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Evading/Invading History: Adolescent Preoccupations with Reality, the Historical Present and
Popular Culture in Spanish GenX Narratives

By

Paul Gunnar Norberg

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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Committee in charge:

Professor Michael Iarocci, Chair

Professor Dru Dougherty

Professor Anthony Adamthwaite

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Abstract

Evading/Invading History: Adolescent Preoccupations with Reality, the Historical Present and Popular Culture in Spanish GenX Narratives

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literature

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Michael Iarocci, Chair

The Spanish Generation X (GenX) refers to a group of writers, born in the 1960s and early 1970s, who published novels in the 1990s. Their work focused on a generation of Spanish adolescents who were raised during and the closing years of the Franco government and the Transition to democracy. Ray Loriga, José Ángel Mañas and Lucía Etxebarria are three writers who are consistently identified by critics as the figureheads of the generation. This dissertation explores the historical dimensions of their early texts.

GenX, a polemical group and categorical designation, is characterized by an emphasis on international popular culture, especially music, film and literature. The young characters in these novelists' works are alienated from society and their peers, immersed in the present, suspicious of the future, and indifferent to the past. They turn to gratuitous violence, sex and substance abuse in their search for meaning or in order to avoid the realities of their lives. While stylistically ranging from realism to postmodern skepticism about the real, the early novels of Loriga, Mañas and Etxebarria coincide in the representation of how Spain's young people grappled with the difficulties of a newly global, media-driven, consumerist society as Spain integrated into the European Union.

In my dissertation, I analyze how these novelists, who have frequently been criticized for their seeming historical and political apathy in fact engage history in their representations of the their era. While debates rage on about the recuperation of historical memory and political corruption, these authors I study engage in very different projects. They capture in myriad ways the peculiar sense of time and history that characterizes a culture saturated in quick-hitting television news clips, sensationalist television shows and distorted newspaper headlines. GenX novels reflect this new historical consciousness. Everything and nothing is historical; Kurt Cobain's and Ian Curtis' suicides (lead singer of Joy Division) become historical markers, signaling the passage of time instead of the attempted coup in 1981 or the death of Franco in

1975. History is easily lost to the quickened pace of life, and these novelists show how the attempt to recover and narrate the past often results in fragmented and sometimes mythical texts.

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Introduction

The Generation X writers in Spain have been a contentious and polarizing group of authors since Ray Loriga's novel *Lo peor de todo* was first released in 1992 and José Ángel Mañas' *Historias del Kronen* finished as the runner-up for the *Premio Nadal* in 1994. Many writers and critics, including the authors themselves, ruminate on whether or not this generational title is accurate, and Luis Martín-Estudillo argues that rather than a generation, it is more pertinent to refer to a Moment X.¹ Whether or not one agrees with the categorical denomination of the group as *Generación X*, *Generación Kronen*, *Primera Generación de escritores de la democracia española*, or *Narradores españoles novísimos de los años noventa*,² one common thread throughout the novels of José Ángel Mañas, Ray Loriga, Lucía Etxebarria, Benjamín Prado, Gabriela Bustelo, Roger Wolfe and many other Spanish writers publishing in the 1990s is the focus on a segment of the outcast Spanish youth population, their 'growing up' or 'coming of age' during this decade and the pronounced influence of popular culture on their identity formations. One aspect of the typical characters in these novels is that they share a relatively similar time of birth, at the end of the Franco regime or during the transition to democracy, so many lack memories of these consequential events in Spanish history or have very limited exposure to them. They are the first generation of the Spanish democracy, products of *el pacto del silencio* or *el pacto del olvido* and 40 years of undercurrents of civil unrest.³ They also share a difficulty with fitting into the society in which they were born, being usually alienated from their peers and previous generations of Spaniards. Their characters find connections to their community through shared interests in popular music and film, drugs and the party scene, and are ambivalent to the dissemination of positive discourses proclaiming the economic and global successes of Spain, the apex in 1992 with the Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona, the 500th anniversary of Cristóbal Colón's voyage to the 'New World', Sevilla as host of the World Expo and Madrid as the European Cultural Capital. Their novels describe what effect the transition to democracy and the integration of Spain into the European and global marketplace had on Spanish youth and Spanish literature.

Generation X is a term applied to many international literary movements and to the generation of young people growing up in the 1990s. With regard to literature, the category originates from the title of Canadian author and visual artist Douglas Coupland's first novel published in 1991, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. X was a stand-in, a placeholder or a blank for any number of identities, reflecting a fluidity of the individual. The catalyst for the GenX was the resistance to the McJob, as Coupland labeled it, and the increasing

¹ See Martín-Estudillo's chapter in *Generation X Rocks*. His theory is that the maturation of authors and their rather quick turn away from the GenX aesthetic points to a brief moment, rather than a full-fledged movement; the resistance to be included in this category by many of the authors is another point that substantiates this idea.

² Dorothy Odartey-Wellington, *Contemporary Spanish Fiction* p. 13.

³ Other terms that have been used to refer to the agreed-upon silence in Spain regarding the historical past include *amnesia* and *desmemoria*. Agency of forgetting is removed by the terms *amnesia* or *olvido*, implying that it was not a conscious effort of the Spanish people to move past their tense history and into a democratic government.

power of the consumer world, in conjunction with a growing inequality of class and dehumanizing effects of capitalism. His characters remove themselves from this society, in a barren landscape. Other literary aesthetics are commonly highlighted as influential on the Spanish GenX, notably Dirty Realism (also known as Minimalism) and the Beat Generation. Cintia Santana writes extensively on the problems with an equivalence of the Spanish and American Dirty Realism while recognizing the authors' overt adoption of writers from these movements as literary forefathers. Santana points to the difficulties with translating regional dialects which are prominent in their texts, as many of the Dirty Realists such as Raymond Carver and Tobias Wolff tended to focus on representing the lower classes' daily struggles. This contrasts with the emphasis in the Spanish GenX texts on younger characters who are from the middle-class or upper echelon of society.

While an international phenomenon, the Spanish GenX had a particular local accent due to the coincidence of Spain's recent emergence from a governmental structure very different from other Western/European countries with the continued rise of a capitalist, consumerist, global, media, and visual culture in Spain and the process of the country's full integration into the European Community. Carmen de Urioste stresses the importance of the year 1986, rather than 1975, as the country joined the EC and followed the model of other occidental democracies and consolidated the social, economic and political changes experienced since Franco's death.⁴ The GenX texts appear about five years after this action and about ten years after the end of the *movida*, a cultural and social explosion of an anything goes attitude and a rejection of traditional mores. Brad Epps describes Spain after Franco's death as "a Post-modern playground of raucous desires" (705), Kathryn Everly highlights "its blatant inhibitions, playful sexuality, and political message" (*Post-Franco* 61) and Odartey-Wellington compares the *movida's* delight in the fluidity of identity with the later GenX's contrarian attitude. "Unlike their 'movida' predecessors, for example, the characters in Spanish Generation X novels do not find any justification for celebrating the plastic, unpredictable, and incoherent postmodern subject" (13). On the contrary, while the cultural manifestations of the *movida* were a reaction to the Franco regime and reveled in its opposition to tradition, "en los tardochenta el propio concepto de identidad recién formulado entra en crisis, así como las concepciones sobre sexualidad, ideología, cultura y religión, entre otras" (Urioste, *Novela y sociedad* 21).

En la democracia avanzada (1986-2008) el individuo se relaciona en sociedad en base a sus derechos individuales sancionados por la sociedad de consumo. La privatización de las conductas basadas en la nueva ética postradicional/global conduce a desarrollos de conductas narcisistas, ensimismadas, permisivas, ociosas, consumistas, alegres, adictas al juego, y evasivas. (ibid. 30)

The new ethic of narcissism, leisure, consumerism, addiction to games and evasion of reality is clearly embodied by many of the characters in the GenX novels. Most, however, would not be characterized as happy; rather the tendency is to be tortured, troubled, tormented by anguished

⁴ *Novela y sociedad en la España contemporánea (1994-2009)*, p.9

feelings. And while the *movida* defined itself in opposition to Franco, the GenX was a reaction to the consumerism, globalization, and audiovisual culture it was immersed in.

The Spanish literary field in the 1990s may be best categorized by its plurality, the heterogenous nature of the texts and the multiple, simultaneous literary currents running through Spain letters. Odartey-Wellington's introduction to a critical analysis of contemporary Spanish literature, appropriately titled *La pluralidad de la narrativa española contemporánea*, highlights the diversity of Spanish letters. "Al mirar hacia atrás en busca de una visión de conjunto de la narrativa española de los últimos quince o veinte años, lo que salta a la vista de forma inmediata es la pluralidad" (11). Odartey-Wellington states that "(i)n Santos Alonso's review of Spanish fiction between 1975 and 2001, he identifies the existence of at least six active generations in the last few decades of the previous century" (18).⁵ The wide variety extends to the GenX themselves, "un grupo bastante heterogéneo" (12). Dorothy Odartey-Wellington writes that "the heterogeneity of the Generation X group of writers itself gets in the way of its categorization" (19). She references Antonio Orejudo Utrilla's claim that the principal characteristic of the GenX "es precisamente la ausencia de características comunes, la inexistencia de una tendencia dominante" (19). With so many competing texts, the Spanish GenX emerges as a product of low culture which enters into a space supposedly reserved previously for high culture.⁶

The explosion of the number of young authors and their novels in the 1990s in Spain has been explained away as a commercial venture spurred on by publishing companies to capitalize on the public's yearning for something new, fresh, young and hip, but there was also a gap in Spanish literature that was filled by these narratives. According to Toni Dorca, a segment of the population was under-served. "Se trataba de satisfacer la demanda de protagonismo de un sector de la población que quería ver reflejadas sus inquietudes en unos relatos tallados a su gusto y medida" (309). The Generation X writers were not the first authors to be young and successful, or to locate their stories in hip bars, discotheques, the streets of Madrid, its Gitano outskirts, or deal with the social impact of drugs and alcohol. They were, however, important in describing and delving into a portion of the Spanish population hitherto underrepresented, the first generation of democratic kids with few or no memories of Franco and the struggles to institute a democratic government. The new novels appealed to this generation's sense of alienation, depression, searching for oneself, and helped to explain the difficulties of growing up in a *fin de siglo* democratic nation, including widespread indifference to politics and history, and an intense obsession with music, television and film (and primarily, those from outside their national boundaries and originating in the United States and Britain).

The Generation X is sometimes defined by the youth of the authors, who were only a few years older than their protagonists. Dorothy Odartey-Wellington defines Generation X writers as

⁵ The reference is to Santo Alonso's *La novela española en el fin de siglo: 1975-2001*. Madrid: Mare Nostrum. s Among the cited authors/movements are Camilo José Cela, Miguel Delibes, Torrente Ballester, the social realist novels of 'los niños de la guerra' such as Carmen Martín Gaité Juan Marsé and Ana María Matute whose presence continued into the 1990s, Francisco Umbral, The Generación del 75, Álvaro Pombo and the Generación de los 80, Antonio Muñoz Molina. (Odartey-Wellington 18).

⁶ The barriers between high and low culture are typically transgressed in the post-modern society, although many have argued this breach has existed for quite some time.

“Spanish novelists who were born between 1960 and 1970 and who published their first novels in the last decade of the twentieth century” (13). However, Samuel Amago asks in his chapter, “Can Anyone Rock like We Do?” in the book *Generation X Rocks*, if writers should be denied inclusion in the Generation X aesthetic purely on their age? Amago proposes that Juan José Millás (b. 1947) and Carlos Cañeque (b. 1957) should be included in the group of Generation X writers, despite their advanced age. “I argue that the aesthetic that we have come to associate with Gen X is not entirely unique to younger authors such as Mañas, Etxebarria, and Loriga, but rather, that this aesthetic transcends the chronological paradigm of the literary generation and brings together a wide group of writers of varying ages who published novels in the 1990s” (60). I agree with Amago that the category should not preclude writers purely based on their birth date, and that the youthful transgressions woven throughout the novels form a stronger foundational base. On the contrary, the category of the GenX is so ambitious and extensive that the inclusion of authors in the literary generation is quite porous.

