, or symbolic political act, are objectifying and annulling acts, the appropriation of this device in the literature of Ana Rossetti and Mercedes Abad, as well as its representation in
contemporary cinema, lead to a rearrangement, or at least a questioning, of the gendered power dynamics that normalize this violence. The gaze itself, as objectifying is an element that Ana Rossetti’s poetry explores and exploits at great length. So, too does Abad, in the spectacle of the “Crucifixión” which evokes Bataille’s Chinese torture victim, highlight the power of the gaze, and its role in objectifying the female body. In Bollain’s protagonist, Pilar, the ability to look and to be looked at, that is the gaze, is central to her evolution. As Laura Mulvey proposes in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” the economy of the gaze places the female subject at a disadvantage:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.

(837, emphasis in original)

Though as was stated earlier, Pilar, does not escape her situation until she finds a supportive group of friends that rally around her, one could argue that her seeing and being seen are primary catalysts of this eventuality. When Pilar goes to see her sister, who restores paintings in the chapel, she sees frescoes by El Greco for the first time. Her fascination with the artist’s vision, his representations, and the detailed interpretations of the images is what, for the first time in the film, allows her to find herself. Her filial relationships, even the love for her son, do not allow her to find the part of herself that still retains her identity. Whereas her relationships with family are based on a dynamic whereby she gives of herself unconditionally (loving daughter, sister, doting mother, obedient wife) her relationship to her friends is relieved of these markers. Her
friends know her only by what they see, and what she chooses to share. Her ability to see the artwork she falls in love with, which leads to her job and her friends, arguably is the key that allows her to be seen. Visibility outside of the possessive gaze of her husband permits her to seek help, and be given support, as she becomes the observer.

At the beginning of this chapter I proposed that dismemberment not only functions in the narratives and film as a reminder of the oppressive power that yearns to obliterate and destroy the female subjects, but that its appropriation can function as a liberating force for them. The validity of this assertion is not readily apparent perhaps. Arguably, the end that the protagonists’ meet in the narratives discussed, particularly those that suffer dismemberment, are not easily considered liberated. For Iciar Bollaín’s main character Pilar, and the poetic voices in the poetry of Ana Rossetti discussed elsewhere in this study, it is easier to suggest that the notion of dismemberment is not an altogether annulling force, yet I propose that in each case seen in this chapter there is an argument to be made for the liberating effect of the act of dismemberment. To frame this assertion adequately the notion of dismemberment must be considered in the light of fragmentation. In addition, it is necessary to assert that although the act of dismemberment carries with it the implicit notion that it is being perpetuated on a passive object, the notion of fragmentation carries no such implication. Fragmentation functions at various levels within these works. In the first place, it is not always dependent on the literal dismemberment of a body within the work, as we see in the case of Ana Rossetti’s metaphorical dismemberment of the bodies she admires in her poetry, in keeping with the baroque aesthetic that inspires her. In the case of Bollain’s film, the dismemberment that takes place is only metaphorical, though it speaks to a deeper desire by Antonio to thoroughly possess his wife. In Abad and Zayas the dismemberment is often times quite literal, and thus the fragmentation of the body is physical.
Within the aesthetic of the baroque the concept of fragmentation speaks to a rejection of the idealized wholeness of the renaissance body. The tensions of the baroque epistemic reality call for bodies that are fragmented and in pieces: “[t]he idea of the fragment and the fragmentary goes thus hand in hand with a theoretical stance that presupposes the impossibility of a unifying discourse, that is, of a teleological and globalizing narrative about the history of the human body” (Guldin, no page). In the case of the narratives in question fragmentation can serve as an opportunity for reconfiguration of the subject as a form of escape from the power of the oppressor that wishes to possess the whole body. It is interesting to note that in the narrative fiction of oppressed individuals the trope of the dismembered body makes a frequent appearance.

In *The Dis-membered Body: Bodily Fragmentation as a Metaphor for Political Renewal*, Rainer Guldin suggests that “[r]adical social change is expressed in the imagery of broken corporeal unity” (no pag.). In this way, we can take the depictions of fragmented bodies within the oppressed group as a form of resistance against the hegemonic power of the state. In what is a morbid assertion of subjectivity, the body that undergoes dismemberment is destroyed but cannot be possessed by the oppressor and thus is liberated. In this way, the appropriation of dismemberment by these women is not expressed as violence towards men, but rather a dissection of the mechanism through which this control is exerted, and an ability to undermine it subtly by appropriating it.
Section III Transcendent Bodies

As the sixteenth century turned into the seventeenth, the Scientific Renaissance that had focused on the re-discovery of ancient texts on natural knowledge, culminated with truly ground-breaking proposals by Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, and Galileo Galilei in astronomy, giving way to a Scientific Revolution. The establishment of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge is just one result of the intellectual maelstrom that took over Western Europe. Great minds such as John Wilkins, Isaac Newton, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, Robert Hooke, Robert Boyle and many other savants of the time expanded the study of natural philosophy and mathematics at an incredible speed. Parallel to the Scientific Renaissance and Revolution were the Reformation and Counterreformation. This tension resulted in great philosophical and theological treatises, and also fomented a resurgence of mysticism. The esoteric also took its place in the popular psyche, with intellectuals such as Isaac Newton and many other savants famously studying alchemy and cryptic ancient tomes as readily as they pursued natural philosophy (Westfall ch.1).

While the English and the Dutch are in the throes of resolving questions of Protestantism versus Catholicism, free will and predestination, Spain has remained staunchly Catholic. During the respective reigns of Philip II, Philip III and Philip IV in Spain (1556-1605), Roman Catholicism has remained unchallenged, yet the effects of the Council of Trent and the Counterreformation ripple through the artistic and cultural production of the period. Most notably the mystical experience as represented by Santa Teresa and San Juan explore a borderline heretical relationship with the divine. Just as the writings of Galileo Galilei, which lay the foundation for much of the Scientific Revolution are later deemed heretical and banned, the
mystical experience of these poets, as taken up and explored by the last true Spanish Mystic, Miguel de Molinos, ultimately leads to his death.

In *Between Exaltation and Infamy: Female Mystics in the Golden Age of Spain*, Stephen Haliczer states that “[n]otwithstanding the onset of the scientific revolution, the dominant intellectual concern in sixteenth-and and seventeenth-century Europe was the search for the way in which humans could directly receive the influence of heavenly forces” (ch. 1). In Spain, during the Counter-Reformation, of the results of this interest in “heavenly forces” (ch. 1) was what Haliczer identifies as “an upsurge of feminine religious enthusiasm” (Introduction). However, women as pious and holy beings were problematic figures:

[…] women’s piety expressed itself especially in mystical experiences frequently manifested in such phenomena as visions, revelations, voice, stigmata, and ecstasies. Phenomena of this kind, while susceptible to rational explanation, must also be understood within their cultural context. For these women, the paranormal was an accepted part of everyday lived experience, understood within socially constructed fields of meaning. The church’s response to this revival of female piety was both wary and welcoming. On the one hand, a long-standing tradition held that women, as the weaker sex, were more emotionally unstable and therefore more susceptible to demonic manipulation. But visions, revelations, and other paranormal events that confirmed Catholic orthodoxy could represent genuine divine communication in defense of the true church. (Introduction)

Despite this perceived increased potential to be influenced by demonic forces, female mystics who were accepted by the church enjoyed a level of influence unattainable for most women during this period (Haliczer ch. 3).
As I have already established at the beginning of this study, during the Franco Regime there is a resurgence and revival of renaissance and baroque culture and symbolism. As we will see in this section, along with this revival came a renewed Catholic fervor and the imposition of dogma. In “Education and Political Control,” Alicia Alted discusses the Catholization of the educational system, and the effects this had: [t]he ‘re-Catholization’ of education meant compulsory study of sacred texts, and subordination of all forms of teaching and student behaviour to Catholic moral. The social consequences of this were the predominance of private education (provided by the religious orders), and the provision of special education for women” (197). In the cultural sphere, women were directed to aspire to emulate prominent Catholic figures such as the Virgin Mary, and Catholic Saints like Saint Teresa.

Although sixteenth and seventeenth century Spanish mysticism was potentially controversial, as it bordered on the heretical, and simultaneously provided women mystics with a degree of freedom and influence otherwise not accessible to them, the Franco Regime’s revival of mystic cultural icons such as Saint Teresa obviated these potentially controversial aspects of the saint. In this section I explore how the contemporary Spanish authors Menchu Gutiérrez, Chantal Maillard, and Ana Rossetti frame the mystical experience, looking back at the rich tradition of Spanish mystical writings from which they draw inspiration, and from which they differentiate themselves. Their forays into the mystical, and the recognition of this Spanish mystical tradition in their work, forces them navigate the difficulties of referencing this tradition while avoiding the negative effects that its association with the repressive Franco Regime brings with it. Their work, therefore, simultaneously evokes the potentially repressive Catholicism that became a tool of the Regime, while rescuing the mystical experience from it as a liberating act.
Chapter 7  Menchu Gutiérrez’s Interior Castles

There is an ascetic quality to the way that much of Menchu Gutiérrez’s writing explores the inner workings of the self. As readers, we follow along in a steady and rigorously slow spiraling inward, a rhythmic plodding that seems outside of the constraints of time. Her work explores not so much the role of the modern mystic, as that of the practice itself. She appears more deeply concerned with the processes through which one can undertake the journey inward, their success and failure, than with the ultimate arrival at some predetermined state of enlightenment or manifestation of God. At times these explorations center on the mindful, tranquil, soft, and slow—a gentle stream of conscious meandering into thought and stillness—while at others, torment and anguish overtake her protagonists and the steady calm of the ascetic is lost in the storming madman’s staggering steps.

At times the reverberations of echoing monastic chants are subtle ones, they are undertones over which she layers her narratives, while at others they overtake them, clearly invoking a monastic tradition that cannot be wholly shed as she explores the mechanisms in play in the search for the self. In El faro por dentro for instance, the constant thrum of the sea against the walls of the lighthouse creates an echo chamber of cathedral proportions. It is perpetually within the narrative, on the sidelines, never coming to the fore, but unavoidably present. The rhythmic beating of waves, like the chanting of monks, is rhythmic, unrelenting and timeless reminding us both of the steady progression of time and the suspension of it.

Within the confines of the lighthouse, the awesome and unbridled energy of the ocean pounding against the rocks propels the protagonist of “Basenji” on a journey. Whether this is a journey towards enlightenment or madness is left unclear, yet we understand the process itself to
be important. The movement of the protagonists is both physical and psychological, as they spiral up and down the lighthouse steps. In the steady climbing, that becomes mechanical, we sense a detachment taking place that pulls them farther from the material world into an often dark, inner world. The measured beating of those steps marks time in the silence of the lighthouse, and becomes the marching song that accompanies these individuals as they move closer to an outcome which is perpetually present on the edges of conscious thought, yet out of reach.

Georges Bataille would tell us “that [this journey] does not lead to a harbor (but to a place of bewilderment, of nonsense)” (Inner Experience 5). I argue that the spiraling transports the protagonists into an inner experience that echoes that of the sixteenth and seventeenth century mystics, yet is contemporary in its portrayal and exploration of inwardness and enlightenment. It is decidedly post-francoist as well, as it seeks to rid itself of the dogma and stigma associated with the Catholic Church in their portrayal of such an experience. It pries away the remnants of a regime that sought to control all aspects of Spaniards’ outer and inner lives, wresting the experience itself away from it, as something that can be had unsullied by the memory of dictatorial imposition. I suggest that mysticism, in its traditional form, is shunned and stigmatized within the context of a certain post-Franco Spain; that part which seeks to rid itself of all remnants of the dictatorship. In this reality, Catholicism which was so deeply tied to the Regime cannot divorce itself from associations of rigidity, control and dogma. The mystic experience within Catholic tradition, such as that described by Santa Teresa de Jesús, is thus too problematic. Gutiérrez however appears to be offering an alternative, suggesting that the experience—the mystic experience, the attainment of enlightenment, the true knowledge of
self—is not the sole property of one tradition or another, of one patriarchal system or another, but rather an individual journey into self that is to be neither romanticized nor feared.