What is, then, the Generation X aesthetic? Samuel Amago provides a comprehensive summary in this same chapter:

While my purpose here is not to define the Generation X aesthetic or to explain its provenance--critics such as Toni Dorca, Christine Henseler, Jason Klodt, and María Pao have made important contributions on this theme already in the Peninsular context--I should like to offer a brief synthesis of some of the themes and forms that have come to be associated with Gen X fiction in order to analyze later the work of Millás and Cañeque within the larger literary context of the 1990s. In addition to the sex, drugs and rock and roll paradigm I mention above, Gen X narrative is typified by some of the following themes: a sometimes nihilistic stance of resistance to dominant cultures; marginalization and estrangement, either self-imposed or imposed by society; inability or unwillingness to engage in meaningful social intercourse with partners and/or peers; vitriolic antiestablishment attitude, often in terms of a perceived or desired generational conflict and/or misunderstanding; emphasis on achieving or maintaining personal authenticity, usually through oppositional strategies of identification; slackerism, boredom, depression and self-pity; protracted interest in the materiality of the body; and a well-articulated awareness and acknowledgment of foreign literatures and cinematic traditions. Related to these themes are narrative forms that may be called a poetics of disaffection: ironic commentary on the trappings of literary representation; critical distance; complexity; fragmentation; use of vernacular language and emphasis on dialogue (and, conversely, a predominance of first-person narrative); intertextuality, usually through references to popular culture, rock music and punk; self-referentiality; intermingling of reality and fiction/abstraction from reality; drug and alcohol abuse as structuring elements; communal production through multiple narrators and/or the illusion of collaborative literary production; open-ended resolution (Dorca; Gracia; Henseler; Pao; Ulrich and Harris). (61)

This dense quote is an almost all-encompassing description of what the GenX is. As is evident by the variety of elements listed by Amago, many authors publishing at this time could be included or excluded based upon how well their texts fit into this accepted definition of the GenX text.

One of the striking omissions in Amago's comprehensive description is any reference to the tendency of the Generation X novels to focus almost exclusively on the present, and to be apolitical and indifferent to Spanish history. Nowhere in this very in-depth description of almost every possible manifestation of the Generation X aesthetic is there mention of Spanish youth's apathy towards history and politics. This stands out because many other critics do mention this as a negative characteristic of Generation X literature. Christine Henseler and Randolph Pope in their introduction to *Generation X Rocks* highlight both. "In the novels we study, the social issues that were frequent in the fifties and survived through the seventies are but faint echoes: class recedes, history fades, money is not a serious issue, and traditional politics are distant and disdained" (xv). Manuel Vázquez Montalbán in his article "De *El Jarama* a La Generación X, Y y Z en la novela española" is also very critical of the lack of a humanist program or historical engagement. "Se desacredita la memoria histórica, la posibilidad de un proyecto que permita que el futuro sea diferente, y se practica una inmersión de los seres humanos en el present como una categoría" (9). Montalbán insinuates that the problems of the present, without novelists engaging in a collective progressive social project, will persist. Kathryn Everly's introduction to a critical collection of contemporary texts includes this description of the Spanish GenX:

The "generation X" writers have gained notoriety primarily for latching on to an American term suggesting the apathy and boredom of a generation with no direction or political cause. Spanish writers such as José Angel Mañas, Ray Loriga, and Pedro Maestre have exploited the basically benign quality of Douglas Coupland's initial vision of disenchanted youth presented in "Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture" by injecting radical acts of gratuitous violence, misogyny, and exaggerated drug use into their narratives. These works have drawn the public's attention because of their shocking content and general disregard for the past, present, and future of Spanish culture. (*Post-Franco* 61)

Ironically, many of the authors who are included by critics in the GenX actually disassociate themselves from the generation and reject the category, instead of latching on to it. Ray Loriga refuses the validity of the generation based on multiple reasons: in addition to a wide variation in their aesthetics and the thematics of their novels, unlike other generations these authors do not even know each other personally, have not collaborated or exchanged ideas, and on the contrary openly take exception to being grouped together under the umbrella of GenX. Everly's assessment also assumes that the GenX is entirely a male endeavor; if it is to be misogynistic then writers such as Etxebarria would inherently be excluded from the classification.

My work intends to shed light on the ways in which the novels of the GenX actually do engage and interact with Spanish history and politics in unexpected and novel ways. While the characters themselves might display apathetic tendencies towards their national histories and politics, they nevertheless function as historical characters, located within a specific historical

time period in Spain and reflecting an analysis of the characteristics embodied by Spanish youth in the 1990s. As H. Rosi Song states, “The popular worlds we discover in the fiction of writers like Mañas, Loriga, and Etxebarria should not just be seen as evidence of a passivity and negativity among the younger generation, but as an attempt to break with traditional ways of incorporating politics and cultural resistance into fiction” (206). For previous generations, fiction was a space for overt political resistance, an area where battles could be fought in an attempt to create political change. On the surface, the GenX novelists resist this technique. However, while not directly participating in a rewriting of the recent past or proposing alternative political realities, the early works by José Ángel Mañas, Ray Loriga, and Lucía Etxebarria do contain elements of history, traces of the past which influence the characters’ lives, make political statements and serve as testaments of the life for some Spanish youth who have not had to struggle for a Democratic government and have not suffered the horrors of war. The novelists display a historical consciousness not only in the ways their novels reflect the reality of Spain in the 1990s, but also through unconventional visions of history. In many instances, the typical historical occurrence is replaced by events in popular culture (including sports); Nirvana lead singer and guitarist Kurt Cobain’s suicide, the suicide of Joy Division’s lead singer Ian Curtis and the Summer Olympics in Barcelona in 1992 serve as the historical backdrop for three of the GenX narratives. Characters appear to be living in a reality no longer historical, where the rapid speed of information negates history. Traditional history is reduced to short television news clips or newspaper headlines. Rather than solely relish in the transformation of history in contemporary media-driven societies, these novels challenge the events in which we recognize historical change in a hyperreal culture. Some of these novels do not mention the country by name or take place in foreign countries, an evasion so blatant as to itself be a political and historical gesture. In short, the presence of history and politics persists in a new code.

The first chapter of this dissertation focuses on two of José Ángel Mañas’ early novels, *Historias del Kronen* (1994) and *Ciudad rayada* (1998). In *Historias*, Mañas describes in a realistic manner the everyday life of *Carlos*, a young well-to-do teenager in Madrid, and his friends who frequent the Kronen bar. His depiction captures a historic moment in time, Madrid 1992, as the alienated protagonist relates his boredom and searches for stimulation and adventure through parties, drugs, and sex, attempting to postpone his entry into adulthood and responsibility. Carlos is not empathetic, a psychopath who ultimately murders (or does he?) one of his close friends, and finds inspiration in popular, cult representations of indifference towards violence, such as *American Psycho* and *Clockwork Orange*. He compares his daily experiences to these movies and emulates the main characters. Underlying narratives of economic inequalities and suspicion of EU integration contrast with his spoiled existence, as his parents supply him with a car, spending money which he uses for drugs, alcohol and concert tickets, a vacation home, and a Filipino maid to clean up after him. With school over, his responsibilities are non-existent. However, his friends exemplify the contrary social position; they work at a bar or in other low-wage paying positions, or cannot find a job. They complain about the irony in needing experience to get a job, but only being able to get experience by working. While in the background, Spain trumpets the Olympics and economic successes, the realities for these characters diverge from the official portrayal of the country. Homophobia is one of the undercurrents confronted by the novel, as is the way that history is treated by the characters,

leading to a critical analysis of the news and society. Carlos' family watches the news in silence every day during lunch, as important global events are reduced to short sound bites and quick quips. Small amounts of information stand in for in-depth discussions of political and historical events. Carlos' exploits in the streets and bars of Madrid are juxtaposed with the Olympic torch's travels through Spain and the World Expo in Sevilla, as the grandiose global events distract attention away from what is really going on in Spain. Carlos' grandfather laments the current situation of this new generation indifferent to their country and families' past sufferings. While for Carlos, history is always boring, the novel subtly foregrounds the historical consciousness of this new generation of young Spaniards.

Ciudad rayada is written in a similar form, as a first person account by a young male who is involved in the popular underworlds of Madrid. This character, Kaiser, is a teenager who is climbing the ranks of drug-dealing, coming of age near the end of the 1990s and cut off from Spain's traumatic recent past. While the primary narrative details his picaresque adventures in Madrid, political corruption serves as the backdrop to the seemingly carefree life of Kaiser. The reader witnesses within the first few chapters a Socialist politician taking a bribe from a local bar owner while bemoaning the press's coverage of the economic woes Spain is suffering and the blame attributed to the government. This same politician's son is later involved in a robbery, although his son is protected from the consequences due to his father's position and political connections. Police corruption takes place as well, as an undercover agent is murdered during a botched drug deal. The newspapers the next day proclaim the youth violence as the culprit, another divergence between the accepted narrative and what really happened. Despite an appearance of indifference to history, characters are well aware of what is going on in their country and their city. Jokes about the attempted coup of 1981 are met with strong rebukes, and political corruption is taken for granted by the characters. The text itself also serves a historical purpose, as it replicates the sensations of hyperreality and the powerful influence of popular culture on its characters.

Ray Loriga's early novels do not contain the abundance of realistic details found in Mañas' novels. In *Caídos del cielo* (1995), Loriga creates a landscape and world completely devoid of any mention or reference to the outside world, except for popular culture. Only through mentioning Kurt Cobain's suicide can the reader fix the narrative within a historical framework, and there are almost no indications of the novel's setting. The landscape is barren, bereft of details linking it to reality, and only the mention of VIPS (as well as linguistic and extratextual clues) signals to the reader that this antiseptic world is Spain. In a time period where Spanish politics and history were protagonists of many literary texts, Loriga's decision to write novels evasive of reality to the opposite extreme was in part a political gesture. Yet while this novel on the surface refrains from the historical and political discussions of the time, the novel captures the sensations of Spain in the 1990s; its hyperreal nature, the manipulation of television, the loss of anchoring, fluidity of identities, the difficulty of getting at the truth of what really happened, and relating that truth through narrative. *Caídos'* omission of Spanish markers, politics and history is itself a commentary on these very issues, as disengagement from the system is a political stance.

In a much later novel, *El hombre que inventó Manhattan* (2004), we see why Luis Martín-Estudillo hypothesizes that the GenX was a moment rather than a generation. Loriga

eschews some of his earlier aesthetics while maintaining the fragmented, short chapters/narratives, the problematic representations of reality and the prevalence of popular, audiovisual culture. This novel is hyperreal in the extreme, as the world portrayed is steeped in details taken from the real world of Manhattan and yet its fictional nature is consistently highlighted, as many of the details and characters are invented and fictional. The reader is tempted by some of the autobiographic consistencies between narrator and author to read the novel as autobiography, despite the gap between reality and fiction. The novel plays with this barrier, as many of the narrative's episodes in the novel are based upon real events. One of the characters drops a coffee mug and then faints; the shards of the mug cut his neck and he dies from the wounds.⁷ The attacks on the Twin Towers in Manhattan on September 11th, 2001, are narrated as part of the background to the novel, and the Beat Generation writer William Burroughs relates the real story of Dutch Schultz, a historical gangster from the 1920s and 30s in the US. Once again Loriga's novel does not engage in Spanish politics or history directly.

Lucía Etxebarria's first novel, *Amor, curiosidad, Prozac y dudas*, narrates three sisters' childhood memories from the tail end of the Franco dictatorship and their current situations in Madrid in 1995. They relate their sexual histories, personal struggles with the demons of their pasts, and their economic decisions. Cristina, the youngest sister, embodies the liberated democratic woman who is sexually free, economically content to work at a bar instead of a global corporation, and resistant to the traditional narratives of the Catholic Church and Spanish society. Rosa, the middle sister, represents the professional businesswoman, who in the process of economic achievements has detached herself from her sexuality and her humanity. Ana, the oldest of the sisters, is the traditional housewife who is reliant upon her husband for economic security, and for whom sex has procreative rather than pleasurable ends. The three are haunted by the past, as traumatic events such as incest, sexual molestation as a child, rape, witnessing physical abuse against their mother, and their father's abandonment in 1975 converge to affect their identities and lives. There is an undercurrent of criticism of the burying of the past that took place in Spain during the Transition to Democracy; rather than confronting the past a pact was made to silence it. These women overcome their traumatic secrets only after confronting them. The narratives in *Amor* challenge the recent historical and political past while simultaneously criticizing Spain's consumerist, global, corporate-driven society of the 1990s.

⁷ This absurd death was recorded in various newspapers, including the Washington Post.

Chapter 1: Punk, Realism, and Indifference to History and Politics as Critical Gestures in José Ángel Mañas' *Historias del Kronen* and *Ciudad rayada*

Y es que parece mentira, que después de las vanguardias, de dadá, de surrealismo, de cincuenta años de contracultura, y veinte de punk, la gente todavía siga mirándote por encima del hombro diciéndote cómo tienes que escribir y qué es buena literatura. Esto del punk quiere decir sólo eso: que nadie tiene el monopolio de la buena escritura o de la buena literatura. (Mañas, *Duende* 81)

Miguel: Si es que todo está muy mal. Mucha Expo y mucha olimpiada pero en Madrid no hay dinero. (Mañas, *Historias del Kronen* 205)

José Ángel Mañas emerged on the Spanish literary scene in 1994 with *Historias del Kronen*, a novel that brought him national attention when it was a finalist for the prestigious literary prize, *el Premio Nadal*. His work has been generally characterized as an offshoot of dirty realism or blank fiction,⁸ giving the reader an unfiltered feel for what it was like to be a young Spaniard in Madrid in the 1990s. Carmen de Urioste aptly calls it *punk costumbrismo*, incorporating a countercultural aspect of his writing while maintaining the link to a textual representation of the daily life of a Spanish youngster. Mañas is consistently included in the Spanish literary generation best known as *La Generación X*, also known appropriately as *La Generación Kronen* (referencing the influence of Mañas' novel on his generational peers). The language of *Historias* and subsequent novels is vulgar and replete with slang, the narrator's voices evoke orality and a lack of completed education,⁹ the time is the present, and the stories told are of characters getting high and/or drunk, having sex, listening to music, partying at bars, selling drugs, witnessing or engaging in violence, and avoiding trouble with the law. The attitude expressed by some of these juvenile protagonists is that the future holds no guarantees and the past is an inherited burden, so why not indulge in the fruits of the present?

Yet in spite of this dreary (depending on your perspective) outlook and portrayal of segments of the Spanish 'Generation X' of the 1990s, in *Historias del Kronen* and Mañas' fourth novel, *Ciudad Rayada* (published in 1998), sociopolitical and historical concerns play a crucial role in shaping the characters and questioning what the historical and political means in the audiovisual age. These concerns are not always addressed by critical analysis of the Generation X narrative, as these issues are concealed by an unwillingness on the author's part to reimagine Spain's recent past and the novel's shortage of historical and political thematics. These moments of historical and political apathy themselves serve as a commentary on the historical in

⁸ See María Pao's article, "Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll: *Historias del Kronen* as Blank Fiction".

⁹ The exception here being *Soy un escritor frustrado*, a story which is told by a University Professor in Spain. However, the vulgar language and its content, as well as the nonsensical violence, remains. The narrative voices in *Mensaka* are either still in school or school dropouts.

contemporary Spain. Mañas' texts, or more specifically the protagonists, exhibit a tendency towards self-serving nihilism which causes indignation in the Spanish reader looking for a promotion of community, redemptive possibilities of the rebellious protagonists and a brighter future under the new Spanish democratic state. What these novels do is call into question the messianic potential of the new government, the Socialist's control and influence on Spanish society, and the European and global project. The narrative in *Historias* takes place in 1992 as Spain shines in the global spotlight; Barcelona hosts the Summer Olympics, Sevilla the World Expo, and Spain celebrates the five-hundredth anniversary of Colón's 'discovery' of America. This historical context serves as the backdrop for *Historias del Kronen* and later *Ciudad rayada*, as Spain's transformation from an isolated dictatorship to an interconnected global player is complete.

Carlos, the protagonist and first-person narrator of *Historias del Kronen*, describes to the reader with brutal honesty and a lack of self-awareness his everyday life. Among the characteristics of *Historias* which contribute to a different portrait of history and the inherited burden of the past are the presence of repressed dissident sexualities which Carlos takes advantage of, the mediation through television of history and politics framing the narratives and heightening the sensationalism of current events, and Carlos' constant resistance to *los sermones de siempre* or societal pressures directed at his reluctance to change and 'grow up'. This includes his interactions with his father and his grandfather, who both relate their family's histories which tie in with Spain's histories, as well as the many friends and girlfriends who attempt to change Carlos. His disconnect from reality is assisted by the American audiovisual and literary culture proliferated in Spain, the effects of drugs and alcohol, and an intentional insensitivity and opposition to feeling and expressing emotions (i.e. showing weakness). The characters, and in particular Carlos' friend Miguel, lament the inclusion of Spain in the European project and the economic struggles masked by the appearance of Spain's global success. Finally, the absence of Carlos' redemption and an authorial attitude subtly critical of the protagonist contribute to a reading that sheds light on young Spaniards' interactions with reality and hints at a negativity that dissipates (for most) with maturity. The novel ends with Carlos continuing on down the same destructive path while his friends, one by one, break off down other roads.

Ciudad possesses some of the same qualities which lead to a reading of Spanish youth culture's lack of engagement with Spain's past and current politics, and the young characters' experiences of contemporary reality mimic those of *Historias*. Political corruption that is notably absent in *Historias* is witnessed by the protagonist in *Ciudad*, another first-person narrator named Kaiser. An aspiring drug-dealer, Kaiser takes the reader along an adventurous ride through Madrid bars, concerts, and its outskirts, and his drug-induced narration satirizes Spain's history and finds gratification in the pleasures afforded by sex, drugs and music. Kaiser, in contrast to Carlos, does not live solely off of his parent's wealth (in this case, his father), choosing instead to make his own money as an up and coming drug dealer. In addition to witnessing firsthand the political corruption rampant during the Socialist leadership, Kaiser also witnesses police corruption and the ability of the Spanish press to spin the events to fit its own depiction/narrative. Violence committed by Kaiser fits into a detached, unemotional state of mind, reminiscent of Carlos' drug-induced and possibly intentional murder of Fierro towards the

end of *Historias*. *Ciudad* ends with Kaiser and his girlfriend looking out over Madrid at night, happy and intoxicated, holding on to their youth and fighting the impending future.

Critical Minefields: Polemic Literature breeds Polemic Responses

Before entering into an analysis of the historical and political engagement of *Historias del Kronen* and *Ciudad rayada*, it would be beneficial to embark on a short history of the literary criticism on José Ángel Mañas. Critical attitudes regarding Mañas are contentious to say the least, which corresponds to the polemical and provocative nature of his early novels. Critic Germán Gullón lays out the skeptical critical landscape in his introduction to *Historias del Kronen*, contrasting it to the overwhelming public support with ten editions in one year:

(L)a crítica reaccionó con cautela, expresando opiniones contrapuestas, las de quienes la aceptaron sin reparos, e incluso encontraron en el mundo del Kronen un mensaje que la sociedad debía escuchar, el que la juventud exigía un hueco que no le acabamos de hacer, y las de los que se aferraron a la defensa de unos valores estéticos, que si bien altamente loables, carecen de toda responsabilidad social. (XVIII-XIX)

One of the anchors of the negative reactions to Mañas and others of his generation is the lack of aesthetic qualities essential to great literature. The social engagement evident in *Historias* and *Ciudad* detracts from its artistic value, as does the vulgarity and orality of the language, the simplicity of the plot, and the emphasis on the *cotidiano* or every day life of these young characters. Furthermore, contentious perspectives regarding Mañas' texts hinge in part on whether or not the repugnant behavior presented in the novel by Carlos and his friends is celebrated or repudiated by the author. Gullón points out that one of the traps of these novels is the play between appreciating and denouncing the values embodied in Carlos and his comportment. "Hay que leer bien, sin caer en la trampa de que el autor comparte los valores de ese mundo que representa. Él es su portavoz, no su defensor" (XXIV). Gullón nods at the hypocrisy that Carlos decries in *Historias*:

A los neorrealistas de hoy se les niega que esa forma de novelar tenga valor, porque las costumbres representadas resultan repudiables. Los bien pensantes rechazan el mundo de la droga, aunque luego ellos mismos pueden disfrutar de un porrete para distenderse de un día de trabajo duro, o un güisqui, o un programa de basura de la tele. (IX)

Certainly a difference in degrees of substance usage should be noted, but even the characters dispute how often they should get high or drink. Miguel chastises Roberto and Carlos for their addiction to the next fix. "Pero qué vicioso. Acabas de pillar tu piedra y ya quieres meterte lo siguiente. No sabes disfrutar del presente" (60).

Another of the commonly negative responses to Mañas' novels is that they lack originality, due primarily to their realist characteristics, and instead of creating an imagined world his texts merely imitate and evoke reality. Gullón once again confronts these assessments:

No obstante, y poco a poco, las acusaciones de falta de originalidad que se lanzaron sobre los neorrealistas [and in particular, Gullón is talking about Mañas] [...] han perdido toda credibilidad. Por un lado, los escritores que les influyeron, como Raymond Carver, son considerados hoy maestros del género literario y, por otro lado, el que forjó la casilla, generación X, Douglas Coupland, se ha convertido en uno de los auténticos innovadores de la lengua y de la narrativa, corta y breve, en lengua inglesa. (xiii)

As Gullón points out, while writers such as Raymond Carver and Douglas Coupland once suffered from critical negativity, they are now considered to have contributed substantially to American literature of the late twentieth century. Mañas and other GenX authors do not deny the influence of the Dirty Realists on their aesthetics, although Cintia Santana has written a very compelling article which problematizes this connection through the lens of translation. Nonetheless, the link between the Spanish GenX and the American Dirty Realists is evident.

Regarding the recording device as literary tool, Juan Angel Juristo makes a comment in this vein in his review of Mañas' second novel, *Mensaka*. "Creo indefensible el hecho de que grabar horas de conversaciones de bares y, luego, plasmarlas en un papel represente algo que tenga la semejanza más tenue con el hecho literario" (1). On the other hand, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán describes the language as "una jerga que es en realidad la mezcla de diversas jergas operantes" (7),¹⁰ refuting to a certain extent the idea of merely recording conversations since what Mañas does is blend different colloquialisms to cause the sensation of informal, youthful speech patterns. The *jerga* operates as an evocation of the way young people talk; it isn't a replica of their speech.

Juristo also points to the impact that the consumer market for literature has had on Mañas' success. "La importancia, entonces, del espacio reservado queda a merced de algo que tiene poco que ver con la calidad que se le otorga a una obra, y sí con la expectación que despierta el mercado editorial" (1). In other words, for Juristo Mañas' popularity stems more from the efforts of the publishing world and less from the quality of his literary production. Certainly there were other forces at work in the commercial success of Mañas' first offerings in addition to his aesthetics, but the continued relevance of *Historias del Kronen* in literary criticism and the ten novels he has published since 1994 indicate that the market's forces were not the only factor contributing to his success. Furthermore, *Historias del Kronen* was a finalist for the *Premio Nadal* in 1994, the fiftieth anniversary of the award, a very prestigious literary

¹⁰ I am not sure if he means this as a compliment, however.

award with many entries and a very well-respected panel.¹¹ And although the capitalist marketplace of rapid buying and selling is one of the critical targets of Mañas' novels, the marketplace is also the unavoidable vehicle through which one's texts must circulate. Carmen de Urioste points to the fact that the *movida* was an accepted form of rebellion by the government and certain pockets of society, whereas the insubordination on the '90s intended to be truly subversive (also destined for failure, since its benefactor was the publishing world).

Frente a la cultura de apariencia rebelde e innovadora desarrollada en la década de los 80, denominada movida madrileña, pero ampliamente aceptada por ciertos sectores sociales como por el gobierno --promotor de la misma--, la cultura joven de los años noventa desea ser identificada como una cultura verdaderamente subversiva e independiente, olvidando de hecho que en su caso el patrocinador es el mercado. (*Novela y Sociedad* 46)

The danger of identifying an aesthetic or social movement as countercultural is that once it has become commercially successful and accepted/co-opted into the mainstream, the countercultural edge appears to be compromised.

Leslie Haynsworth looks at this phenomenon in Generation X music from the United States. Her conclusion is that “[t]he increasing absorption of Gen X values and practices into mainstream youth culture signifies a perhaps irrevocable loss of pure countercultural status, which is troubling for a movement that is self-defined through its oppositional stance” (57). Are Mañas' novels already co-opted by the marketplace? Is it realistic to expect the counterculture to ignore the marketplace? Some like Juristo criticize Mañas' anti-establishment pose as nothing more than a commercial ploy to sell books, and there might be some truth to this criticism. Professional writing is nothing new in Spain, but unlike the financial struggles a writer like Ramón del Valle-Inclán had to endure at the turn of the 20th century (satirized in his *Luces de Bohemia*), a writer in the late 1990s could survive, albeit relying upon other sources of income such as writing newspaper articles or movie scripts. As John Hooper described it, “Within a few years, authorship in Spain ceased to be a hobby and became a profession. By writing articles as well as books and *haciendo bolos* (working the lecture circuit), authors nowadays can make a decent living” (404).