Menchu Gutiérrez’s *El faro por dentro* (containing both “El faro por dentro” and “Basenji”) and *La mujer ensimismada* seem to question and reframe the role and practice of mysticism in a contemporary context. Her mystics are not hermits in a desert, monks in a monastery, or yogis in meditation; instead, we find them in almost surreal yet familiar settings, undertaking mundane, often uninteresting, activities with an almost feverish attention and zeal. In “Basenji” we see the lighthouse keeper single-minded in his tending of the light house, in *La mujer ensimismada* we find multiple women wholly engrossed in sundry tasks, while the narrator in “El faro por dentro” explores both the inner spaces of the lighthouse and themelves. Just as the lighthouse in “El faro por dentro” provides a modern physical projection of the subtle and arduous exploration of self, *La mujer ensimismada* provides a reformulation of the *moradas* of the interior castle and the journey inward.

If for Santa Teresa the path to the inner sanctum of the interior castle lies in prayer, one could argue that for Gutiérrez the act of “ensimismarse” is the path to self-knowledge and creativity. Divorcing prayer from any connotations of religiosity or even spirituality, she presents the devotion to, and arduous pursuit of, various mundane or creative tasks as a physical and secular manifestation of ritual and prayer. A pursuit which, when carried out faithfully, mirrors the ascetic’s physical preparations to quiet the mind, and step into the experience of self. I argue that Gutiérrez presents us with a new mysticism, a path to inner experience that though anchored in traditional asceticism, more closely conforms to Bataille’s definition of it: “[I]nner experience cannot have its principal in a dogma (a moral attitude), in a science (knowledge cannot be either its goal or its origin), or in a search for enriching states (the aesthetic, experimental attitude), it
cannot have any other concern or other goal than itself” (13). Bataille dispenses with the notion of God as the ultimate goal of the inner experience, or rather, argues that having a goal for which to strive reduces such an experience into an object: “If I said decisively: ‘I have seen God,’ that which I have seen would change. In place of the inconceivable unknown—wildly free before me, leaving me wild and free before it—there would be a dead object and the thing of the theologian…” (10). In this way, Bataille argues for the experience itself, not an outcome of it, as that which one must give into and become.

Back in the lighthouse the steps of its inhabitants seem fruitless, and yet their movements, the succession of steps, one in front of the other, mark a progression. “El faro por dentro” follows a protagonist in an exploration of the lighthouse. There is no plot or driving engine to the piece, it reads much like a diary or memoir, as the narrator explores the confines of the lighthouse, in which we are to understand she or he has dwelled, yet there is no plot, timeline or resolution. In “Basenji” we have something closer to narrative plot, as we follow the keeper of the lighthouse on an existential journey that appears to progress towards madness. The narrative thread revolves around his firsthand account of his daily tasks. In both pieces, we find a spiritual quality to the physical space of the lighthouse:

La planta del edificio es rectangular. Sin embargo, el apéndice circular del faro se adhiere a su cara norte y rompe la línea perfecta, engordándola en su centro con un vientre inesperado. La planta tiene, así, un parecido—quisiera pensar que casual—con la de una iglesia, en la cual el vientre del faro equivaldría al ábside. También, al analizar la distribución del edificio, vuelvo a toparme con el orden místico que se supone favorece a la oración: habitaciones iguales y enfrentadas a ambos lados de un amplio pasillo que va
a morir en la torre circular del faro. El pasillo es la nave principal y las habitaciones conforman las naves laterales y sus capillas. (Gutiérrez XXIV).

In this unique space, there is a paradox of movement and stillness, just as in the narrations themselves: The architecture of the lighthouse determines the movements of the inhabitants, movement on a horizontal plane is limited, subsequently there is no distance to be measured by which progress can be assessed. Just as the mystic cannot pursue, desire or hold that which he seeks—he must practice non-striving—the keeper and the narrator do not move progressively towards a destination. Instead, their steps transport them upwards and downwards, with every step they move deeper into, or further from, the center within the lighthouse. In a two-dimensional plane these figures appear still, yet in the third dimension a significant movement takes place. This physical motion echoes the metaphysical or psychological movements of the protagonists into their inner selves. Just as in the physical world, their psychological or inner movements cannot be detected by an outside observer. The meditator appears paradoxically still, even while a movement deeper into inner realms is taking place within. In a similar way, the keeper appears immutable and still within the confines of the lighthouse, static within the daily repetition of his tasks, returning to point zero as he repairs the same parts day after day.

Through this image Menchu Gutiérrez beautifully illustrates the paradox which Santa Teresa refers to in her moradas. Just as in the image above, only an observer who can perceive the extra dimension, in that case depth, would truly see the movement of the figure throughout the interior of the lighthouse. For Santa Teresa the ability to understand the interior journey relies on a keener sight and understanding of the self. Only those who turn away from the mundane and look towards themselves can begin the process of understanding the act of moving inward:
Pues tornando a nuestro hermoso y deleitoso Castillo, hemos de ver cómo podremos entrar en él. Parece que digo algún disbarate [sic]; porque si este Castillo es el ánima, claro está que no hay para qué entrar, pues se es él mismo [sic]: como parecería desatino decir a uno que entrase en una pieza, estando ya dentro. Mas habéis de entender que va mucho de estar a estar, que hay muchas almas que se están en la ronda del Castillo, que es adonde están los que le guardan, y que no se les da nada de entrar dentro, ni saben qué hay en aquel tan precioso lugar ni quién está dentro, ni an [sic] qué piezas tiene.

Ya habréis oído en algunos libros de oración aconsejar al alma que entre dentro de sí; pues esto mismo es. Decíame poco ha un gran letrado que son las almas que no tienen oración como un cuerpo con perlesía o tullido, que aunque tiene pies y manos no los puede mandar; que así son, que hay almas tan enfermas y mostradas a estarse en cosas exteriores, que no hay remedio ni parece que pueden entrar dentro de sí; porque ya la costumbre la tiene tal de haber siempre tratado con las sabandijas y bestias que están en el cerco del castillo, que ya casi está hecha como ellas, y con ser de natural tan rica y poder tener su conversación no menos que con Dios, no hay remedio. Y si estas almas no procuran entender y remediar su gran miseria, quedarse han hechas estatuas de sal por no volver la cabeza hacia sí, así como lo quedó la mujer de Lot por volverla. (8)

In the lighthouse, this leaving behind comes about forcefully: The isolation of the lighthouse is hard to avoid, the task of the keeper is by default a lonely one, to keep watch over a fragile mechanism on whose continuous and proper operation depend myriad lives and livelihoods. Metaphorically the lighthouse is a beacon, a place of guidance to those lost in the night. In El faro por dentro isolation manifests in the form of paranoia and a slipping into madness. The inner experience of the keeper appears to be anguished rather than ecstatic. The roar of the
ocean, the repetitive tasks, the isolation, the hint of intoxication brought about through his work, all coalesce in a singular experience both free and wild and maddening.

Isolation becomes the unifying thread for the journey inward and provides the necessary detachment from the exterior world to facilitate it. The interior castle can only be accessed through a turning away from the exterior, and this requires the will to renounce mundane things. In “Basenji” the interior castle only becomes accessible to the protagonist through the inhabiting of the exterior castle: the lighthouse. The outer walls of the lighthouse provide the necessary barrier for the interior exploration to take place. Without the exterior, there cannot be an interior. Just as the outer moradas protect the increasingly precious inner sanctums of the soul, the lighthouse becomes the physical manifestation of the interior castle’s fortifications. The physical movement of the keeper, just like that of monks in a labyrinth, allow the self to slip into itself. Unlike in Las moradas however, the journey of the protagonist is less certain in its ultimate goal. There is no clear sense that the spiraling movements of the keeper will lead to a communion with the divine. Instead there is an emphasis on the fine line of madness and genius. The reader is constantly prompted to question the sanity of the protagonist while simultaneously being persuaded that he is on the verge of a great insight. We follow him on a contemporary re-framing of a mystical experience, a journey into the unknown through solitude, isolation, despair and forced self-exploration which culminates in ambiguity rather than enlightenment in the traditional sense.

In the final scenes of “Basenji” the lighthouse keeper sheds the obsession with the lighthouse in a dramatic culmination. The keeper notes that “[p]or primera vez, el faro ha permanecido apagado durante la noche” (XLIV), a singular event that marks a final detachment
from the exterior world. This is followed by a categorical shift in the keeper’s reality and purpose:

Me levanté de la cama, corrí por el pasillo, entré en el cuarto de máquinas. En el cuadro de automatismo, los dos pilotos encendidos. Fallo de la lámpara principal, fallo de la lámpara auxiliar. Todo fundido; la alarma dormida; el brazo cambiador inutilizado, como una prótesis separada del cuerpo; todo perdido; el faro muerto. Y yo... Ahora sí es verdad: tengo que estar muerto. Sólo muerto he podido ignorar esta tragedia. (XLIV)

The keeper’s apparent death does not eliminate consciousness or culminate in nothingness. Instead he shifts focus and sheds the obsession with the lighthouse—the exterior castle—as if shedding a skin. Immediately the keeper turns to what has slowly begun to consume him, the microscope. It is what he places under the microscope’s lens however that which is of greatest significance:

Ya sólo queda obtener la muestra: con el cortatramas me hago un pequeño corte en la yema del dedo índice izquierdo. La sangre brota solidificada, en forma de diminuta piedra redondeada, del color del carbunclo. Es necesario laminarla para poderla observar bajo la lente. Deposito con cuidado la lasca de sangre sobre la bandeja de cristal. Acerco el ojo derecho a la mirilla; giro la rueda a la derecha, a la izquierda, rectifico a la derecha. Han desaparecido las formas: los glóbulos rojos, los glóbulos blancos; sólo queda un plasma uniforme, un plasma carbonizado. El primer análisis de la muerte arroja, sólo en apariencia, un resultado único. Pero la autopsia no se detiene... (XLIV)

That single drop of blood that contains within it his entire being signifies an important moment in the inner journey. The keeper is no longer looking outside of himself, but rather turning an
ever finer and stronger lens into his very being. He dissects the essence that runs through his veins, suggesting that the search continues but that it must take place with an eye turned inward.