Toni Dorca phrases the question as follows: “¿tenemos derecho críticos y profesores a censurar a los jóvenes por acercar la literatura al público y venderse al mejor postor?; dicho en otras palabras, ¿es lícito censurar que una porción cada vez mayor de jóvenes sin empleo se procure un sustento mediante la escritura?” (311). This decade in Spain saw out-of-control unemployment rates that were especially high for young people. In 1998 one in every three 20-24 year old in Spain was unemployed; that percentage grew to 44% for 16-19 year olds. Spain as a country had an overall 20.9% unemployment rate in 1997 and 18.9% in 1998. To put this in perspective, the next closest country in the EU-15 was Finland, with 15% and 13.2%,

¹¹ 253 novels were entered in 1994 for the award. (http://elpais.com/diario/1994/01/07/cultura/757897208_850215.html). The panel consisted of Pere Gimferrer, José María Guelbenzu, Robert Saladrigas, Andrés Teixidor and Antonio Vilanova. (<http://hemeroteca.abc.es/nav/Navigate.exe/hemeroteca/madrid/abc/1994/01/07/045.html>). Rosa Regàs won the award for her novel, *Azul*.

respectively.¹² Thus, Spain's unemployment rate was 5% higher than any other country that belonged to the EU-15.¹³ Is it any wonder that young authors in Spain sought to capitalize on their texts to the fullest, even if it gave the impression of a less valid aesthetic form?

Certainly becoming an author is not the best way out of a personal economic crisis, so possibly Dorca's next statement gets to the core of the argument, that the writers who are 'supposedly' subversive and are selling subversion are not really so counterculture after all. "Existe, por consiguiente, un recelo hacia los jóvenes creadores que pretenden explotar bajo un disfraz de rebeldía las ansias de consumo de la sociedad. Paradójicamente, los propios escritores tienen conciencia de esta problemática y la trasladan a las páginas de su ficción" (Dorca 310). The self-awareness exhibited in these texts demonstrates that Mañas understands this dilemma and even satirizes this very situation in his second novel, *Mensaka*. The young characters are in a rock band and attempt to get signed by a major international record label after a local label takes advantage of them and fails to make them rich, famous and successful. They have to sell out in order to make it big, leaving behind one of their band members and best friends in the process. Another example is *Soy un escritor frustrado*, in which a university professor steals the novel of his young female student and it becomes a best-seller. The publishing houses promise him an award for his second novel; the only problem is that he (or rather, his young sequestered student) hasn't written it yet.

Possibly because of the self-awareness exhibited by the authors, Toni Dorca refuses to believe that solely because a novel has become a consumer product it must necessarily be lacking in quality. "Me resisto a creer que este comercio al por mayor tenga que redundar necesariamente en perjuicio de la calidad de nuestra literatura" (311). Leslie Haynsworth also concludes that a subcultural movement such as the Gen X can maintain a sense of authenticity and control the values associated with it even as it has become integrated into the mainstream. "[T]he history of alternative rock's incorporation into the music mainstream suggests that this kind of shift in a subculture's relationship with the dominant culture in fact gives the subculture leverage to infiltrate and reshape the dominant culture largely on its own terms" (57). While giving away a bit of its rebellious credibility, a commercially successful subculture can reach a larger audience and spread its message further.

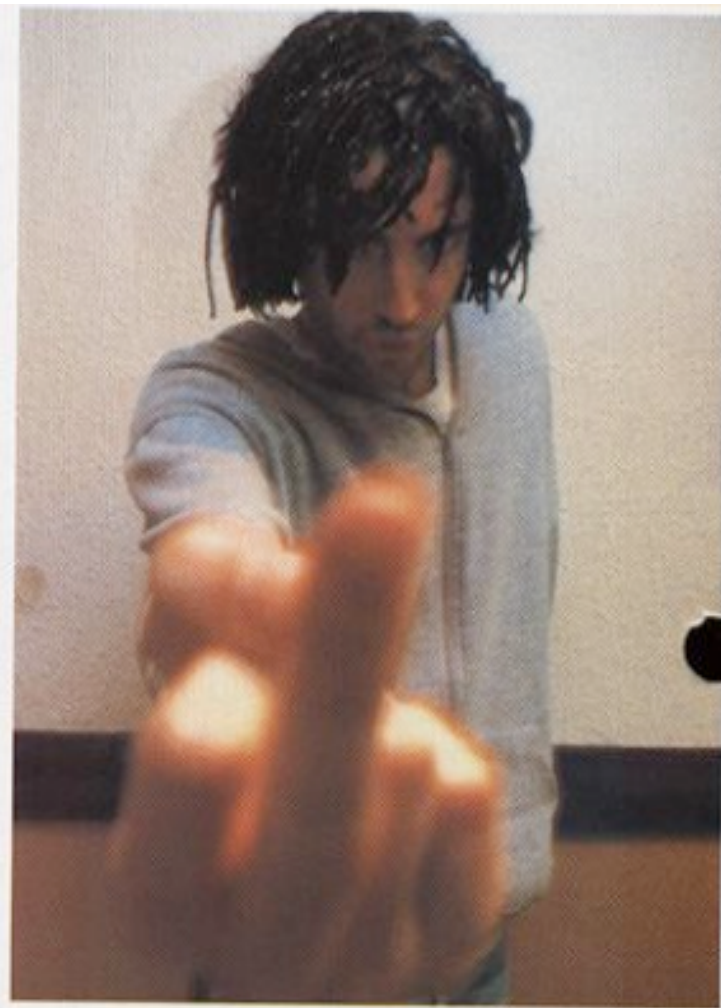
Mañas' image as punk-rock rebel writer was carefully crafted in the beginning of his literary career, not only in his writing but also in his interactions with the media. This is not to say his affection for punk music or his writing was falsified or empty, but rather that it was utilized as a tool to increase his public presence and cement his counterculture status. In a recent interview Mañas was asked if he wants to be known in the future as a punk writer. "No, no es una cosa, ... en la época me consideraba un punk de la literatura, y creo que si pones eso ... a mí eso retrataba muy bien lo que intentaba entonces, lo que estaba haciendo iba un poco en esa línea" (Corbalán 341). The implication from this quote is that, among other things, he no longer considers himself to be a literary punk, but at one time he did. As

¹² In May 2004, the EU15 was comprised by the following 15 countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom. <http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=6805>

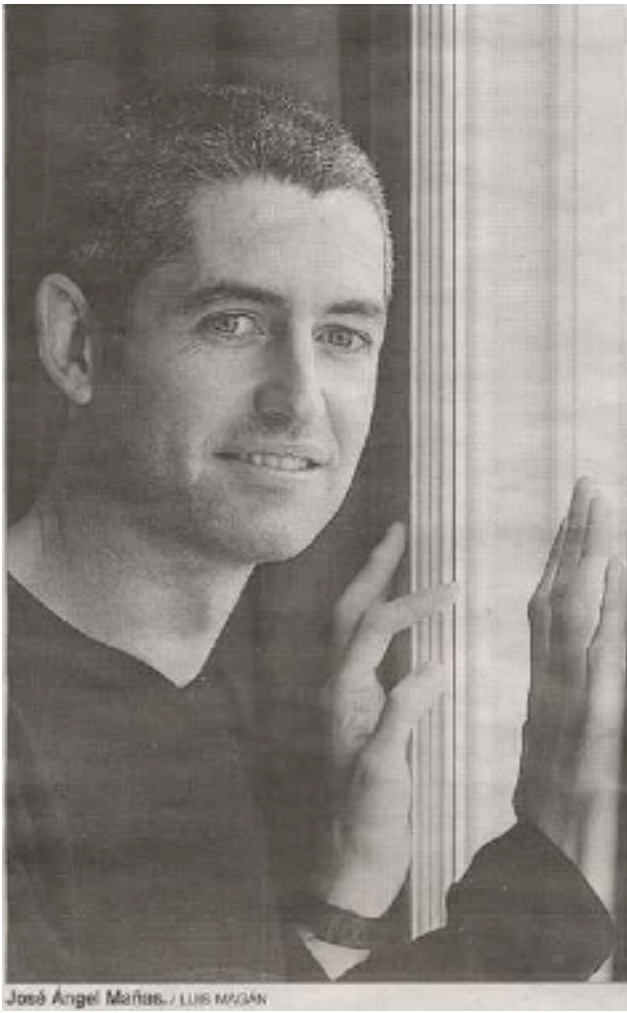
¹³ http://www.ine.es/jaxi/tabla.do?path=/t22/e308/meto_05/rde/px/10/&file=04002.px&type=pcaxis

the epigraph to this chapter suggests, “punk” initially designated a rebellion against established aesthetic norms, much like Dada and Surrealism before it. The fact that this overtly rebellious stance has diminished as Mañas has become commercially successful and part of the literary establishment may speak to the power of the market to accommodate, promote and manage subversive cultural ‘products’.

A good example of the transformation of Mañas’ image between 1998 *Ciudad Rayada* and 2005 *El Caso Karen* can be seen by comparing photographs taken of the author for promotional campaigns for the two novels. These two photographs were taken for different publications and with two very different audiences in mind. The much younger and rebellious author has dreadlocks, wears a casual zipper sweatshirt and a snarl, hasn’t shaved in a few days, chugs a beer in one photo, flips off the camera in another, and finally covers up the camera with his hand. This Mañas appeals to the younger, wayward public reflected in the themes of his first four novels in particular. An older and more mature Mañas can be seen gently leaning against a window, wearing a nice black sweater with a short haircut accentuating his grey hair and a smile on his face. The hedonistic, no future young kid has grown up. The transformation is astounding.



El Duende de Madrid, Especial de Verano 1998
<http://joseangelmanas.com/archivo.html>



Article in *El País*, March 10, 2005
<http://joseangelmanas.com/archivo.html>

What is Mañas' place within the Spanish literary field?

Earlier in this chapter I cited Germán Gullón, who pinpointed Raymond Carver and Douglas Coupland as two literary antecedents to Mañas and the Spanish Generation X writers. Gullón also traces Mañas' writing to another well-known realist writer of Spanish literature at the turn of the 20th century. "El neorrealismo lo que ha hecho es reingresar el personaje en la vida social [...] Lo mismo, salvadas las distancias, que hiciera don Pío Baroja en la primera mitad del siglo, pues fue él quien puso al personaje en contacto con el medio social" (xi-xii). Literary precedents reside both locally and abroad. Critic Matthew Marr asserts that Mañas follows Hemingway's suit in sociopolitical resistance to governmental interference regarding individual

rights, namely the freedom to imbibe legal and illegal substances such as alcohol in Hemingway's case and marijuana and other drugs in Mañas' case. By comparing the two writers and underscoring their common rejection of certain government policies, Marr legitimizes Mañas' *nobela* as worthy of more critical debate and discussion, as well as illuminate its space within a larger historical literary mode.¹⁴

Mañas is well-versed in the history of cultural provocation; his answers in interviews reveal both a knowledge of past movements, provocations directed at the established guard and his desire to be included within a rebellious tradition.

Lo alucinante de verdad es que más de medio siglo después del dadá y los *ready-made* de Duchamp [...] después de veinte años de punk y cincuenta de contracultura, haya quienes pretendiendo entender de arte no 'entiendan' el 'gusto' de quienes sufrimos una fascinación nietzchiana por la imperfección y quieran seguir imponiendo criterios estilísticos más que dudosos, por no decir kadukos. (*Ajoblanco* 42)

The proliferation of k's, intentionally misspelling words like *caduco* and *contracultura*, imitate the youth culture's introduction of k's into their writing and produces a sensation of disgust in the more grammatically-inclined reader. By listing previously embattled cultural movements which are now readily alluded to as revolutionary and transformative artistic achievements, Mañas insinuates that his writing is just one more link in a long countercultural chain while also elevating his works to high aesthetic levels. Albeit a ways off, Mañas believes the misunderstanding of his works will ultimately result in his vindication. Ironically, he is simultaneously asking to be canonized by the same public he was trying to alienate.

While knowing what kind of legacy *Historias del Kronen* and Mañas' other novels will enjoy is a long way off, *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature* from 2004 does include a brief description of José Ángel Mañas and other Generation X writers:

The relatively strong divisions and connections between social engagement and aesthetic experimentation that characterized the sixties and seventies seem to have weakened, fragmented, or proliferated in ways that make any classification not based on genre, date, place, and ostensibly more embodied signs of identity (such as gender, sexuality, nationality, and race), quite tentative. Of course, classification of any sort is increasingly contested, as if the truth were indeed nowhere - or perhaps everywhere - to be found. [...] Such topics also become something of a fad with the promotion, under the rubric of 'dirty realism', of José Ángel Mañas' *Historias del Kronen* and Ray Loriga's *Lo peor de todo* and *Caidos del cielo*. Mañas and Loriga are of the same generation - another disputable classificatory term [...] If Mañas writes with a directness that seems to empty

¹⁴ In concordance with intentional designs at rebellion, Mañas refers to the punk nature of his texts by calling them *nobelias* instead of *novelas*. In twentieth century Spanish literature, Miguel de Unamuno's play with *novela* and *nivola* comes to mind as but one precedent.

prose of poetry, Gopegui's prose becomes poetic in its reliance on ellipsis, understatement, and repetition. (Epps 723)

Brad Epps certainly hits the nail on the head when he describes the resistance of the new narrative to any classification, and the provocative, slang-infused writing style of Mañas. Although not in the forefront of the contemporary literary movements (this comes in the final few pages of the history of contemporary Spanish literature), Mañas' inclusion in a very mainstream critical literary tool, *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, speaks to the importance of *Historias* in defining a new literary field. The description may not be flattering, terms like 'fad', 'promotion', and a "directness that seems to empty prose of poetry" hint at less than enviable aesthetic qualities, but nonetheless his works have become included in the conversation regarding the contemporary Spanish literary world.

Punk-rocking History and Politics in *Historias del Kronen*

Considering Mañas' controversial position within the literary field, many have taken at face value the notion that his texts are devoid of history or politics of his time. However, a closer examination suggests that the case is more complex. *Historias* and *Ciudad* are two textual examples which offer a different perspective on what it means to be historical or political. The punk aesthetic itself and countercultural rebellion have historical roots signaled by Mañas in interviews and textual clues. The intention behind the punk aesthetic is to invert everything that is traditionally regarded as sacred, whether it be language, literature, the canon, history, clothing, music, or religion, and to do so intentionally within an aesthetic that pushes against established norms. The ideology of punk is evident in Mañas' novels. Carmen de Urioste underscores the punk attitude:

No solamente es la ideología punk el motivo de preocupación de la sociedad burguesa, sino que los signos punk más superficiales --la distintiva forma de vestirse y el autoaniquilamiento-- generan unas relaciones sociales que ofenden y amenazan a la sociedad biempensante [...] la introducción de una representación ruptural en el lenguaje de las novelas puede compararse a la perturbación social producida por la indumentaria punk. [...] las narraciones de Mañas provocan inquietud tanto por su contenido como por la anarquía introducida en el lenguaje de las misma, ya que supone la subversión más evidente del orden establecido. (*Novela y sociedad* 52-53)

Provocation can be achieved with a variety of techniques, including linguistic and thematic turns. In punk music the lack of attention to musicality and the concept of anti-aesthetic achieved this

social rebellion whose influence persists to the present day.¹⁵ Explicit references to the previous punk bands appear in *Ciudad Rayada*, for example, when the protagonist, Kaiser, hitches a ride with a drummer whose van was covered with graffiti. “LEGALIZACIÓN, ¡YA!, ¡EL GOBIERNO NO PUEDE IMPEDIR KE NOS DIVIRTAMOS! FIGHT THIS BULLOCKS [sic] ” (150). Bollocks harkens back to the Sex Pistols’ only studio album, “Never Mind the Bollocks, Here’s the Sex Pistols”. The iconography from punk still has a grip on the rebellious youth in Spain and is linked to struggles for individual freedoms that are restricted by government policies. Thematically the desire to smoke marijuana (in public) butts up against the law that prohibits it. Linguistically, intentional misspelling and the use of the letter ‘K’ is very often employed as transgressive linguistic tools by Mañas. Juan Angel Juristo, however, does not see the ‘K’ in such a positive light. “Si esta novela se hubiese publicado en ediciones de literatura de kiosko, con k, nuestro autor no poseería la jerarquía que se le supone, pero estaría, de seguro, donde le corresponde” (1). Politically and historically, one form of rebellion is indifference, apathy and ignorance. Another is active participation in defying the rules in effect.

Botellón, Hachís, Expo and Olympics

Matthew Marr explores sociopolitical rebellion in his article that compares Mañas’ *Historias del Kronen* to the novels of an iconic writer from an earlier generation, Ernest Hemingway, specifically to his novel *The Sun Also Rises*. What’s important isn’t just that the “novels both embrace excessive drinking and drug use as devices that contribute stylistically to a kind of accelerated narrative rhythm” (128), but rather the underlying conclusion from this connection. “The Lost Generation and Generation X, though vastly separated by time and space, coalesce in *Historias del Kronen* and *The Sun Also Rises* around remarkably parallel sociopolitical concerns: anxieties which involve, at their core, government’s attempts to curtail time-honored, culturally-inscribed forms of festive overindulgence” (129). While the ‘festive overindulgence’ in *The Sun Also Rises* relates to alcohol, the individual’s right to partake in legalized drugs, such as marijuana, is the issue in Mañas’ texts. *Historias del Kronen* “contains a politically informed discourse linking government’s increased vigilance and control of intoxicating substances to political trends which, as they expand, inevitably promise to erode additional liberties and even the Spanish cultural identity at large” (140). By integrating themselves more and more into the European Union, Spain’s self-determination is imperiled. For example, the recent ban of smoking in almost all enclosed public spaces is part of an EU-wide movement to completely ban indoor smoking; beforehand Spain had been considered one of the easiest places in the EU to smoke. With the ban comes the loss of traditional cultural activities such as eating tapas, drinking wine and smoking inside of bars and restaurants.

Marr bases his comparative work on the sociopolitical rebellion of the two generations against the restriction of an individual’s freedom to (over)consume mind-altering substances. In

¹⁵ Although the same questions of co-optation by the market surface. For an up-to-date example: The Sex Pistols have an official webpage, www.sexpistolsofficial.com, where you can purchase a *Never Mind the Bullocks* t-shirt for \$29.95 or a lithograph of *God Save the Queen* for \$100.00 that comes with a certificate of authenticity. They also have an official Myspace page.

the United States of Hemingway's Lost Generation it was the federal prohibition of alcohol, which lasted until 1933. In Spain the loose government policies concerning drug and public alcoholic consumption that were enacted after the death of Franco clashed in the 1990s with Spanish integration into the European community.¹⁶ The Spanish government led by the Socialists helped set the tone for a permissive attitude towards drugs and alcohol that they then later overturned.

One of its (PSOE) earliest measures, in the year after coming to office, was to legalize the consumption of narcotics both in public and private.¹⁷ It was not until 1992 that the government modified its policy and made public, but not private, consumption an offense. (Hooper 152)

The Socialist government's decision to ban public consumption of drugs in 1992 directly affected young people like the characters in *Historias del Kronen*, and was in part a response to widespread drug use among younger people. Their reaction to a ban on smoking cigarettes inside of discotecas and bars would certainly have been highly critical and incredulous.

Earlier in the novel the reader witnesses the young characters engaged in the traditional *botellón*, drinking *litros* and smoking *hachís* in Parque de las Avenidas. By Carlos' description, this is a common occurrence. "Para fumar vamos casi siempre al parquecito de la plaza de toros pero hoy, como hay concierto, hay maderos por todas partes y decidimos ir al Parque de las Avenidas" (53). Their jeopardized social ritual takes place in the public sphere, not the private one. Some of the characters in *Historias* express concern that decisions such as the one to ban smoking marijuana and *hachís* or to drink alcohol in public places are symbolic losses of independence which will lead to a more homogenized nation and loss of autonomy. Miguel, one of the characters in *Historias*, explains what the consequences to becoming more European are:

Si es que esto es Europa: el cinturón de seguridad, prohibido fumar porros, prohibido sacar litros a la calle [...] Al final, ya veréis, vamos a acabar bebiendo horchata pasteurizada y comiendo jamón serrano cocido. Yo es que alucino. Encima, todos los españoles contentísimos con ser europeos, encantados con que la Seat, la única marca de coches española, la compre Volksvaguen, encantados con que los ganaderos tengan que matar vacas para que no den más leche ... Así estamos todos con los socialistas: bajándonos los pantalones para que nos den bien por el culo los europeos, uno detrás del otro ... (204)

Miguel's monologue details in vulgar language some of the restrictions (trite as they may be) which encroach upon individual liberties and ridicules the legislation that attempts to minimize and ultimately eliminate all public risks. Hence the joke about eventually drinking pasteurized

¹⁶ Spain joined the EC (now the European Union) in 1986.

¹⁷ John Hooper notes in a footnote on page 152 that "so far as cannabis was concerned, the reform did no more than reaffirm a previously little-known peculiarity of the law. Even under Franco, the possession of small quantities for personal consumption was not an offence."

horchata and eating cooked *jamón serrano*. While these are matters of culture, the economic aspect is a much more dramatic example of the loss of the country's autonomy in certain matters. The irony of SEAT being bought by a foreign company is reflected in Miguel's diatribe. SEAT is an acronym for *Sociedad Española de Automóviles de Turismo* and was the leading Spanish car manufacturer since 1967. In 1990 the German Volkswagen Group bought 100% of the company. What is conveniently not mentioned is that SEAT was initially started with an investment from Fiat, a foreign car manufacturer, or that Fiat had a large percentage of ownership of the company until the 1980s. The perceived loss of self-determination and identity in Spain is expressed by the young character, Miguel. Mañas suggests that just as Spain is losing some of its autonomy and identity in an effort to unite with the greater body of Europe, the young people fear losing their individual freedoms.

What the characters do to combat this entrenching effect is engage in personal rebellions which challenge the prescribed permissible actions. At the end of their *botellón*, for example, the question arises about what to do with the empty bottles.

- ¿Qué hacemos con los litros?
- Bah. Déjalos ahí. No seas tan europeo.
- Ahí quedan. (60)

This small and somewhat comical defiance reflects a desire especially on Miguel's part to resist imposed social structures which he deems to be 'European'. With respect to the drug culture and in particular smoking marijuana and *hachís*, their conversations revolve around Amsterdam as a mythical drug haven. In addition to yearning to travel to Amsterdam, they also argue that Spain should adopt its policies. Carlos states, "Joder. Lo que hay que hacer es legalizar el jachís. Como en Amsterdam" (62). If European countries are going to become more similar, this is the direction advocated by Carlos and his friends.

Miguel fulfills the role of the socially aware friend who contrasts with Carlos' apathetic political stance, lack of work ethic (or need to work), and disinterest in the Spanish economy. Miguel is knowledgeable about the economic difficulties already at hand in Spain in 1992; he describes his struggles selling insurance and the disparities between his life and Carlos' life.

Tú estás en tu chaletito de la Moraleja, con tu piscinita y tu esclava, la tailandesa ésa, pero yo estoy como un cerdo currando, intentando vender seguros de mierda, y, ¿qué pasa? Que como todo va mal ahora, como no hay dinero, lo último que quiere la gente es gastarse las pelás en seguros, y yo me jodo mientras todo el dinero, ¿para dónde va? Para Europa, que está comprando el país. Y a mí eso no me gusta. Yo paso de ser europeo y paso de tener que hablar en inglés y beber horchata pasteurizada. Me niego. (204)

With his comfortable lifestyle in lush la Moraleja provided by his parents, Carlos does not need to worry about the rise in imports, the slowed GDP growth, the contraction of the Spanish economy in the final quarter of the year, 18% unemployment, a weakened global position and

persistent inflation.¹⁸ All of his expenses are paid for by his parents (his father and mother both work). Miguel reflects a young Spaniard's concerns about his financial situation and also his suspicious attitude and critique regarding the Maastricht Treaty (the pathway to the European Union and eventually the Euro) with his comment, "que está comprando el país".

The criticism flies in the face of the prosperity of the 1980s and the grandiose events taking place in Spain in 1992. As Teresa Vilarós states:

(E)n un sentido local es el fin de los acontecimientos culturales del 92, y no el tratado de 1993, el que da término a la fiesta transicional y pone la euforia pasada en perspectiva. El año 1992 marcará por otra parte el inicio de la incertidumbre económica, que contrasta con el crecimiento avasallador de la renta per cápita y con el potencial inversor de la época de los ochenta. (*El mono* 3)

This novel takes place at the crossroads of economic success and national euphoria for Spain. While Carlos and some of his friends are ignorant of or indifferent to these impending changes, other characters anticipate the negative and foreboding future taking place behind the facade of the Olympics, the Expo and the economic uptick. As Miguel puts it, "Si es que todo está muy mal. Mucha Expo y mucha olimpiada pero en Madrid no hay dinero" (205). Appearances suggest continuing financial strength and global significance for Spain, whereas serious problems are bubbling beneath the surface and in particular for Madrid. Miguel displays a prescient wariness of the Europeanization of Spain.