Though strongly associated with mysticism, the notion of going inside oneself is not the sole purview of the ascetic. In psychology “ensimismamiento” refers to a sort of self-absorption. This state of immutability and disconnectedness from all exterior stimuli also has a place in philosophy. José Ortega y Gasset coined the term ensimismamiento, yet the concept appears also in the writing of Maria Zambrano as suspension or an ability to turn inward:

[…] el poder que el hombre tiene de retirarse virtual y provisoriamente del mundo y meterse dentro de sí, o dicho con un espléndido vocablo, que sólo existe en nuestro idioma: que el hombre puede ensimismarse. Noten ustedes que esta maravillosa facultad que el hombre tiene de libertarse transitoriamente de ser esclavizado por las cosas implica dos poderes muy distintos: uno, el poder desatender más o menos tiempo el mundo en torno sin riesgo fatal; otro, el tener dónde meterse, dónde estar, cuando se ha salido virtualmente del mundo. (Ortega y Gasset “Ensimismamiento y alteración”)

For these writers, it is the ability of humans to go within themselves that which makes them human. In La mujer ensimismada we see that the process of turning inward and exploring the interior castle is not solely pursued through prayer and meditation. In this text, the notion of moradas introduced by Santa Teresa in the Interior Castle, is reflected in the spaces of the text. The concentric circles that carry us ever deeper into the self in Las moradas are transmuted into twelve dwellings that surround a central garden: “La plaza tiene forma ovalada y un jardín en el centro. Las doce casas, de dos alturas y semisótano, son iguales y están pintadas en blanco” (9). From the inner garden of the plaza the protagonist explores the houses and her surroundings:

“Me sumerjo en el jardín de la plaza. Tras circular por los caminos de tierra y llegar al centro del
The inner sanctum of the central garden is the anchoring space to which the protagonist will return after each foray, and at the end of the journey through the dwellings that surround her. From this vantage point, both the start and end of her journey, we observe her assessing her surroundings and preparing for her exploration of the interior of each one of the surrounding buildings. It is not until she reaches this space that she is aware of her purpose: “En el centro del jardín aprendo qué he venido a hacer aquí, y mientras las primeras gotas, pesadas y gruesas, comienzan a golpear la tierra y a doblar las ramas infantiles de los árboles, me encamino hacia la primera casa” (10). The beginning and end of her journey are marked by her presence in this central space, an act that is accompanied by revelation or insight into knowledge she did not previously possess.

Though the function of the central location is important throughout the novel, I will return to it later, focusing now on its role as springboard to the surrounding spaces. Within the houses surrounding the plaza the protagonist observes figures thoroughly engaged, 

*ensimismadas*, in that which they are doing. These absorbing tasks, these acts of *ensimismamiento*, include cooking, singing, sewing, composing, drawing, reading, writing, acting, metalworking, gardening, playing games, and watching films. Each figure can be seen as a recluse within a dwelling that is thus presented as a sanctuary for self-expression and exploration; a contemporary monastery. This monastery is not only unique in its composition and arrangement, but too in its dwellers. These ascetic figures are not monks or nuns, but women, and the tasks in which they engage are not the hard labor and toil that cleanses and purifies the self to receive the divine in prayer and meditation. Instead, their labor is infused with pleasure
and the sensuous, their bodies luxuriating alongside their minds and souls in the task at hand. These tasks consume their attention and energy yet the pursuit is satisfying. Just like in The Interior Castle, the houses the women are in serve as spaces for self-exploration and knowledge of themselves. Early on in her meanderings the protagonist finds herself considering these spaces and their function:

Vuelvo a situarme a su espalda y escudriño de nuevo los planos. Busco eso que la mujer acaba de decir y lo encuentro. Es verdad que la escalera parece conducir a un lugar y luego lleva a otro; es verdad que cada ventana implica un espacio que exige ser vivido de forma independiente, que cada espacio reclamado por un alféizar es una pequeña casa, con vida propia, un espacio donde se piensa y se toman decisiones. La casa no es un castillo, ni se disfraza de castillo, tiene voluntad de castillo: de observatorio, de fortaleza y de lugar donde se guarda y se atesora. (12)

The house with the “will” of a castle is a space for these women to discover freely, sheltered from the outside, experimenting and experiencing through their creative pursuits. The inherent qualities of the castle—staircases that appear to lead one place but end up in another, rooms that are worlds unto themselves to be experienced fully in their individuality—reflect the meanderings and movements of the inward experiencing of self.

Time and timelessness are also aspects imbedded into these spaces in which the women lose track of the hours and seasons within their dwellings, despite reminders of the passage of time being scattered throughout the homes. In one of the dwellings the protagonist encounters old photographs: “[h]ay fotos de niña en los que aparece vestida con miriñaque y peluca blanca rizada; de adolescente, con kimono..., los últimos disfraces no son tan fáciles de situar en el mapa o en el tiempo” (21). The photos, like the dresses she describes later on, carry the markers
of time and space. Unlike the clock or the calendar, the photograph’s representation of time is visceral and instantaneous, compressing past and present into a single moment, creating a bridge between the instant the photograph was taken and that of the viewer’s experience of it. Similarly, the dresses offer an alternate measure and reckoning of the passage of time. Their measure of time is different, however, than that of the photographs:

Los vestidos llevan siempre mensajes guardados. Si quisiéramos rendir culto a la memoria, más que fotografías, deberíamos guardar nuestros vestidos: los vestidos viejos se leen del cuello al bajo desgastado, como una larga historia, igual que los camisones viejos, impregnados de los sueños con los que han estado en íntimo contacto. (52)

The imprint of the passage of time on these is one of history and memory, and less of a measure of a specific point in time and space. The slow accumulation of memory and experience becomes tangible in the fabric, which is interwoven with thoughts and feelings and imbued with tactile, aural and olfactory memory. Through the various markers and measures of time, we see the flow of it presented both as an endless stream and a quiet and still pool disturbed only by the protagonist who in her awareness of it, brings it to the fore. This dynamic is beautifully condensed in the following image: “[c]on el pie enfundado en la bota de goma, muevo el agua del charco para ver cómo la farola reflejada tiembla de irrealidad, cómo la luz se contonea, por el mero placer de imprimir movimiento a la quietud, a la soledad de la escena” (9).

The protagonist is subject to the fluctuating perception of time when she is within the dwellings—spaces where time seems suspended, or its passing measured by other means—only observing the changes in weather and angles of the sun when she emerges from them. This paradoxical juxtaposition of lineal time and the apparent cessation of its movement underscores the power of the state of flow in which the figures find themselves. The women thus are
simultaneously experiencing the instant and eternity as their perception of time is filtered through their inner explorations: “Yo la miro de lejos: el pelo largo, suelto, parece flotar sobre el respaldo del sofá; bajo la apariencia de calma, se adivina la vibración interna; bajo los ojos cerrados, la mujer parece ver algo que fluye, ¿un río en un paisaje? Ahora, abre los ojos, y tomando las hojas de papel que tenía a su lado, sobre el sofá, lee” (22). The meditative nature of the tasks the women engage in is conducive to the achievement of a state of transcendence.

Further highlighting the importance of time in her narrative, we see that the twelve homes surrounding the plaza bring to mind a clock-face, the months of the year, and the circularity of time in their arrangement. When she is outdoors and in the plaza the protagonist is keenly aware of the flow of time and the changes it renders on her surroundings (the chill in the air, the filtered sunlight, the lights in the square). Yet, she is not caught in the flow, observing it instead from a point of stillness—the central plaza. From this space, she watches the flow of time and space, diving into the stream with each expedition, yet returning always to the center where only she appears to dwell:

Algunas personas entran en el parque, otras salen, otras más cruzan la plaza en el interior de un coche; pero la plaza, como siempre, está casi vacía y sólo yo parece habitarla realmente. Me gusta la soledad en la que camino. Antes de sentarme en mi banco de la plaza, me quito el abrigo y me lo echo por los hombros. La temperatura es mucho más cálida y puedo ver yemas en las ramas de las acacias, los tilos y los castaños. (33)

The protagonist’s dwelling space is in fact herself—the inner sanctum of the moradas—the center to which she returns having ventured into the dwellings and intimate spaces occupied by the women she encounters. Her point of reference begins and ends with the inner garden, in which she sits to contemplate the passersby, the changes in seasons, the sun or cold on her skin,
in short, the transience of the outside. It is here also where she processes what she has seen during her expeditions, contemplating the activities she has witnessed the other women engaging in.

The epicurean nature of the activities represented takes the reader on a contemporary exploration of the perennial mind-body duality, a modern questioning of the separation of body and soul, and whether the ability to tap into divinity requires the shedding of the body or can be achieved through it. This question is not a new one; for centuries philosophers, artists, and theologians have considered this dilemma: does pleasure equal sin and therefore remove one from the divine, or does pleasure—reveling in the senses—bring one closer to the self and by default the divine or sacred. Eastern traditions in particular, such as Buddhism, emphasize the connection between body and inner self, striving to reach enlightenment through a greater awareness of the body. I would argue that Gutiérrez aligns with the notion that the body is an ally in the inward journey and road to enlightenment.

*La mujer ensimismada* seems particularly preoccupied with the senses and the experience of the world through them. The protagonist is carefully attuned to temperatures, textures, smells, sounds, flavors, light and darkness. These sensual experiences are often depicted as pleasurable and luxurious, as we observe the women slowly sipping and enjoying wine, moving languidly as they recline on sumptuous furniture, reveling in the feeling of fine fabric, or even the smooth gliding motions of the calligraphy pen. The text exudes sensuous pleasure, richly populated with saturated colors, fine wines, melodies, enticing aromas, and flavorful foods. Early on in the narrative we find the protagonist admiring an ornate and cozy interior:

Es una habitación dominada por el dorado y el rojo, y enseguida experimento un gran placer, el lujo de la calidez. Sucedan tres cosas importantes en este espacio: las paredes
sólidas, la pared cristalera que comunica con el jardín interior de la casa y el rectángulo que se abre en el suelo, una especie de piscina vacía que baja al nivel de la puerta del jardín. Esta piscina es el sofá de la habitación, y al sentarse en él, los hipotéticos invitados apoyarán su espalda en un respaldo de banco corrido y madera labrada, e introducirán las piernas en la piscina, para chapotear en un espacio forrado de moqueta de color ocre y presidido por una mesa alargada, también de madera. Desde allí, con el agua invisible hasta las rodillas, y una copa de vino en la mano, los invitados contemplarán el jardín, a través de la pared cristalera, protegidos del invierno por un escudo de temperatura. (10)

The vibrant colors, and the anticipated comfort of the guests as they sip on wine and submerge their legs in the pool of burgundy carpeting, create a pleasing anticipation of enjoyment, pleasure that is gathered and transmitted by the senses. At first blush this seems at odds with the notion of monastic asceticism, yet paradoxically it is through this dwelling in the body that transcendence can be achieved.

Just as in tantric tradition, Gutiérrez presents the indulgence of these pleasures as pathways to the inner experience. As we saw in the case of the woman reading and occasionally closing her eyes in meditation and inner observation, the task itself produces a state of flow that is trance-like. Similarly, we find the protagonist in a state akin to that flow-like trance, when she allows herself to be in the moment, and indulge her senses:

La crema se va haciendo densa, infinita, y la mujer canta ahora una canción de cuna. Me dejo llevar hasta la frontera del sueño, pero no quiero dormir, no quiero arriesgarne a perder un sólo instante de este placer, y tampoco quiero abandonar el reino de la vainilla, del azúcar, de la leche... –¿Quieres probar? –me pregunta. Yo asiento, sin abrir los ojos, y
percibo la proximidad de la cuchara de madera. Abro los labios y beso la cuchara. «Así sabe la eternidad», pienso, «así se muere.» Es muy difícil salir de este estado. (39)

This almost ecstatic state is in the narrator’s own words, difficult to abandon. Through the narrator we are taken on a tour of such experiences, each found within one of the twelve houses, and each one a celebration of the senses. The warmth of the hearth, the luxurious texture of the carpet, the softness of a dress, the smell of books and flowers, the smoothness of a sip of wine, the pleasure of uninhibited movement, are all among the sensations the protagonist absorbs through her senses. These instances of pleasure are moments in which the protagonist is in the moment, a prerequisite for an experience of self.

The experience of the world through the senses is certainly underscored as a necessary component for the creation of a story of self. Towards the end of the novel we find the protagonist handing one of the women a piece of paper that contains her story, a story that echoes the origin stories of a singularity breaking and subsequently searching for a return to wholeness:

Me gusta la voz de la mujer y la forma en que me cuenta la historia que me cuenta a mí misma tantas veces, sin decidirme a darle fin; la historia de esa piedra que se rompió en cinco pedazos, y de los cinco fragmentos que, desde ese momento, se convirtieron en los cinco sentidos. El ser que vivía bajo el hechizo de la piedra conoció así la dispersión, y comenzó a escribir la obra de una vida fragmentada: el libro de la Vista, del Oído, del Gusto, del Olfato y del Tacto; cinco libros entretejidos a su pesar, unidos por el sentimiento de la zozobra, por un origen golpeado. (31)

The fragmentation of her self into five pieces thus requires the experience and the story of each of her senses to intertwine in order for a whole to emerge. We see her doing this throughout the
novel, seeing, feeling, tasting, hearing, and smelling, chronicling her material reality through the senses as she visits the rooms of the castle, returning each time to her center, an island of stillness in space and time, a place for reflection and processing: “[a]bro la puerta y desde la acera contemplo el parque de la plaza, que parece una isla, un bosque flotante” (41). This inner sanctum is the inner castle, the belly of the lighthouse, the center point of stillness in which, and from which, she can find herself whole again. Yet the letting go of self into the experiences found in the houses is the bridge that allows her to reach the center island and ultimately embark on her journey inward. Despite a fundamental difference in the modes of arrival at the inner experience between the protagonist that paces in the lighthouse and the one that explores the houses “with the will” of a castle, the final step in the process requires the same condition: solitude. Whereas the keeper of the lighthouse divorces him or herself of pleasure, living instead an ascetic existence feverish in the zeal to reach an end, the protagonist of the castle dwells in the body of pleasure. These two modes of turning inward however, result in the same outcome, a communion with self. In the final lines of La mujer ensimismada the protagonist steps into the inner plaza and experiences wholeness: “[v]er y escuchar la luz es, de pronto, lo mismo; abro los labios como si también pudiera saborearla, y con una bocanada de luz tomo impulso para volver a levantarme y buscar una nueva salida del parque” (97). In this moment her senses intermingle, and overlap bringing her into a momentary instant of self and eternity. Paradoxically this moment is fleeting however, and she is once again prepared to step out of her self into the world.
Chapter 8  The Instant: the Mystical Experience of Time in “Matar a Platón”

One of the many important developments which take place in the early sixteenth century is the invention of the pocket watch. Yet it will not be until the seventeenth century that Robert Hooke and Christiaan Huygens, independently of each other, develop a mechanism that keeps time accurately to within five minutes, and is capable of measuring seconds. This period of roughly one-hundred and fifty years represents a significant shift in the human perception of time. It is true that prior to this development methods of time-keeping were already in existence, but the creation of a portable mechanism that could keep accurate measure of time to the second created, even if at first only in a wealthy few, a heightened awareness and preoccupation with the lineal aspect and forward marching of time. In *Technics and Civilization*, Lewis Mumford posits that the mechanization of time is one of the most important developments in modern history:

> When one thinks of time, not as a sequence of experiences, but as a collection of hours, minutes, and seconds, the habits of adding time and saving time come into existence. Time took on the character of an enclosed space: it could be divided, it could be filled up, it could even be expanded by the invention of labor-saving instruments. Abstract time became the new medium of existence. Organic functions themselves were regulated by it: one ate, not upon feeling hungry, but when prompted by the clock: one slept, not when one was tired, but when the clock sanctioned it. A generalized time-consciousness accompanied the wider use of clocks: dissociating time from organic sequences… (17)

This fundamental shift in the conception of time forever changed our relationship to the passage of it.
The contemporary Spanish poet and philosopher Chantal Maillard has noted that the “time of the clock”—a notion she discusses in her essay “Una cuestión de lenguaje,” and which she attributes to Edmund Husserl who uses the term in his lectures *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*— as our primary mode of perceiving and experiencing the passage of time creates a distancing between the subject and reality (similar to Mumford’s observation of the dissociation of time from nature). The roots of the desire to measure time go back hundreds of years, but it is during the end of the Renaissance and beginning of the Baroque, a period when the sciences as we know them are being born, that the tools that allow us to do so accurately and uniformly come into existence. Measurement is for the burgeoning scientific community an increasingly more necessary and nuanced procedure. The science of observation no longer relies on senses alone, but requires logic to decipher sensorial data and tools to enhance the accuracy and capabilities of the human sensory system. Just as with the observation of time, the experience of the world through the senses becomes distanced through logic.

And yet, just as the instruments that will provide increasingly more accurate measurements of our world are being developed, mystics such as Santa Teresa de Jesús, San Juan de La Cruz, and Miguel de Molinos are penning and relating their experiences of the ineffable. Their mystical experiences turn inwards, relying on the inner self as a vehicle for experiencing reality. It is this juxtaposition of the measurable and the immeasurable, the scientific and the esoteric that has become a hallmark of the Baroque period, and a dichotomy that is explored in “Matar a Platón.” Chantal Maillard questions our choice to live in the “time of the clock” and what this has done to our ability to truly connect, and empathize, with the ‘other.’ In the long poem “Matar a Platón,” published in the book by the same title in 2004, she explores the possibility that an alternate perception of time might affect our ability to experience the event
and thus our ability to feel compassion (Gilles Deleuze’s conceptualization of the event is presented in *The Logic of Sense.* Interpretation of the concept can be found in the articles “Eventum Tantum,” by Ole Fogh Kirkeby, and “Poética y Estética en ‘Matar a Platón’” by Eugenio Maqueda.)

Structurally the poem can be divided into two main components or modes: The action is told through parallel genres, poetry and prose, each displaying its strengths and limitations for conveying the experience of the main occurrence. This results in a series of twenty-eight short poems, or sections, linked to each other by a prose narrative located at the bottom of each page throughout the length of the poem. The prose acts as a footnote of sorts, creating a lineal and logical sequence for the single occurrence that takes place in the poems. In this way Maillard sets up a dichotomous presentation of a single unifying event through the artful use of two genres of writing.

Maillard demonstrates the differences between perceiving an occurrence through a sequential and logical time construction as opposed to an instant driven or timeless experience of the same. Each individual poem (or section of the long-poem) offers a slightly different perspective of one central occurrence while the prose narrates the moments leading up to it. The central action around which the entire poem revolves is presented clearly in the first section “un hombre es aplastado/En este instante./Ahora…” (“Matar a Platón” 13). As the prose progresses and the poems build upon each other, we come to learn that a nameless man, with whom the narrative voice of the prose has been sustaining a conversation, is at the last instant of the narrative run over by a truck. This occurrence is recreated twenty-eight times in the short poems, each time presented from a unique viewpoint.
Sometimes the perspective comes from the micro-level, such as when the young girl who had been holding the man’s hand at the moment of impact observes the widening pools of blood and urine, and wishes she had worn her rain boots (“Matar a Platón” 21). In other cases, the image is painted from farther outside the epicenter, reminiscent of a series of concentric rings that continue to widen as is suggested in these lines:

[…] y suceden en él al tiempo que les miro,

ellos suceden dentro del punto que se ensancha,

me cerca, me succiona, y es otra la mirada

que nos observa a todos y escribe lo que usted

acaba de mirar (“Matar a Platón” 39).

In another instance, we observe a dog make off with the finger of the victim, while in yet another poem we hover over the accident observing from above with a birds-eye view. It could be said that the occurrence portrayed in the poems exists indefinitely, as poetry does not impose time limits and parameters on it, lending it a sense of timelessness. The occurrence exists somewhere outside the temporal markers of language, not only because it is expressed as a multifaceted instant through poetic language, but also because it is absent from the prose narrative. The moment of the pivotal occurrence is not described through prose, remaining outside of temporal linguistic restraints.

I’ve referred to the pivotal point of the poem that is the instant in which the accident takes place, as the occurrence. This is intended to avoid any confusion with the use of the terms accident and event as used by Gilles Deleuze in The Logic of Sense. Despite the fact that this ‘event’ is clearly a fatal traffic ‘accident’ in which a man is run over by a large truck, I am reserving the use of the terms accident and event to be used as Deleuze defines them. Maillard
emphasizes that the notions of *accident* and *instant* are important to the work by way of two introductory quotes from the French thinker’s work:

El acontecimiento no es lo que ocurre (accidente), es en lo que ocurre lo expresado mismo que nos hace señá y nos espera. (...) es lo que debe ser comprendido, lo que debe ser querido, lo que debe ser representado en lo que ocurre.

[...] Tan solo el hombre libre puede comprender todas las violencias en una sola violencia, todos los acontecimientos *en un solo Acontecimiento* que nos deja lugar, ya, al accidente. (Gilles Deleuze qtd. In “Matar a Platón” 12, emphasis in original)

According to Ole Fogh Kirkeby, in his article “Eventum Tantum: To Make the World Worthy of What Could Happen to It”, the event in Deleuze’s definition can be thought of as *non-aliud*, “as that which is beyond Sameness, and hence, beyond both the concept of identity, and beyond its negation” (Kirkeby 291). He describes the *event* further by suggesting that “the *non-aliud* could be a way to grasp the concept of an *absolute immanence*, a mode of existence, which implies no distinction between ‘outside’ and ‘inside’, between thinking and thought, and between subject and object in the process of time” (Kirkeby 291).

Maillard adapts the concept of the *event* and calling it the *acontecimiento*, she discusses how this concept functions within “Matar a Platón” during an interview with Quimera: “‘Matar a Platón’ significa tratar de vivir con el acontecimiento, intentar prescindir de los conceptos que son limitaciones que poco dicen acerca de lo que realmente ocurre, y nos libran de la responsabilidad de estar en lo que acontece, con todo lo que eso implica” (Quimera 68). The *event* in “Matar a Platón” is not what can be perceived superficially and sequentially, it is not the narrative of the occurrence as told in prose, this is the *accident*. The *event* is what happens within
the instant of the *accident*, that which can only be understood outside of notions of time and space, and therefore also must be outside of language.

The true nature of the *event* as Deleuze defines it, goes beyond the capabilities of language. Kirkeby alludes to this in his article, yet attempts to explain the *event* as follows: “[t]he *eventum-tantum* is the prototype of the event, the event that, in the most radical sense of the words, Never was, the event, which was Never. […] The event is totally empty, nothing happens at the core of the event, because it is beyond the time-structures presupposed by language” (Kirkeby 292). This illustration of the *event* as outside of space and time hearkens to descriptions of the mystical experience as described by countless mystics throughout history. From Meister Eckhart to Miguel de Molinos the inability for language to express the mystical experience is a unifying thread. In the moment in which the mystic transcends the confines of human experience to unite with the divine, the entire experience becomes unutterable. In the translator’s foreword to *The Fold* by Deleuze, Tom Conley notes that: “[t]he mystical venture convinces because no language can be said to represent what it means. It is tantamount, in part, to what Deleuze, by means of Leibniz, Henri Michaux, and Gaëtau Clérambault might call an *event*: it may not have empirical or historical basis, but it happens to be the virtual sensation of a somatic moment of totalization and dispersion” (Deleuze xii). If we formulate our conception of the *event* in these terms, as akin to a mystical experience, we can better understand Maillard’s affirmations that falling into the *event* will allow one to “make himself or herself” with the other (*Quimera* 68).

In “Matar a Platón” the event is crucial, and it is important to note that the notion of the *event* is inevitably tied to the perception of time. The atemporal quality of the instant, and one’s ability to comprehend it, are directly linked to our ability to perceive it within the proper temporal framework (or lack thereof). That is to say, that in order for us to be capable of
comprehending the event we must be able to comprehend “todas las violencias en una sola violencia,” to understand the timelessness and all-encompassing nature of it. The event then becomes the opposite of a sequential series of occurrences, reinforcing that its expression in writing, if it can be managed at all, must be done in such a way as to circumvent the confining structure of language. Prose remains an inadequate vehicle for writing the instant as it relies, in order for it to be grammatically correct, on a sequencing and organization within lineal time. Maillard however, argues for the capacity of poetry to bring us closer to its expression.