Another character who has to work to support himself is Manolo; he is the friendly bartender at the Kronen and part-time partygoer with the group. He also laments the distinction between his obligations and those of Carlos and a few of his fortunate friends:

(Manolo): Qué bien vivís, hijoputas. Mientras los demás curramos para ahorrar unas pelillas para pagarnos el verano, vosotros ya tenéis el chaletito esperando a que os dignéis aparecer, tronco. Qué puta suerte tenéis [...]
(Carlos): Es la vida, Manolo. Los hay que nacen con estrellas y los hay que nacen estrellados. (177)

Again the mention of the summer *chaletito* surfaces as a symbol of Carlos' decadent lifestyle and inherited privileges. Yet while Carlos attributes his economic advantages to being born lucky, other narratives in the novel sustain the belief that the divisions of class and the distribution of wealth has to do with social and historical processes and not solely are a matter of being born into it. Implicit inequalities in the economic system show that while Carlos has the luxury of not having to work and reveling in his laziness, his friends work very hard for very little benefit.

¹⁸ These are the economic concerns highlighted by the OECD in its report on Spain in 1992. <http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/fulltext/1093241e.pdf?expires=1334181593&id=id&accname=ocid195467&checksum=3856F76AA6F326743C21DCEF7E82E5B6>

Another example of economic challenges comes from Miguel's girlfriend, Celia. She describes the catch-22 of the modern Spanish economy; in order to get a job, you must have experience, and in order to get experience, you must first get a job.

Ya lo sabes que a mí no me hace nada de gracia, ahora que estoy intentando buscar trabajo. Es que es un círculo vicioso. Para encontrar trabajo, te piden experiencia profesional y, como no la tienes, no puedes conseguir el trabajo y no puedes adquirir la experiencia. Y así no sales nunca. (205)

This is in response to Carlos' admonishment of Miguel's reluctance to talk about topics other than his struggles with work and the economy. Celia's situation exhibits the absurdity of her job hunt and serves as another critique of the current reality facing many Spanish youths in 1992.

The many struggles and economic difficulties demonstrated by Miguel, Celia, Manolo and other characters are in stark contrast to what Carlos encounters in his daily life. Mañas' portrayal of Carlos' desire to avoid any discussion of social issues appears cliché and naive. Miguel deconstructs one by one the 'sex, drugs and rock and roll' attitude:

(Miguel): ¿De qué quieres que hablemos? A ver.

(Carlos): De sexo, de drogas y de rocanrol.

(Miguel): Vale. Te voy a hablar de sexo, de drogas y de rocanrol. De sexo: resulta que tengo una novia buenísima y cachondísima, que me pone a cien y con quien me encanta follar, pero no puedo hacerlo cuando quiero porque resulta que ella vive en su casa con sus viejos y yo, con los míos, lo cual podría solucionarse si tuviera un buen trabajo. Pero de esto, claro, no se puede hablar con el señor Carlos. Hablemos ahora de drogas: me encantan, me encanta estar colocado, pero resulta que para eso tengo que tener dinero, y mi dinero no se lo pido a papá, como el señor Carlos, sino que tengo que ganármelo en el trabajo. Pero de esto tampoco se puede hablar. Hablemos ahora de rocanrol: me vuelve loco, es cojonudo, y ahora necesito comprarme un amplificador bueno, pero para ello necesito dinero, y el dinero no crece en los árboles...(205)

Miguel's logical argument stands in opposition to Carlos' insulated world as it highlights that each activity depends upon money and time, which Carlos enjoys in abundance. On the contrary, Miguel must desist from participating in these recreational pursuits in order to participate in them, ironically. This narrative demonstrates how economic realities can restrict an individual's access to recreational activities and liberties, which ties in to the Europeanization of Spain and the eventual adoption of the Euro.

A consistent theme throughout the novel is the social pressure exerted upon Carlos from all directions, the sermons which badger him to grow up, get a job, stop living off of his parents' wealth and quit the excessive partying. Manolo, Miguel and Celia are but a few of the characters more or less the same age as Carlos who admonish his selfish, egotistical and possibly dangerous behavior and lazy demeanor. The women with whom Carlos maintains sexual relationships

rebuke his lack of independence and motivation. When Nuria, one of his female friends, asks Carlos if he plans to get a job, he responds:

(Carlos): Yo, mientras no le falte dinero a mi padre, estoy tranquilo. Tengo mi pequeño sueldo de heredero potencial.

(Nuria): Pero no puedes vivir así toda tu vida. En algún momento tendrás que independizarte y vivir por tu cuenta. (147)

Carlos speaks openly about his plan to leach off of his father's money and rely on his inheritance, in defiant opposition to the calls to '*independizarse*'. This character reflects a number of young people in capitalist societies who can fall back on the economic triumphs of past family members and paints a picture of his family as enabling his behavior. Carlos lacks the incentives to go out on his own financially.

His reaction to being instructed by others to 'grow up' is to walk away or shut down the conversation, demonstrating a lack of maturity and reluctance to entertain contrasting viewpoints. The repeated admonishments of Carlos hint at a critical authorial stance with regard to Carlos' spoiled lifestyle; while there are certainly positive representations of popular culture and the drug culture in this novel, ultimately the repetitive critical statements directed at Carlos from all parts of society imply an unfavorable portrayal. When Nuria tells Carlos, "No se puede ser como tú y tus amigos durante toda la vida. No sois más que hijos de papá, niños monos que no tenéis nada que hacer más que gastaros el dinero de vuestros padres en copas y en drogas" (147), many readers probably agree with this sentiment denouncing Carlos' "pequeña vida egoísta" (148). The alternative rhetorical position is stated frequently, questioning Carlos' stance on working, family and money.

El abuelo, Traditional Spain, Television and Los sermones de siempre

There are many textual examples that support a reading of *Historias* as concerned with sociopolitical and historical anxieties, despite some of the young characters' attitudes of apathy and unconcern. Generational tensions are rooted in divergences of traditional beliefs with the contemporary time periods, evident in Carlos' relationship with his father and grandfather and other older characters. Carlos characterizes these generations as out of touch with the current times. "Los viejos son personajes del pasado, fósiles. Hay una inadecuación entre ellos y el tiempo que les rodea. Son como fantasmas, como películas o fotos de un álbum viejo y lleno de polvo. Estorbos" (47). Photographs in a dust-covered album are an apt metaphor for the previous generations according to his perspective, implying the past was photography and the present is a different representational form of media. Carlos' depiction of the older generation is at odds with his *abuelo*'s astute observations which we will analyze shortly, but does coincide with his nostalgic, traditional and antiquated viewpoints, such as celebrating the relegation of women to the house and married couples living with their families. These are examples of the *abuelo*'s ideas which do not conform with the prevailing thought in Spain. Carlos' cruelty also comes to light on the subject of older people. "Malditos viejos. Habría que implantar la

eutanasia obligatoria a los cincuentaycinco” (54). The callousness of this statement shocks the reader, yet the intense pain of his *abuelo* and will to die does support a case for euthanasia, albeit not obligatory.

On a visit to his grandfather and great aunt, Carlos suffers through an interminable and yet prescient diatribe, introducing a host of topics unpleasant for Carlos but revealing to the reader. Ironically, when Carlos first arrives, his great aunt Sara warns him of the dangers of the new generation of Spaniards and recounts how she was recently robbed by three young hooligans. This reproach, unknowingly to Sara, describes many of Carlos’ attributes:

Hay que tener mucho cuidado, hijo, porque hay gente muy mala por la calle, mucho drogadictos que roban a los viejos para drogarse. La última vez que salí a hacer la compra me vinieron tres gamberros y me dijeron que si no les daba dinero, me iban a dar paliza. [...] Si es que los jóvenes de hoy ya no tienen nada de respeto, no piensan más que en drogarse. Hay muy mala gente, hijo. Tenéis que tener todos mucho cuidado. (80-81)

Carlos has no need to rob older people to feed his drug habit, since his parents are wealthy and provide him with enough money to purchase drugs when needed, but he does engage in other forms of brutal violence and takes drugs daily. The story of Sara being robbed by three young thugs provokes no response in Carlos. As for the drugs, after leaving his grandfather’s house the first thing he does is head to Kronen, the bar where he and his friends spend time and the namesake of the novel, to finish a drug deal. “Al salir a la calle, me meto en el coche y me voy al Kronen, a ver si Manolo me tiene ya los dos gramos para el fin de semana” (87). I read this lack of commentary about his great aunt’s plight and his need to get high as an invitation for the reader to criticize Carlos’ actions and attitudes. Carlos has cultivated a tool for dealing with his feelings, and that is to be indifferent to the outside world and refuse to be empathetic. He has the capability, evident when he lies to his grandfather about having to meet up with friends; “Hay decepción en la cara del viejo” (87). Carlos is adept at understanding other characters’ motives and emotions, but suppresses the emotional connection, instead using his talent to manipulate others. This is the last time he sees his grandfather, who shortly thereafter passes away.

The reader witnesses Carlos’ apathy during his one-sided conversation with his grandfather, a sermon of traditional, sometimes antiquated values and a perceptive denouncement of some of the social ills plaguing contemporary Spain. Some of his outdated beliefs include the need to limit the proliferation of females working outside of the home and the dissolution of the nuclear family. He also talks about his past experiences, a historically rooted narrative heard all too often by Carlos. One of the commonly cited lines from this novel comes from Carlos’ reaction to his grandfather recounting the suffering their family went through during the Civil War. Carlos: “Las viejas historias del pasado. El pasado siempre es aburrido” (83). The full quote is the following:

El viejo comienza a soltar el rollo de la guerra. Habla de cómo su madre se murió de hambre, de cómo su padre le dieron el paseo los rojos, de cómo fumaba las

colillas que recogía del suelo y hacía las colas de aprovisionamiento. Las viejas historias del pasado. El pasado siempre es aburrido. (83)

Carlos' indifference to the tragedies of his great-grandparents and grandfather might be sickening to the reader, especially the Spanish reader who remembers personally the terrible pains of the Civil War. It is clear from the citation that Carlos has heard the same stories told by his grandfather, over and over again. Presentism rears its ugly head; the stories of Spain's past mean very little to our protagonist. Yet maybe one should not be so harsh to judge Carlos; later in the one-sided conversation he maintains with Carlos, the *abuelo* observes, "Pero no te quiero aburrir con mis historias de viejo." Carlos responds, "No me aburres, abuelo" (83-84). Carlos placates his grandfather despite the obvious repetitive nature of his grandfather's narrative. This is one of Carlos' few moments of contact with 'his' Spanish past; one can read his reluctance to connect as possibly a result of how removed he is from these stories (almost seventy years later), or the medium through which the past is presented. Many of the stories his grandfather tells would have a dramatically different effect if they were disguised in graphic movies or another genre which speaks more to the young generation represented in this novel, who prefer television and film to newspapers and poetry.

At the end of another long *sermón* from his grandfather, *el abuelo* breaks down and starts sobbing. Gonzalo Navajas comments that "Carlos observes events and situations in a neutral and remote manner without ever making value judgments about them" (6), and the following passage reinforces this statement:

'Tenéis que estudiar mucho porque la gente de tu generación lo tiene muy difícil. Sois demasiados y la competencia va a ser feroz. El otro día estaba releyendo una novela de un inglés, Juixli, que se titula Mundofeliz, una de estas pocas novelas que leo últimamente porque ahora sólo me intereso por la teología, ya sabes. Es un retrato terrible del mundo en que vais a vivir...No hay más que ver en qué se ha convertido Madrid. La ciudad moderna es monstruosa, Carlos. Yo todavía me acuerdo cuando era joven y vivía cerca de la Puerta de Toledo en una finca con caballos y animales. Todo se lo llevó la guerra, claro. Es terrible el paso del tiempo, no te lo puedes imaginar, Carlos. Aún me acuerdo de cuando era crío y mírame ahora, hecho un cascajo. Te juro que si alguien me asegurara que si bebía este vaso de agua me moría ahora, me lo bebería de un trago sin dudar. Esto es terrible, hijo, pero perdóname. No quiero deprimirte con mis historias del viejo.'

El viejo está llorando como un crío: *un espectáculo lamentable*. (Italics are mine 81-82)

On the one hand, Carlos' reaction is mixed; the use of the word '*lamentable*', or 'pitiful', shows his revulsion and emotional reaction to the situation. *El abuelo* desperately wants to die, desperately wants to be young again, and the baring of his soul to Carlos is one of the few, if any, moments about which any value judgment is made by Carlos. Yet even this value judgment

comes with a catch: to Carlos, the sight of his grandfather sobbing like a baby is a spectacle or a show. In a world of multimedia bombardment, this word can imply a distancing between the participant and the observer to an extent that it causes little to no emotional response on the observer's part. Carlos hardly reacts, and he does nothing to help calm his grandfather in end; on the contrary, he leaves his *abuelo* without finishing the visit and lies about where he's going next. He coldly leaves his grandfather's house and heads straight for the bar where his friends hang out to pick up drugs and forget everything he just did and heard.