Studies in linguistics have shown that there are fundamental differences between the modes of thought and the culture of civilizations whose languages possess grammatical structures for the expression of past, present and future and in those where they do not. Cultures that do not make this differentiation of time in their language display a lack of sequential notions of time (Shlain 25). It is evident that our tools for perceiving the passage of time affect our interaction with our apparent reality, and Maillard is interested in the effects of time perception on our consciousness as evidenced in her discussion on the topic in Una cuestión de lenguaje: “[c]aptar el suceso en nuestro tiempo, en el tiempo de los relojes como decía Husserl, supone solidificar las fuerzas, determinarlas y distanciarse de ellas, objetuarlas y crear el sujeto. Captar el suceso en el tiempo de cada una de las fuerzas a las que denominamos entes es verlas en su hacerse y hacerse con ellas. Captar el suceder mismo es salirse del tiempo” (Maillard 4). While Maillard seems to emphasize that capturing the event is desirable she also acknowledges that “el hecho simple, de tan simple que es infinito, no logra comunicarlo ninguna explicación versificada ni filosófica” (Quimera 72). Despite that assessment she argues that a well-executed Haiku may be able to capture and convey the event, and also states that “con la forma se puede innovar […], pues la forma no está desligada al contenido. La forma, con su ritmo, crea
realidades distintas” (Quimera 67). In Razón estética Maillard champions a new form of expression, and in “Matar a Platón” she experiments with poetic form and its capacity for conveying the event without creating the distancing of prose.

The effect of distancing caused by the “time of the clock” is of great concern to Maillard as it directly undermines the individual’s ability to share a “common feeling” and experience compassion (Quimera 68). Lineal time carries with it the disadvantage of permitting an objective visualization of the event, it leaves room for, and enables, the deployment of all those contrivances which free us from “la responsabilidad de estar en lo que acontece, con todo lo que eso implica” (Quimera 68). The consequence is that the individual is unable to “make himself” with the other (Quimera 68). This can only be remedied by shifting the temporal perception of the instant, by removing oneself from time, or rather by accepting the timeless nature of experience.

In an interview with the magazine Quimera, Chantal Maillard states that she the main topic of “Matar a Platón” to be compassion: “[el sentimiento de lo común] es lo que hace posible la compasión, el cum-pathos. Es de lo que trato en Matar a Platón: a qué se debe esta pérdida de la compasión, qué posibilidades hay de recuperarla. ¿Es posible volver a la compasión, darnos cuenta de que todos estamos embarcados en lo mismo? ¿Acaso es posible volver a sentir al otro?” (Quimera 68). In order to experience compassion Maillard asserts that the individual must not distance him or herself from the event. Instead she encourages a falling into it so as to experience the other. She acknowledges that a continuous state of being within the event is not sustainable, that it would be overwhelming and though possible, would likely overcome the individual. Despite this, her poetry pushes her reader to explore that state of consciousness.
In large part “Matar a Platón” is an attempt to convey the event while revealing the various methods by which individuals distance themselves from it:

Una mujer temblorosa aprieta
el brazo de su acompañante.
Él vuelve hacia ella un rostro
tan largo como un número de serie
y dice: <<El sesenta por ciento de los muertos
por accidente en carretera
son peatones>>.
La mujer deja de temblar: todo está controlado.
A punto estuvo de creer que algo anormal ocurría,
algo a lo cual debía responder
con un grito, un espasmo,
un ligero anticipo de la carne
ante la gran salida, pero no:
aquello es conocido y ya no la involucra;
le pertenece a otros. Y el añade:<<Han llamado
a una ambulancia>>, y ella se relaja,
su angustia la abandona:
el orden nos exime de ser libres,
de despertar en otro, de despertar por otro.
A punto estuvo de gritar, desde esa carne ajena,
pero el orden contuvo a tiempo ese delirio. (27)
The moment when the traffic accident occurs, the woman finds herself on the brink of “feeling with the other” (Quimera 68), she almost allows herself to feel compassion for the victim. However, her companion introduces into the scene the distancing and cold logic that snaps her out of that state. The man’s reaction to the scene unfolding before them is to conjure a statistic on the mortality rates of pedestrians versus motorists in traffic accidents. This simple act unleashes a series of sequential and logical reasoning that removes the woman from the event and places her firmly in a state of observation of, rather than being-in, the accident. This reasoning pulls her away from the present in a logical digression that follows a sequential pattern of associations: situations such as this one happen frequently, statistical data has been gathered, it is a normal occurrence in the modern world, and therefore I don’t have to worry, follows logically (“Matar a Platón” 27). This sequence of thought removes her from the event temporally, as in order to think in language she must be within time while the event is beyond it. When she is finished with her mental digression she is so far removed from the scene that she is no longer capable of feeling compassion for the man whose body she had been on the verge of screaming in agony through only a moment before.

This woman is only one of many individuals in the poem that fall into these modes of coping with the magnitude of the event, and are seduced by the possibility of escaping true feeling: “[t]enemos muchas corazas: lingüísticas, culturales, rituales… Situamos las cosas en el plano en el que “deben” estar porque nuestra cultura nos dice que así tiene que ser, e inmediatamente estamos trasladando el dolor desde el lugar de su agudeza desestabilizante al lugar en el que puede controlarse” (Quimera 69).
Throughout the poem we see characters placing the event in its place that is within a context where it can be coped with, understood, or ignored. The man’s daughter observes that it’s not always true that puddles are formed by rain (21), a woman looks away and reaches back to wipe something away from her leg (29), the driver hangs on statistics on the deaths of people in Bangladesh, to remove him from the overwhelming significance of what has just happened, as he listens to the radio say “[y]a van dos mil trescientos desaparecidos… las lluvias del monzón” (31), a mother escapes by busying herself with removing her young son from the scene (34), a woman faints (41), a young woman hangs on the threshold of a building and hides in her lover’s arms (49), and an old man refuses to relate to the event by dismissing it (55). In these lines Maillard is telling us that the tactics we employ in order to avoid experiencing the event, to avoid “making ourselves in the other” (Quimera 68) are infinite. Maillard denounces this mode of being, yet implicates herself and all of us as complicit:

Yo no soy inocente. ¿Lo es usted?
La realidad está aquí,
desplegada. Lo real acontece
en lo abierto. Infinito. Incomparable.
Pero el ansia de repetirnos
instaura las verdades.
Toda verdad repite lo inefable,
toda idea desmiente lo-que-ocurre.
Pero las construimos
por miedo a contemplar la enorme trama
de aquello que acontece en cada instante:
todo lo que acontece se desborda
y no estamos seguros del refugio
Bien pensado, es posible que Platón
no sea responsable de la historia:
delegamos con gusto, por miedo o por pereza,
lo que más nos importa. (“Matar a Platón” 67)

In the closing poem hang both a question and an accusation. Maillard shrewdly calls out our various mechanisms for shying away from the event which “[…] acontece/en lo abierto. Infinito. Incomparable” (67). Our desire for the tangible, logical and measurable pulls us away from any prospect of experiencing the event. Instead of falling into this trap, Maillard invites us to suspend, if for a moment, our desire to seek refuge in the measurable, logical and sequential. An invitation to be in the event is an exhortation to allow ourselves a mystical experience and to step outside of time, language and meaning into the ineffable. Just as fifteenth and sixteenth century mystics were a counterpoint to the natural philosophers in the baroque polyphony, Maillard’s voice lends a counterbalance to contemporary modes of perceiving reality.

But the question remains as to how can language, which is lineal, logical, and rooted in the temporal world, be reconciled with the expression of that which defies language’s structures. Maillard does not claim to have captured the moment in her poem (Quimera 67), yet “Matar a Platón” succeeds in using language, with its limitations, to recreate the sensation of the suspension of time—contrasted with its lineal flow—through the juxtaposition of poetry and prose.

In her treatise “The Aesthetic Pleasure of Tragedy in Western and Indian Thought,” Maillard delves into the various theories of aesthetics. One particular theory with which she
appears to agree, is that which affirms that beings are capable of living an experience vicariously through art. This is achieved through “aesthetic empathy”, and “is a matter of reactivating resonance in the spectator (sahrdaya) through the imprints or memories (vasana)” (“The Aesthetic Pleasure of Tragedy” 122). This resonance allows the observer to feel the emotion at a level more appropriate for learning, since it does not occur to him or her directly. The structure of “Matar a Platón” exemplifies the juxtaposition and modalities of the perception of time, while not submitting to the rigid linguistic structure of prose. Poetry, through its use of symbols, metaphors, and by its very structure is presented by Maillard as a better (though not perfect) vehicle for the expression of what logic has difficulty transmitting. In Filosofía y Poesía, María Zambrano identifies the tension between philosophical and poetic language:

Es en Platón donde encontramos entablada la lucha con todo su vigor, entre las dos formas de la palabra, resuelta triunfalmente para el logos del pensamiento filosófico, decidiéndose lo que pudiéramos llamar ‘la condenación de la poesía’; inaugurándose en el mundo de occidente, la vida azarosa y como al margen de la ley, de la poesía, su caminar por estrechos senderos, su andar errabundo y a ratos extraviado, su locura creciente, su maldición. (13-14)

In “Matar a Platón” Chantal Maillard contemplates the possibilities of a return of poetry, of a balance between philosophical and poetic language, through the metaphorical death of Plato, the father of Western thought and philosophy. Undermining, thus, the conceptual framework that has perpetuated conceptualizations of self that separate us true understanding of self.
Vía un ángel cabe mí hacia el lado izquierdo en forma corporal, lo que no suelo ver sino por maravilla. [...] No era grande, sino pequeño, hermoso mucho, el rostro tan ecendido [sic.] que parecía de los ángeles muy subidos, que parecen todos se abrasan [sic.]. Deben ser los que llaman Querubines [...]. Viale [sic.]en las manos un dardo de oro largo, y al fin de el hierro me parecía tener un poco de fuego. Este me parecía meter por el corazón algunas veces, y que me llegaba a las entrañas. Al sacarle, me parecía las llevaba consigo y me dejaba toda abrasada en amor grande de Dios.

Santa Teresa de Ávila, Libro de la Vida.
Cap. XXIX.3

The lurking emotions behind the ambiguous expression on the face of the sixteenth century Spanish mystic Teresa of Ávila in Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s iconic sculpture The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa (1652) have been a topic of debate among psychoanalysts, philosophers and theoreticians alike. Her evocative attitude has led to various theories of what elicits it, including
orgasmic pleasure, hysteria, mystical transcendence, and *jouissance*. The persistence of its attraction as a subject of discussion is a testament to the powerful and compelling nature of the baroque aesthetic, which according to Heinrich Wölfflin “wants to carry us away with the force of the impact, immediate and overwhelming [giving] us not a generally enhanced vitality, but excitement, ecstasy, intoxication” (*Renaissance and Baroque* 38). In this sculptural masterpiece Bernini exploited the dramatic and theatrical nature of baroque aesthetic to its full extent. He designed the entire chapel housing the figures, arranging it so the central piece, that of Saint Teresa and the angel, appear to be on a stage. The effect of the likenesses of the Cornaro family looking on as spectators, coupled with the composition of the entire scene, draws the viewer into it. As in a theater, the observer stands before the sculpture and among spectators, breaching the fourth wall to become part of the work. The effect of the entire composition, as Wölfflin notes, exemplifies a significant manner in which the baroque aesthetic diverges from the renaissance: “the work of art was no longer composed of a series of independently beautiful and self-contained parts. Only through the whole could the individual part gain value and meaning, or a satisfying conclusion and determination be brought about” (*Renaissance and Baroque* 70). The erotic undertones, though not explicit, add to its controversial and prepossessing nature: the bare-chested angel who gently opens Saint Teresa’s robe, dart in hand in preparation to strike, while she throws her head back displaying an expression which hovers between pleasure and pain transgress into the realm of the erotic.

Ecstasy is the emotion attributed to her face, and yet this term in itself is a problematic one to define. The psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte, blatantly acknowledging what is clear to any viewer, suggests that what the mystic is experiencing is nothing more than an orgasm (qtd. in Bataille 224-225). An assessment whose value lies in the recognition of the implicit erotic nature
of the experience, but that if taken at face-value diminishes the power of the ecstatic moment. In *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* Georges Bataille argues for a more complex view of the experience being expressed on Saint Teresa’s face stating that “[t]here are staggering similarities and even corresponding or interchangeable characteristics in the two systems, erotic and mystical. But these connections can only be at all clearly perceived if the two kinds of emotion are actually experienced” (226). He is equally opposed to the strictly physical interpretation of the transverberation expressed in the writings of mystics posited by the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot, for whom the experience is reduced merely to a bout of hysteria. Despite this however, he does not divorce the physical and erotic undertones of the experience from the religious, contesting that one cannot be understood without the other. For her part, in *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir insists that the eroticism of the experience cannot be divorced from the mystical:

Saint Teresa’s texts are not at all ambiguous, and they justify Bernini’s statue showing us the swooning saint in thrall to a stunning sensuality; it would be no less false to interpret her emotions as simple “sexual sublimation”; there is not first an unavowed sexual desire that takes the form of divine love; the woman in love herself is not first the prey of a desire without object that then fixes itself on an individual; it is the presence of the lover that arouses an excitement in her immediately intended to him; thus, in one movement, Saint Teresa seeks to unite with God and experiences this union in her body; she is not slave to her nerves and hormones: rather, she should be admired for the intensity of a faith that penetrates to the most intimate regions of her flesh. (805-806)
These more nuanced approaches to Saint Teresa’s ecstatic experience are ones I wish to bring to bear as I analyze the works of Ana Rossetti, Mercedes Abad, Chantal Maillard, and Menchu Gutiérrez in the context of the inherited legacy of mysticism.

As suggested above, the ambiguous and problematic nature of the ecstatic experience lends itself to an exploration of the borders between the spiritual and the carnal, the exalted and the base. Within a social structure in which the binary soul and body take central stage in the regulation of morality, the representation of communion with god in such an embodied manner becomes significant. As discussed previously, the Franco Regime’s resurrection of the traditional iconography and symbolism of the renaissance and baroque periods did not limit itself to depictions of the Virgin Mary as foundational for female identity, but also evoked other female figures such as Saint Teresa. Interestingly it is Saint Teresa’s Incorruptible Hand which became Francisco Franco’s favorite relic. Though the General’s obsession with the hand, and his belief that it bestowed special powers on him, is well documented and treated as somewhat of a curiosity, the appropriation of the Saint by Franco, and by extension the Regime, is problematic on various levels. On the one hand, it demonstrates the implicit violent possessiveness over her body, which to be remembered and revered had been dismembered over the centuries and put on display, an act that spills over into Bernini’s theatricalization of her moment of ecstasy. In this way she becomes objectified and subject to the male gaze. On the other hand, this possession of her as an icon for the Regime opens the door for her re-appropriation by those resistant to it. Her ambiguity as erotic-spiritual figure is under-appreciated by the narrow-minded regime which wishes to reinstate her as a paradigm of pious femininity, ignoring the undercurrent of female transgressive eroticism implicit in her representation and writings.
In this chapter I examine how contemporary Spanish women writers Ana Rossetti, Mercedes Abad, Chantal Maillard, and Menchu Gutiérrez pull Santa Teresa away from her sanctioned role as model of religious purity and feminine piety, and rework her into a narrative that evade the control and sanitization of the Regime. I examine how Ana Rossetti literally invokes Saint Teresa in her poetry, sexualizing and complicating the experience of transverberation of the heart. I argue that Mercedes Abad takes this a step further, not explicitly introducing the saint into her work, but by exploring the climactic moments of pleasure as ritualistic, sacred, and possibly transcendental moments of ecstasy inevitably linked to death. Chantal Maillard and Menchu Gutiérrez each in turn invoke the saint’s legacy through writings of their own that explore the inner experience, divorcing it from the appropriating and misogynist grip of androcentric religious mores, and the Regime.

The employment of female figures in the normalization and imposition of idealized gender norms on the part of the patriarchy is a common and longstanding practice. It is clear that the patriarchal order, if enforced and maintained strictly by males, would not be sustainable. Thus the Regime appropriates female icons and presents them as authoritative figures imbued with, and transmitting, the power of the patriarchy. The value for the Regime of their complicity within the structural norms that maintain them, and other females, in a position of less power, is in the veiled imposition of an androcentric system that disproportionately impacts females negatively, yet does not seem to be externally imposed. Many women participate in structural oppression and express their internalized oppression (of which internalized sexism is a manifestation) through the systematic imposition of oppressive norms and expectations on other women or as Bearman, Korobov, and Thorne suggest in The Fabric of Internalized Sexism, they “maintain sexism as a whole via a system of social expectations and pressures enacted between
women” (Bearman, Korobov, and Thorne 14). The question of why women willingly participate in a system which oppresses them and casts them in a subservient role can be answered simply by positing that in a constrained power dynamic, such as that of the master and slave described by Hegel in his dialectic, certain benefits are bestowed on those who participate willingly and help to sustain it. Pilar Primo de Rivera could be said to embody this type of internalized sexism, which she propagated with the establishment of the ‘Sección Feminina de Falange,’ as we have seen in previous chapters.

Non-contemporaneous figures to the Regime were presented as models for the Spanish woman as well. As we have seen, the Virgin Mary as well as Saint Teresa fulfilled this role. However, although the mystic saint is presented as an aspirational figure for women during the Franco Regime, she remains a complex and ambiguous figure. Even in her time Teresa of Ávila was controversial, her visions and experiences were not universally accepted as divine in nature, and mysticism in general was viewed with a degree of skepticism by the Catholic Church. Furthermore, through her writing Saint Teresa espouses and validates an embodied experience of the divine, one that cannot be divorced from the physical, what Sofie Kluge describes as “a suggestive amalgam of eroticism, faith, and literature” (Kluge 276). In Erotic Desire, Spiritual Yearning, Narrative Drive she presents Teresa’s form of divine knowledge as problematic:

However, Teresa’s mediation of transcendent spirituality and worldly sensuality through aesthetic Christology was not as unproblematic as the preceding presentation may suggest. Even if it served as a vehicle of transcendental contemplation, her extreme devotion to the bodily image of Christ had an undeniable iconodulic flavour. Her assertion that the Humanity appeared to her in person, with its implicit claim to unmediated divine interlocution, had more than a touch of heretic Illuminism. As such an
outrageous meeting point of erotic desire and spiritual yearning, Teresa’s “mística teología” (XI, 63; XII, 70) was soon impugned by her confessors and superiors, who saw it as the expression of an impious presumption and suspected heretic beliefs. (Kluge 271)

Despite this controversy, and although these erotic undertones appear antithetical to the model of woman that the Franco Regime attempted to impose on its citizenry, we can argue that it is precisely the overt yet repressed eroticism portrayed in Bernini’s sculpture that makes her an ideal figure for the Regime. In an article examining the fascist propaganda art of Leni Riefenstahl, “Fascinating Fascism”, Susan Sontag proposes that “[t]he fascist ideal is to transform sexual energy into a ‘spiritual’ force, for the benefit of the community. The erotic is always present as a temptation, with the most admirable response being a heroic repression of the sexual impulse” (Sontag 12). This aesthetic, in which the female form is sexualized and objectified yet her sensuality is controlled and channeled towards an appropriate outlet, describes the Franco era projection of femininity. Thus, in this light, the figure of Saint Teresa with all her potential erotic energy constrained and given over to the divine, exemplifies the fascist ideal.

If the appropriation of Saint Teresa by the Franco Regime can be better understood through Sontag’s characterization of fascist aesthetic, Sharon Keefe Ugalde provides us a framework in which to place the subsequent appropriation and revision of the saint by contemporary Spanish women writers. In “The Feminization of Female Figures in Spanish Women’s Poetry of the 1980s,” Ugalde posits that the appropriation of literary and mythical figures in the work of 1980s Spanish women poets is an inherently subversive act. She suggests that “[t]he realization that the prevailing order smothers female subjectivity inspires accusatory and suppliant poems, and established female figures are enlisted as co-conspirators in the dismantling of a male-dominated world” (170). In what appears to be a similar drive for re-
appropriation, Ana Rossetti has argued for removing the halo that surrounded the figure of Saint Teresa (Entrevista, no pag). Rossetti denounces the pious and conforming vision of the saint as largely imposed by the Franco Regime and the project of liberating Teresa from the vestiges of the archaic and sanitizing effects of this co-opting is one she takes seriously in her literary production.

One of the most overt and clear references to Saint Teresa is found in the poem “Pasión y martirio de la devota de san Francisco de Catania. (En el siglo, Franco Battiato).” This poem can be found in the collection Yesterday (1988). The reference to Saint Teresa appears early in the poem:

De rosa se tiñeron las paredes
y a su sangre tornó la adolescencia, el tiempo
en el que el corazón era una tierna orquídea
que lloraba de amores y de música.
La transverberó el dardo de un ángel invisible
en la mitad exacta de su inviolado pecho.
donde una lentejuela extendió su dominio
manchando la batista de su blusa impecable. (199)

The transverberation of the young woman by the angel’s spear echoes Saint Teresa’s mystical experience, yet we find that this moment of ecstasy takes place in a much more mundane situation. Rather than being transported by divine ecstasy, the woman in the poem is blissfully and metaphorically impaled by the songs of a popular Italian singer, Franco Battiato. In this way, the ecstatic experience is removed from the spiritual and exalted, and reduced to the infatuation of a young woman for a celebrity. One could certainly construe this light and ironical treatment
of such a religious symbol in this manner to be both irreverent and accusatory. Despite the immediate sense that this portrayal is a degradation or a devolved version of Saint Teresa’s ecstatic communion with the divine, it also prompts us to examine the essence of such an experience. One could (and certainly some have) question the underlying nature of Saint Teresa’s ecstatic trance. As alluded to earlier, her ecstasies have been attributed to much more commonplace phenomena, such as orgasm or hysteria, rather than spiritual communion with the divine. Certainly, the possibility that these episodes are a manifestation of an immature and juvenile captivation with God and Christ as husband is brought to the fore when it is juxtaposed with the effusive raptures of the poem’s protagonist for a popular singer, as she cries “Franco, Franco, Franco!” (200). The characteristic ‘sweet pain’ of her longing for communion with the object of desire is not given greater deference in one case or the other. Therefore, I posit that if at first glance this appears to suggest a debasement of the ecstatic experience, it bears consideration that the opposite can also be true. Simone de Beauvoir suggests that in most cases “[t]he woman first seeks in divine love what the woman asks for in man’s love: the apotheosis of her narcissism” (806). In The Second Sex Beauvoir argues that:

Love has been assigned to woman as her supreme vocation, and when she addresses it to a man, she is seeking God in him: if circumstances deny her human love, if she is disappointed or demanding, she will choose to worship the divinity in God himself. It is true that there are also men who have burned with this flame; but they are rare, and their fervor has been of a highly refined intellectual form. Women, though, who abandon themselves to the delights of celestial marriages are legion: and they experience them in a strangely affective way. (802)
The strangely affective way in which the poetic voice in “Pasión y martirio” experiences her infatuation for the singer, whom being exalted through his fame and her worship becomes in a sense deified, echoes the myriad marriages to the divine Beauvoir alludes to as so common among women. The reference to Saint Teresa complicates the dynamic however, and as we will see further on, brings other considerations to the fore.