Nevertheless, the grandfather's account of the world that Carlos and his generation inhabit is not presented as the mere ramblings of a senile old man. His perceptive analysis of contemporary Spain touches upon the collapse of the traditional family and its consequences, the impact of television on the family, and the dehumanization of the modern citizen in a metropolis such as Madrid. Ubiquitous television sets and *telediarios* according to *el abuelo* are the death of the family.

La televisión es la muerte de la familia, Carlos. Antes, la hora de comer y la hora de cenar eran los momentos en los que la familia se reunía para hablar y para comentar lo que había pasado durante el día. Ahora las familias se sientan alrededor de la tele; no hay comunicación. La familia se está resquebrajando como célula social. (84-85)

His representation of the modern family's lunchtime traditions find their counterpart in Carlos and his family. The reader witnesses time and time again how during lunch no one in the family speaks and the television and the *telediarios*, the news, are the focus of attention. "Nadie habla durante la comida porque estamos todos viendo el telediario" (28). When Carlos does attempt to break this rhythm, his father scolds him. "Durante la comida, le cuento chistes al enano y nos reímos hasta que el viejo dice que nos callemos, que no puede oír el telediario" (208). Even the playful behavior of Carlos and his brother, impeding their father from hearing the news, is not allowed to continue. Familial communication is repressed as the daily news stories trump conversation and interaction.

These daily *telediarios* reflect the spectacle that has become the combination of news, especially wars, and visual images capturing the gory details and trauma alien to the viewer. "El telediario, sin guerras, no sería lo mismo: sería como un circo romano sin gladiadores" (28). What attracts Carlos in particular to these news shows is the violence and the simplicity of the narratives presented in short clips:

En la tele están hablando de los juegos olímpicos de Barcelona y parece ser que Felipe González va a pasear la antorcha olímpica de un lado a otro de la Moncloa. Ya hablan menos de Yugoslavia. La verdad es que es una guerra de segunda. La del Golfo, con los moros, era más espectacular. Además, estaba mucho más claro quiénes eran los buenos y quiénes los malos. (66)

Stylistically the short, choppy sentences and quick shift from one topic to the next in Carlos' description parrots the form of the television news show, with its fast pace, flash of images and

shift from one story to the next without much in-depth analysis. Additionally the reduction of, for example, the Gulf War to the classic good guys versus bad guys is a sharp jab at the many one-sided news stories. The spectacular Gulf War, with its night-time bomb flashes and pervasive media coverage, brings to mind Baudrillard's *The Gulf War did not Take Place*, a critical piece on the 'virtual' war being recreated and transmitted to audiences across the globe. The repetitive nature of news cycle establishes what is important, focusing on the Olympic torch's journey to Barcelona, Jordi Pujol, the Expo in Sevilla, and the occasional tragedy. History now moves at a speedy pace, and some narratives are left in, others not so noticeably excluded.

The manner in which Carlos narrates the news stories demonstrates how he engages with them, with distance, indifference and pleasure. He is a spectator and not an actor in History. They serve as a source of entertainment, not one of information, discussion and analysis.

Nos sentamos a comer y vemos el telediario, que hoy está entretenido. Nueve inmigrantes polacos han muerto en un incendio en Móstoles. En China ha habido trescientos muertos por una inundación. Y sigue la guerra en Yugoslavia: parece que la situación se normaliza. (100)

Tragedies resulting in innocent deaths act as a stimulus of delight, the news another form of recreation for Carlos. Meanwhile, these are historically accurate events that took place in Madrid in 1992, helping to contextualize the narrative taking place in the novel. Paradoxically, one of the few news stories relevant to Carlos is met with the same dispassionate response.

El siguiente reportaje es sobre el problema de la droga. Los drogadictos comienzan a los veinte años y terminan a los treinta: una corta carrera llena de sombras. Un yonqui, de espaldas a la cámara, hace unas declaraciones: ahora, el que tiene billetes, se mete coca, o, si toma caballo, se lo mete con plata, lo fuma, ¿sabes? Ya cada vez hay menos que llegan a la vena. (132)

This prophetic news report predicts Carlos' eventual downfall, yet provokes no emotion or commentary from him. The novel we are reading serves as another story in the narrative concerning drug addiction and young Spaniards, one that complements, molds and challenges pre-existing conceptions.

Mañas is clearly indicting 1990s Spain. When the grandfather mentions Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* ('*Mundofeliz*'), the reader familiar with this novel will immediately see the connections between its celebrated representations of dystopia, societal conformity and desperation and the world of *Historias del Kronen*. The grandfather realizes the level of dehumanization brought about by the new world, and how much Spain has changed since the Civil War. Carlos' grandfather and his generation participated in and were witness to the incredible transformation of Spain from an agriculturally and rurally based society after the Civil War to an industrialized urbanized country.

Yet in spite of (or because of) these wide-ranging social, political and cultural changes, his *abuelo* realizes the trials brought forth by this new world.

Si es que vosotros no os dais cuenta de la suerte que tenéis: no habéis vivido la guerra, ni la posguerra, ni la dictadura. Pero por otra parte no os envidio porque el mundo que os va a tocar vivir es cada vez más deshumanizado. Yo no lo viviré, pero lo estoy viendo ya. Antes, en mi época, había otra manera de tratar a la gente, había un cierto calor y un respeto... (83)

While this new generation of Spaniards was certainly fortunate to not have to suffer through war or the dictatorship, each generation has their own burden to carry, and one of the greatest afflictions at the turn of the century involved the ability to navigate the internet, television, film, and all of the other representations that filter reality, while maintaining one's humanity. Carlos might not realize or understand this burden, but this is not to say that Mañas is blind to the dehumanization of the 20th century. On the contrary, the portrayal of Carlos and 1992 Spain is not one of praise and glorification, but rather alienation, depression, and emotional elision. This novel might appeal to the young Spaniard trying to find his or her way in the 1990s, but it also criticizes the society and the culture it represents. Carlos is the embodiment of the *mundo deshumanizado* that his grandfather fears and does not envy. The reader is invited to witness firsthand his emotional detachment and makes his or her own judgments.

To a certain extent the disconnect manifest in Carlos and some of his friends has to do with their age. When asked by his grandfather if he has a girlfriend, Carlos replies in the negative.

[El abuelo:] Pues ya es hora de que vayas pensando en el futuro.

[Carlos:] Aún queda tiempo, abuelo.

[Abuelo:] A ti te queda tiempo, es verdad; a mí, no. (86)

Each generation has a different experience with the passage of time, and while Carlos' grandfather is at the end of his lifetime, Carlos' life has just begun. He has the luxury of not having to worry about the future, partly due to the modern comforts he has come to enjoy and also by merely being young. This comment also reflects the temptation to forever remain in the present, especially for Carlos, who resists maturity and the inevitable march of time. Symbolically the rejection of past/future is a rejection of Spain's terrible past and the need to recuperate its stories and a better future brought on by democracy, a European Spain and progress.

Overtly violent films and books which explore the suspension of reality, such as *Clockwork Orange* and Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* and its protagonist, Pat Bateman (Pat Beitman and *Americansaico*, according to Carlos and his friends), contribute to Carlos' and other friends' attempts at disengaging from reality and avoiding any thought of possible consequences to their actions. Carlos' description of his current state of mind is a chilling account of the influence they have had on him. "Últimamente tengo ideas algo macabras en la cabeza. Debe de ser por ver tantas películas de psicópatas. Comienzo a preguntarme qué se sentiría matando a alguien. Según Beitman, es como un subidón de adrenalina brutal, como una primera raya. Sonríó" (134). This reflection sets up the final scene of the novel (not including the epilogue) when, under the influence of drugs and alcohol and through the intoxicated first-person lens, the

reader witnesses Carlos murder or accidentally kill his friend Fierro. Roberto, in a conversation with his psychologist in the epilogue, tries to rationalize Fierro's death as an accident but comes to the conclusion that it was intentional. "Matar a alguien era una idea que Carlos tenía metida en la cabeza desde hacía tiempo. Aquello le excitaba y no dejaba de darme la coña. Sobre todo después de leer *Americana*" (237). Constant mentions of *American Psycho* and the protagonist Pat Bateman fall in line with the dehumanization of mankind exhibited by Carlos and explored in *Brave New World*.

How does one get into the mindset to kill someone? As Roberto says to his psychologist, "Imagínese que es una novela, o una mala película...Eso era lo que Carlos decía siempre: que la vida era como una mala película. Le encantaba el cine..." (237). Carlos' advice to Roberto makes an impression, provoking him to participate in dangerous activities like driving in the opposite direction of the normal flow of traffic and talking about hardcore violent acts humorously and without remorse.

-Vamos a degollarles y a serrarles los brazos -Roberto se ríe.

-Tú, desde que has comenzado a leer al colega Pat, te has vuelto tan violento como él, ¿eh, Roberto?

Roberto se vuelve a reír y Miguel y Celia nos miran, extrañados. (56)

However, for Roberto it is ultimately impossible to cut himself off from other people and reality; Carlos experiences no such difficulties. In one of the first scenes of the novel, Carlos describes his ability to detach himself from the world. "Hay gente a mi alrededor, pero he desconectado con la realidad" (22). First Carlos, due to the drugs he's taken and alcohol he's drunk, feels as if he were alone even as he is surrounded by people. Being thrown out of the bar does not shake him from this dream-like state as his life mirrors the movies. "Me caigo entre dos coches pero no me hago daño aunque, al restregarme la nariz con la mano, noto que me sangra. Me quedo unos instantes mirando la mano y me asombro de lo poco real que es el color de la sangre. Es como si estuviera viendo una mala película" (23). The surge of blood from his nose accentuates the irreality of the moment instead of awakening him from this slumberous consciousness.

Carlos expresses similar sensations throughout the novel, as in his sexual encounter with Amalia. "Me río satisfecho. Ha sido igual que una peli porno" (78). Comparing their act to a pornographic movie highlights the denigration of the female, using her as a sexual object, and thus his ability to separate himself from other people even while sexually engaged with them. It also sets a pattern for future actions which replicate the barrier between Carlos and the outside world. Even his best friend Roberto acknowledges he was nothing more than an actor in Carlos' movie. "Nos veía a todos como si fuéramos personajes de una película, de su película. Pero él era como si no estuviera ahí. No le gustaba vincularse afectivamente..." (237). This distaste for affection is apparent in the final episode at Fierro's house when Roberto and Carlos masturbate one another on Carlos' suggestion. However, when Roberto attempts to kiss him, Carlos vehemently rejects him. The frontier between love and sexual pleasure, and between homosexuality and abusive heterosexuality, is clearly delineated by Carlos.

Reality, according to Mañas (and some postmodern theorists), has been replaced by the audiovisual. Our realities are mediated so much by television and film that the original has been

replaced by the copy and there is no distinguishing between the two and there is no possibility of recuperating the original. As Carlos describes it:

La cultura de nuestra época es audiovisual. La única realidad de nuestra época es la de la televisión. Cuando vemos algo que nos impresiona siempre tenemos la sensación de estar viendo una película. Ésa es la puta verdad. Cualquier película, por mediocre que sea, es más interesante que la realidad cotidiana. Somos los hijos de la televisión, como dice Mat Dilon en Dragsorcauboi. (42)

Exterior experiences are subsumed by representations of reality, the frame of reference has become the movie instead of the real experience. A mediocre everyday existence regularly exposed to spectacles on television and movies induces Carlos and his friends to search for the extreme and replicate what they passively watch and take in. The detachment from the real and the bombardment of young people by media images in a country like Spain are reflected in Carlos' experiences.

Roberto and Homosexuality, Analogous readings of *Historias?* and Fierro's Death

Homosexuality, its acceptance/rejection within social circles and its subversive nature is a topic which enters into *Historias del Kronen* and many of the other novels of the GenX. It is no coincidence that one of Carlos' closest friends is a closeted homosexual. Roberto serves as a counterweight to Carlos' heterosexual normality and whereas other characters are openly gay like Fierro (who is a masochist/submissive), Roberto hides his sexuality for fear of reprisal and contempt. He also suppresses his same-sex desires in order to fit in better with the group. From Roberto's fears expressed at the end of the novel one can conclude that the other friends of the group would not accept him if he were openly gay, reflecting a societal difficulty for young homosexual males in Spain. The novel is narrated entirely in the first person except for the prologue,¹⁹ in which there is a shift to the third person and the reader witnesses the dialogue between Roberto and his psychologist. In this conversation Roberto acknowledges his sexuality and his apprehension in revealing it to the group.