The invocation of Saint Teresa as seen in “Pasión y martirio” published in 1988 was already at play in Rossetti’s collection of poems Devocionario (1985). In it we find that the sacred and the erotic intermingle. Playing with the imagery and the sensuality implicit in the bliss of the religious ecstatic experience, Rossetti writes a devotional of the sensual and feeling body in which religious iconography melds with erotic imagery to create an intertwined experience of the sacred and the carnal. In “Festividad del dulcisimo nombre” religious dogma and Catholic symbolism weave into the questioning and insecure sexuality of the poetic voice.

As she recalls how as a girl her first experiences of the sensual were through religious language and contemplation of the cross we cannot avoid the intermingling of spirit and body:

…Se abrían, dulcemente,

insólitos caminos en mi sangre

—obediente hasta entonces— extraviándola,

perturmando la blancura espectral

de mis sienes de niña cuando de los versículos,

la más bellas palabras, asentándose iban

en mi inocente lengua.

Mis primeras caricias fueron verbos,

mi amor sólo nombrarte
The tentative forays of the young girl into the realm of the sensual occur within the context of a spiritual event. Within the sanctioned space of the church, in which the pious seek an encounter with the divine, we find that the girl’s successful communion with god comes to fruition through what is ultimately a bodily experience. We are constantly reminded of the physical as she alludes to her thirst, the sensations on her tongue, and her beating heart. The references to the blood in her veins mirror the “menstruo continuo” of the incense, and the wounds of Jesus, whom she contemplates lovingly, highlight the embodied nature of her experience. The final communion is a physical one as she confesses that “anulada, enamorada yo / entreabriá mi boca, mientras mi cuerpo todo / tu cuerpo recibía” (139). This final moment of coming together underscores the eroticism inherent in the notion of communion with the divine, and the necessity of the body to partake in the experience. The notion of consubstantiation necessarily implies the need of the divine to take physical form in order to become one with the body of the faithful. Despite these erotic undertones however, the becoming of one flesh is channeled towards the divine. There is no doubt that the protagonist’s ecstasy is both virginal and pure.

In “La anunciación del ángel” the eroticism becomes more overt as we encounter a direct reference to Saint Teresa, and the anticipation by the poetic voice of the “dardo” which will penetrate her: “Muriérame yo en ellos, cautiva la cintura, / amenazante dardo presentido, / pálido acónito, / igual que una fragancia, preciso, me traspase” (158). This same dart is echoed in “Reliquia” as in an explicitly erotic image Rossetti alludes to the phallus as “la enardecida flor. hostigada y pujante / su violencia apresura” (141). These poems are replete with religious undertones and references to saints, martyrs, and angels, all presented in a baroque, ornate style.
Most notably, she imbues the religious experience with eroticism, reframing her experiences as a child of the Franco Regime growing up in a rigidly Catholic society. Though not always referenced directly, the figure of Saint Teresa, along with other Catholic saints and martyrs, is constantly present as an undercurrent. Through the poems Rossetti complicates and blurs the line between the spiritual and erotic, on the one hand returning to the beatified representations of these figures the messiness and ambiguity of the overlay of eroticism and spirituality, on the other, by opening up the language of religious ecstasy to the expression of desire, elevating the sexual act to the realm of the spiritual: “… the liturgical rituals from which Devocionario draws its inspiration, constitute in themselves explicit manifestations of love an eroticism. Sex is perceived, then, as a self-conscious metaphor of a religious sensual experience” (Escaja 102-103).

For her part Mercedes Abad approaches the eroticizing of the ecstatic moment by ritualizing the sexual act. In the short story “Pincho Moruno” she presents a happy cautionary tale of the disappointments and delights associated with the refraining from, versus giving-in to, one’s desires. The story thus unfolds into a banquet of sex and food, culminating in a sexual act that not only involves sexual appetites, but pointedly makes use of food in the fulfillment of the characters’ desires. This baroque banquet reflects a tension between life and death. The use of both fruit and ground meat during sexual intercourse underscores the link between erotic, and other appetites, employing language more typically used to describe the act of consuming food and reaching satiety to convey the sexual experience of the characters. The entire scene navigates a thin line between the acceptable and the obscene, depicting transgressive and taboo behaviors, while the visualization of this potentially life-affirming act taking place within a coffin highlights points of contact.
between orgasm and death. Both the act of eating and copulating are linked to death and decay insofar as they function as the negation, or rejection of it. In *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, Bataille suggests that: “Life is always a product of the decomposition of life. Life first pays its tribute to death which disappears, then to corruption following on death and bringing back into the cycle of change the matter necessary for the ceaseless arrival of new beings into the world” (55). In “Pincho Moruno” the presence of death is made material through various images: the coffin, the ground meat that in essence is a carcass, and the “frutos maduros”, their ripeness indicating that they are at the point of decay. Bataille argues that the orgasm itself is a “mini death” as the expenditure of energy to reach it necessarily translates to a loss of life to some degree (12). According to Bataille it is the awareness of death which turns the simple mechanical sexual act into an erotic one, as it constitutes a transgression against the natural desire to avoid death and the “squandering” of energy: “…while it is true that eroticism is defined by the mutual independence of erotic pleasure and reproduction as an end, the fundamental meaning of reproduction is none the less the key to eroticism. Reproduction implies the existence of discontinuous beings” (12).

Eroticism is thus a transgression. In “Pincho Moruno” and “Crucifixión del círculo,” seen in chapter 2.3, it is the transgressive behavior which gives the narrative its interest, as it explores the moral ambiguity of sexuality and desire, and touches on the dual nature of human experiential extremes. Although I will not go over “Crucifixión del círculo” in great detail here so as not to be redundant, I would like to point out its sacralization of death. Bataille sees a direct correlation between religious sacrifice and death. In Abad’s story we find a similar sacrificial attitude on the part of the woman to that described by Bataille when he states “I must emphasize that the female partner in eroticism was seen as the victim, the
male as the sacrificer, both during the consummation losing themselves in the continuity established by the first destructive act” (3). This dynamic of victim and victimizer is mirrored in religious sacrifice, the goal of both acts being the same, the assertion of continuity of life:

Erotic activity, by dissolving the separate beings that participate in it, reveals their fundamental continuity, like the waves of a stormy sea. In sacrifice, the victim is divested not only of clothes but of life (or is destroyed in some way if it is an inanimate object). The victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals. This is what religious historians call the element of sacredness. This sacredness is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being to those who watch it as a solemn rite. (22)

As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Abad takes great interest in the implied violence of the sexual act and the body given over to pleasure. In “Crucifixión” her protagonist is offered up as a sacrifice, and becomes a crucified body. In his assertion that “[a]lthough clearly distinct from it, mystical experience seems to me to stem from the universal experience of religious sacrifice” (23), Bataille encapsulates the connection I wish to make between Abad’s crucifixion of the woman in this short story, and the mystic experience of Saint Teresa.

Returning to de Beauvoir’s description of the transference of love for man to that of god on the part of many female mystics, I would like to note that she also touches upon the topic of sacrifice in a way relevant to “Crucifixión”:

Most women mystics are not satisfied with abandoning themselves passively to God: they actively apply themselves to self-annihilation by the destruction of their flesh.
Of course, asceticism was also practiced by monks and brothers. But woman’s relentlessness in violating her flesh has specific characteristics. We have seen how ambiguous the woman’s attitude to her body is: it is through humiliation and suffering that she metamorphoses it into glory. Given over to a lover as a thing of pleasure, she becomes a temple, an idol; torn by the pain of childbirth, she creates heroes. The mystic will torture her flesh to have the right to claim it; reducing it to abjection, she exalts it as the instrument of her salvation. This accounts for the strange excesses of some women saints. (808)

The grotesque examples of self-annihilation provided by Beauvoir make the short story in question appear far less transgressive and taboo in its depictions of the abject and grotesque. Rather than diminishing its value however, it serves as a contextualizing reminder that depictions of self-mutilation and gruesome acts of self-deprecation performed by women are not rare. Indeed, these narratives have a rich history especially among the religious texts depicting martyrs, saints and mystics.

While I have leaned heavily on the relationships with the divine set out by Beauvoir and Bataille, particularly in reference to women and the notion that their mystic experiences cannot be completely divorced from a gendered power dynamic, I propose that the next writers I analyze, actively work against this notion in their own writing. Whereas Rossetti and Abad highlight the eroticism inherent in the mysticism of Saint Teresa, Chantal Maillard and Menchu Gutiérrez re-examine the transcendental experience itself, reframing it outside of a religious context. The narratives of these authors exhibit a contemplative nature, portraying journeys of self-discovery and the inner experience. Taken as a whole, their literary production delves into the question of self in such a way that the subjectivity
of the protagonists is constructed outside of societal and gender specific limitations. Rather than re-appropriating Saint Teresa as figure through the undermining of her as model for normative female behavior under the Regime through her erotization, these authors appropriate her by becoming her direct thought descendants. They do this outside of a religious context, however, which liberates them further from the trappings of a politicized Catholic symbolic order. This is not to say that these authors operate within a system that is devoid of gender dynamics of oppression, but rather that their resistance occurs at the level of creation of a new symbolic order. Both Maillard and Gutiérrez create a space for female mysticism that happens on the terms of the individual.

The authors differ, however, in the amount of emphasis placed on the gender of the protagonists in their work, and how they go about upending these dynamics. In what appears to be a direct nod to Saint Teresa, as I explored in the previous chapter, in La mujer ensimismada, Gutiérrez creates a space that explores the experience of the female mystic. Despite the fact that the work features women, it does not do so in a self-conscious way, as the lack of males in the narrative is not presented as peculiar or noteworthy. In Literature after Feminism, Rita Felski notes that:

…we are accustomed to finding broader resonances in male bodies, to glimpsing the sublime in stories of heroic struggle and drawing existential metaphors out of images of male solitude. We are less used to endowing female bodies with this kind of authority and reading female lives as rich in general resonances. I suspect this is true of men and women, who both learn to think of woman as the embodiment of her sex rather than as a symbol of the human. (17)
I propose that in *La mujer ensimismada* Menchu Gutiérrez challenges the universality of the male, and the particularity of the female, by presenting an existential and philosophical exploration of the self, embodied by women, yet not to be considered necessarily female. Her narrative challenges the convention that only the male can stand in for the universal by simply offering a vision of the inner experience from the female perspective.

In *Matar a Platón* Chantal Maillard moves her narrative even further beyond gender binaries, focusing on the universality of experience in its particularity; that is, the varied experiences of one single event. Her work deemphasizes gender divisions reducing their importance, stripping bare the experiences to those that are common to human beings regardless of gender. In this act of subversion, if one can consider it thus, a complete inversion, or annulation, is put into effect. That is, in a sense, the complete disregard of the gender binary eliminates the masculine. Whether this writing can be considered feminist writing, is up to debate. Yet, I argue that within the context of post Franco Regime Spain, to move beyond these binaries and state instituted gender expectations that effectively stole the inheritance of contemporary mystic writers through the appropriation of one of their most iconic figures, is a form of resistance. Or rather, it implies the elimination of that which must be resisted. Therefore, the Regime’s control is obliterated through its erasure.

Although Maillard’s writing is perhaps not overtly feminist in that it does not appear to openly assume a position of social compromise, in much of her work she unearths and brings to light philosophical thought by women, particularly María Zambrano. Her academic writing is concerned with eastern philosophies that take us away from the platonic model, and provide alternate frameworks for conceptualizing experience. In “Las mujeres en la filosofía española”, Maillard makes a compelling argument for the deficiency in a system of
thought from which half of the human population has been excluded. Basing her argument for gender equality from the point of view of philosophy and the advancement of human knowledge, Maillard urges the reader to consider the opportunities for human development that are lost by suppressing the thought of women, and she proposes the work of Zambrano as a building block for a new model of philosophical thought, primarily her concept of poetic reason which bridges philosophy, poetry and religion. Much like Gutiérrez, Maillard espouses a philosophical approach in her writing that encourages the exploration of the inner self, and in her way, she too acknowledges the philosophical debt owed to Saint Teresa.

The invocation of Saint Teresa as a source of literary inspiration by all writers discussed in this subchapter effectively serves as a form of reclaiming. The Franco Regime, through the systematic use of historical cultural symbolism, the rewriting of history, and the implementation education reform and indoctrination, attempted to formulate a new identity for Spaniards. I propose that it is only through the work of individuals such as the authors cited here, which rediscovers rich cultural history that does not eliminate women from the historical narrative, and that resurrects varied and nuanced subjectivities for both male and female, that identity construction in post-Franco era can take place.
Conclusion

I began this dissertation by proposing that it was possible to trace a baroque aesthetic throughout a selection of work, from 1980 to the present, by six contemporary Spanish women writers: Mercedes Abad, Dulce Chacón, Cristina Fernández Cubas, Menchu Gutiérrez, Chantal Maillard, and Ana Rossetti. I posited that this aesthetic could be observed through representations of bodies in their writing. As a primary conceptual and organizational framework, I chose to trace two ways in which the resurgence of the baroque in this contemporary work can be approached for analysis: The first, through a consideration of the socio-historical context, in light of which its recurrence can be seen as a reaction to the revival, implemented by the Franco Regime, of cultural symbols and ideology of renaissance and baroque Spain. The second, through an analysis of those stylistic and thematic components of the texts that exhibit an affinity with a baroque aesthetic, and can be analyzed independently from their historical context, and within a framework of baroque theory.

I began by addressing the potential pitfalls, and anachronisms, of using the term baroque to discuss contemporary cultural production. In support of my decision to apply a baroque theoretical lens to the study of contemporary Spanish literature and film, I furthered two arguments. I proposed that both a current trend in baroque studies that untethers the aesthetic principles of the baroque from its historical period, in conjunction with certain factors present in the socio-historical context in which the literary works in question were produced, gave ample reason to anticipate the viability and interest of applying a baroque theory to their analysis. For the purposes of this dissertation, the term *baroque* was best defined as a group of stylistic elements, aesthetic sensibilities, and epistemological anxieties which mark a paradigm shift
between the renaissance, and the historical period we call the baroque (roughly spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). The characteristics which I chose as most adequate in determining whether something can be classified as stylistically baroque, included Heinrich Wölfflin’s concepts as presented in “Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art.” In summary, these are: the linear in contrast to the painterly, the movement from plane to recession, the shift from closed to open form, the preference for unity over multiplicity, and the concerns regarding absolute versus relative clarity of the subject (50-51). In addition to these concepts, my definition of baroque comprehends the epistemological changes that Severo Sarduy identifies in Barroco as stemming from a complete re-evaluation of the universe during the historical baroque, which came about as a result of the theories of heliocentrism and the elliptical orbit of heavenly bodies (Sarduy 56). The existential anxieties that Gregg Lambert identifies in The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture, and which he introduces as shared elements in baroque and post-modern sensibility (33), informed my formulation of the term. His analysis provided a point of departure as I identified the ways in which sixteenth, seventeenth and twentieth century Spanish cultural production dialogue with each other, and shaped the daily life, experiences, and power relations of post-civil war Spain.

Having established the historical evolution, and applicability, of the baroque as a theoretical framework for the analysis of contemporary cultural production, I furthered my argument in section one. Here, I narrowly defined the specific social and historical conditions which I contend as having precipitated an abundance of aesthetically baroque cultural production during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Spain. In The Seduction of Modern Spain, Aurora G. Morcillo proposes that the Franco Regime in its composition, symbolism, moral stance, punitive actions, and rhetoric, emulated a glorified amalgam of renaissance and baroque
notions of Spain. These ideals represented a golden era of Spanish power and wealth in the imagination of the ruling party. This revival, as Tobias Locker proposes in “The Baroque in the Construction of a National Culture in Francoist Spain: An Introduction,” precipitated the proliferation of a baroque pastiche, observable not only in the cultural production of the dictatorship, but in that of the resistance (Locker 658). The imagery, symbolism, language, and style of the baroque became ubiquitous, and permeated Spanish society during the twentieth century. This was seen in cultural production at all levels, and its effects lingered long after the end of the dictatorship.

Censorship in turn, played an important role in this revival by eliminating access to much of the cultural production of the last centuries. In most literature produced from prior to the first and second republic, and during its apogee, the Regime found much to be censured. In order to find Spanish culture that would not undermine the Regime’s messaging, and that fit within the newly imposed ideal of Spanish identity, it had to reach far back. It found, or rather imagined it found, in the baroque and renaissance periods material that was politically safe, and which furthered the ideological purposes of the dictatorship. The Golden Age of Spain, a period generally defined as the years beginning no earlier than 1492 and ending no later than 1681, became the primary source of material for the construction of Spanish identity. This rich and flourishing era of literary and artistic production in Spain, along with Catholic morality and iconography, were the building blocks for the myth of national identity furthered by the Franco Regime. Thus, producers of art, literature, and music under the Regime, and in the years subsequent to it, had an abundance of common cultural markers that resided in this baroque aesthetic. It is not surprising therefore, that the writers I analyze in this dissertation would exhibit this aesthetic in their own work, and place it at their disposal as a vehicle for resistance.
In sections one (“[Un]Regulated Bodies”) and two (“Abject Bodies”), I explore some of the ways in which the authors at the center of my analysis adopt, internalize, and reproduce, this aesthetic in their own writing. Although I do not categorize them, the overarching arguments I delineate in the analysis of their work fall roughly into two groups. The first is marked by what seems to be a conscious adoption, and adaptation, of the symbolic and aesthetic elements of the rhetoric of the Regime. This appears to be done purposefully and, at times, with an element of parody. Three primary instances of the co-opting of this baroque aesthetic by the contemporary writers chosen are seen and explored in the section “[Un]Regulated Bodies”: Chacón’s re-working of the archetype of the maiden virgin in *Algun amor que no mate* displays the cruelty of a fascist patriarchal system that erases female identity, and imposes rigid models of gender performance; Rossetti’s re-appropriation of the poetic language of the baroque and the power structures implied in the gaze, in a selection of her poetry, infiltrate the male dominated literary canon by using the style and structure of classical literature for the expression of female desire; and Abad’s reinterpretation of the traditional *picaro*’s tale in “Pascualino y los globos,” similarly appropriates a traditional structure and upends it. In addition, Abad and Rossetti push the boundaries of morality and art in their erotically charged poetry and prose, challenging gender binaries and accepted modes of sexual expression.

In “Abject Bodies” I explore more subtle ways in which the baroque aesthetic operates within the work of these writers. In addition to elements of theme and style, I analyze the resurgence of existential anxieties relating to identity, incompleteness, lack of definition, multiplicity versus unity, duality, madness, and the grotesque. The primary organizing theory is that of abjection and its dialogue with characteristics of the grotesque. I approach the discussion of abject bodies by framing it within characteristics of the baroque aesthetic which reflect its
fundamental anxiety; the incompleteness of the subject. This anxiety is expressed through various forms of fragmentation. These include reflection, doubling, splintering of the self through madness, permeability and fluidity of bodies and identities, and ultimately, destruction and dismemberment of the body. Two stories by Cubas, “Helicón” and “Lúnula y Violeta,” as well as El faro por dentro and El ojo de Newton by Gutiérrez explore the role of optics in this fragmenting of the self. Perception of self and others becomes central to the formation of identity, and in keeping with the baroque anxiety regarding the lack of boundaries and potential dissolution of the self, these bodies are presented to us as splintered, incomplete, and permeable. The narratives themselves are fragmented, hard to discern at times, and leave the reader in uncertainty regarding the narrative arc of the story. From the metaphorical or perceived splintering of the self we move to literal acts of violence that dismember and annihilate the female subjects of the text. A juxtaposition of Abad’s “Crucifixión del círculo,” and the film Tedo y mis ojos by Iciar Bollaín, with the Desengaños of María de Zayas, trace a tradition of violence against women’s bodies in Spanish cultural production, and analyzes the structures of power and identity that motivate them.

In the third, and final section “Transcendent Bodies,” I examine the resurgence of mysticism in the work of Abad, Gutiérrez, Maillard, and Rossetti. I consider the tradition of mysticism and the efforts made by the Catholic church to normalize and restrain this borderline heretical form of spirituality, as well as the role the Franco Regime played in the re-emergence of figures such as Teresa de Jesús in popular culture and the imaginary. In the poetry of Rossetti I observe how the language of mysticism and spirituality is presented as part of popular culture and speech. Delving into La mujer ensismisada and El faro por dentro by Gutiérrez, and “Matar a Platón” by Chantal Maillard I consider how their work dialogues with traditional mystic
literature, as well as more contemporary formulations of the mystical experience as presented by Bataille in *Inner Experience*.

Drawing hard and generalizing conclusions about a large swath of literature is fraught with complications. Therefore, I will not engage in such an activity here, but will propose that this analysis has highlighted potential areas for further study, patterns of movement and trends in the work of these authors that through exploration can enrich, and further nuance, our view of their work. Throughout my dissertation I not only highlight the various ways in which the baroque aesthetic re-emerges in the work of these authors, but also suggest that through it they are able to open up avenues of expression for themselves. I propose that in the face of the imposition of unyielding homogeneity, hybridity becomes an avenue for liberation. Under the power of a totalizing and rigid regime that utilized the regulation of cultural expression as a primary means of control, co-opting the rhetoric alone, although a form of resistance, would not satisfy as sufficiently liberating. There is an evolution and progression of the author’s engagement with the baroque aesthetic. I observe a correlation between the temporal proximity of the dictatorship to the works in question, and the forms in which these pieces dialogue with the aesthetic and ideology imposed by the regime. Whereas early post-dictatorship works engage with it as confrontational and rebellious, later works become more introspective, self-analytical, suggesting not simply a refusal of the regime, but a recognition that its legacy produces real and observable consequences in the subject. Finally, those most removed from it, shift yet again in their attitude, making strides towards and overcoming, making peace, and possibly leaving behind of the regime’s effects.

The characteristics of hybridity embedded in the baroque aesthetic, from the outset, undermined the Regime. If the Regime’s interest resided in constructing an identity of the new
Spaniard that was cohesive and unified, and excluded identities that threatened and challenged this self-image, resurrecting an aesthetic reflective of a period which was rife with existential anxieties resulting from a rapid industrializing and shrinking world, it follows that ultimately it would be unsuccessful. Embedded in every aspect of the culture that the Franco Regime aspired to recreate was a questioning of authority, truth, perception, reality, and self. In this way, the baroque aesthetic becomes doubly compelling as a form of retaliation for these writers: not only does it constitute an appropriation of the tools of the oppressor, but perhaps more interestingly, these tools are perfectly suited to the disruption of the unified narrative imposed by the Regime.
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