(Roberto): No quería romper eso, no quería que me mirase de manera rara, ¿sabes? Ese es lo que he intentado toda mi vida. Por eso nunca les he contado a mis amigos cómo era, ni lo que sentía...

(Psicólogo): Pero eso no está bien. Tienes que aprender a aceptarte como eres. A no avergonzarte.

(Roberto): No. Si no es que me avergüence. Pero usted no les conoce. No me aceptarían. Se pasarían el día riéndose de mí y no sería lo mismo. (231)

¹⁹ This shift in perspective will be explained in more detail in a few pages.

Although homosexuality was no longer under assault by the state as it was during the Franco dictatorship, socially there were still pockets of strong resistance to gays, reflected in Roberto's confession to his psychologist. The threat of exclusion is a powerful motivator.

Early in the novel there are signs which point to Roberto's sexuality and Carlos' awareness that he is gay. One of the recurring topics for Carlos' group of friends is girls, or in their vulgar lexicon, *cerdas*. At the beginning of the novel almost everyone in the gang has a girlfriend, or multiple girlfriends in Carlos' case, and Roberto conspicuously does not. Carlos defends Roberto when others ridicule him. "¿Y a ti qué te importa si sale o no con tías? Déjale en paz. Es un problema suyo, no tuyo. El día que Roberto quiera tener una cerda, la tendrá" (12). Carlos maintains that Roberto is heterosexual, yet later on in the same conversation admits that Roberto is different; "Roberto es como es y punto. Además, calla, que aquí viene" (13). Others call Roberto "*raro*" (63) and in one scene when Carlos and Miguel propose prostituting Miguel's girlfriend Celia and other females to make money in Amsterdam, Roberto's reaction prompts suspicion.

(Celia): Bueno. Y os podríamos prostituir nosotras también, que hay mucho marica por todos lados...

(Miguel): Espera, espera. Tengamos las cosas bien claras, eh, Celia. Tú eres mi novia y yo meto, no me importa dónde, pero no me dejes meter. A mí la mierda no me la busca nadie...

-Roberto, chaval, ¿qué te pasa que te has puesto blanco?" (58)

Why would Roberto turn white unless something that Miguel had said elicited such a response? Fearful of being discovered as gay, this is an example of his secret almost coming to light.

Towards the end of the novel it becomes clear that Roberto is indeed gay, and the reader suspects that he is also in love with Carlos. In one scene, at Roberto's suggestion, they find a transvestite prostitute who performs oral copulation on Roberto and then Carlos as they sit together in the car. On a different night, Carlos utilizes Roberto's homosexuality to provoke him to drive dangerously fast and cross an intersection against the light. The episode is especially powerful because Carlos resorts to vulgar name-calling in order to influence his friend, repeatedly questioning his masculinity, yelling insults (the capitalized words and rapid speed of the dialogue adds to the pressure felt by Roberto and by proxy the reader) and eventually spurs Roberto to commit this possibly suicidal act.

(Carlos): Eres un marica, no tienes cojones.

(Roberto): Claro que tengo cojones. Tengo tantos como tú o más....

(Carlos): Bah. Historias que cuentas. No tienes cojones....

(Carlos): Eres un marica, Roberto. No tienes cojones. No puedes....

(Roberto): ¡Qué pasa! ¿¡No soy un marica!? ¡No querías emoción!" (193)

Once Roberto has sped up and thinks he has quashed Carlos' verbal abuse, Carlos orders him to stop and spin the car to face oncoming traffic. Immediately the disparaging remarks continue and Roberto succumbs to Carlos' influence.

(Roberto): ¿Estás loco? Yo paso de hacer el suicida.

(Carlos): Ves cómo eres un puto marica. Nunca serás capaz de hacer nada.

(Roberto): Mira. Deja de llamarme marica, que no viene a cuento....

(Carlos): ¡Venga, Roberto, hostias! ¡No seas tan cobarde! Eres un DÉBIL. ERES UN MARICA.

(Roberto): ¡No me grites, POR FAVOR!

(Carlos): ¡DÉBIL Y MARICA! ¡ARRANCA! ¡ARRANCA, HOSTIAS! ¡ARRANCA!

(Roberto): Que no me llames marica, joder. (194)

Knowing Roberto's sensitivity regarding his sexuality, Carlos brutally takes advantage of his best friend.

In addition to Roberto's mental torture at the hands of Carlos, there is a graphic sexual encounter at Fierro's party as the two friends masturbate one another; again the reader witnesses Roberto's manipulation and a subversive, prohibited sexual act that calls into question the separation of heterosexuality and homosexuality. In this account there are two perspectives, first the intoxicated voice of Carlos and then Roberto's conversation with his psychologist. The duality of the encounter communicates the difference in meaning of the event for each character. In Carlos' first person narrative, we are witness only to his words and all other voices are excluded from his consciousness. Carlos and Roberto are voyeurs, watching Pedro and his girlfriend have intercourse, and the reader is a voyeur as well. We deduce from the context of Carlos' statements what the characters are doing and the speed of the monologue (with gaps reflecting silence or Roberto's words) imitates the speed of their sexual encounter:

A ti, lo que pasa es que te gustan los tíos, ¿no es verdad? () Si no tiene nada de malo, Roberto. No te pongas rojo y venga, déjame tocarte. () Así. Te gusta que te acaricie así, ¿eh? La tienes también dura, cabrón. () Venga, Roberto. No me vengas con bobadas. Somos colegas, ¿no? () Así, así. Desabróchame tú también los pantalones y nos lo hacemos mutuamente. () Eso es, Roberto, eso es. Si te gusta. Si yo lo sé. Mira al Pedro enfrente cómo sigue metiendo como una bestia... () Ah, ah. Espera, no tan bruscamente. () Así, pero cuidado. Tienes que cogerme así. () Sí, así, así. () ¿A ti te gusta así, también? () Eso es, Roberto. () Más rápido, más rápido. () ¡Así! ¡Voy a correrme!, ¡voy a correrme! ¡Córrete conmigo, Roberto! () ¡Me corro!, ¡me corro! ¡Córrete tú también, coño! ¡Córrete! (220)

The appearance of a very explicit taboo homosexual act in a novel about tough, masculine characters challenges the typical notions of gay men and what topics in literature are acceptable. This erotically charged and brusque sexual act frees Roberto from his secret and his shame, temporarily. After they both reach climax, Roberto attempts to kiss Carlos. "Que no, que paso mucho de besarte en la boca. Eso es de julandrones. Vamos dentro" (220-221). Carlos disassociates their act from homosexuality and disparages gay men; this was nothing more than

another person and situation to exploit for his own sexual pleasure. From Roberto's point of view, that of a finally liberated gay man in love with his best friend, the rejection sets the stage for a disillusioning finale.

The structure of the novel is entirely dependent on Carlos' first person perspective except for the epilogue, which begins with Carlos in Santander but then migrates to the dialogue of Roberto's session with a psychologist. This is the only scene in the novel that excludes Carlos, although the conversation consistently refers back to him, and it serves as Roberto's confession. The revelations in the epilogue include Roberto's homosexuality, his love for Carlos, the acknowledgement that Carlos manipulated him as if he were a character in a movie, and his continued attraction to Carlos in spite of his destructive, powerful nature. The reader sympathizes with Roberto's situation which highlights Carlos' self-interested abuse of every other character in the novel, including his best friend. "Para mí, el que me quisiera tocar era maravilloso, no podía resistir. Pensé que al fin se había dado cuenta. Me engañaba. Él nunca me quiso, al menos no como yo le quería. Me di cuenta en cuanto quise besarle y él me dijo que era de jalandrones. Sentí tanta vergüenza..." (232).

Motivated by shame, unrequited love, or just to fit in, Roberto assists Carlos in tying up Fierro and helping pour a bottle of alcohol down Fierro's throat, the dramatic conclusion to the final scene of the novel. The characters are aware that Fierro is a diabetic and cannot drink alcohol, but this does not prevent them from forcing him to imbibe the highly sugared beverage. Fierro goes into diabetic shock and eventually dies. Critic Robert Spire reads Carlos' manipulative masterminding of Fierro's murder/accident and Roberto's self-preservation as parallel to the current political situation in Spain. "(It is difficult to ignore extratextual political echoes in all this" (5), such as the *personalismo* in the government and sacrificing of ethics for selfish reasons. Yet while Spire finds an analogy between the novel's final scene and the political corruption in 1992 Spain, I see this last episode as taking Carlos' dehumanization to its ultimate, logical conclusion: the murder of Fierro, an individual. Fierro's death is not a reflection of a state-sponsored ETA-hunting secretive death squads (GAL)²⁰ as much as it is the culmination of Carlos' insistent indifference to others' humanity. Carlos acts without any empathy for Fierro, completely alienated from feeling, and he has finally gotten the chance to reenact the violent fantasies witnessed so often in film and literature. By savagely punching Fierro and slamming his head against the wall in the ensuing chaos, under the guise of waking him up, Carlos acts as if Fierro were not a person but rather a dummy or an actor in his violent movie.

Historias del Kronen is not primarily a veiled denunciation of Spanish politicians in the 1990s; it is a self-aware exploration of a particular segment of urban Spanish youth, specifically from Madrid, born into a democracy after the country had endured forty years of dictatorship and their encounters with dehumanizing culture, their engagement or disengagement (assisted by drugs and alcohol) from reality, history, and politics, the difficulties with inheriting the past's burdens, the influence of spectacular televised images on their relationship to history and reality, and a critical evaluation of the contemporary economic and cultural situation of Spain, 1992. Fierro's death concludes the dystopic vision of contemporary experience; while the other

²⁰ *Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación*

characters are already on a path to change and maturation, there is no saving of Carlos. He avoids visiting Fierro at the hospital, does not go to the funeral, and the last time we see him he's up to the same tricks as before, on a self-destructive course without remorse or the promise of redemption.

Ciudad rayada; Mañas Purchases a Gun, Bribes, Police and Political Corruption

After the success of *Historias del Kronen*, Mañas published in rapid succession *Mensaka* in 1995, *Soy un escritor frustrado* in 1996 and finally *Ciudad rayada* in 1998. Some consider *Mensaka* and *Ciudad rayada* to be part of the *Kronen* trilogy, since thematically they continue to focus on young characters, drugs, music, film, and moderate amounts of sex and violence, each with its particular focus on the Spanish youth culture and their 'rebellions'. As we've seen earlier, the rebellions narrated in these texts have a socioeconomic component and tie in to Spanish culture, economic policies, democratic realities, and themselves are a link in the chain of historical subversive cultural products. *Ciudad* shares many of the characteristics of *Historias*, but diverges in representing firsthand the political and police corruption commonly spotted on the front pages of the national newspapers. Kaiser, the first person narrator, is on the other side of the drug world from Carlos; instead of constantly using drugs, Kaiser deals them. Although living with his father (who is notably absent for the majority of the novel) and a maid, Kaiser's goal is to branch out on his own. He has a girlfriend, is much less dehumanized and dispassionate than Carlos, and yet still revels in his youth and resists the future and growing old.

Kaiser serves as our navigator throughout the city streets, bars, clubs, outdoor concerts, *gitano* outskirts, and the Spanish countryside. The first-person narrative filtered through Kaiser's voice is replete with vulgarity, orality, mischief, digressions, rants, and a physical and psychological perspective altered through cocaine and marihuana ingestion. The protagonist frequently reveals his naïveté with statements such as the following: "Aunque también es verdad que entonces acababa de cumplir los diecisiete y no me daba cuenta de muchas cosas que ahora, con dieciocho, me parecen súper obvias porque he madurado" (36). His story is a 1990s version of the 'coming of age' tale, although by believing that by turning eighteen he has 'matured' or come of age shows he still is young and credulous. While what Kaiser recounts to the reader seems to be accurate and he does not manipulate the events, he is somewhat of an unreliable narrator due to various factors; he narrates while intoxicated, his immaturity and bravado tint the narrative, and the reader is invited to judge Kaiser's perspective on the events he narrates.

As the opening lines of the novel make clear, Kaiser's anticipated audience is a contemporary, a "tú" who is familiar with Mañas and his novels, setting up a clear distinction between reality and fiction. By introducing the author as a character in the novel in the opening lines, Mañas is highlighting the fictionality of the text from the very beginning. "Mira, tío, tú no sabes nada de mí, vale. Y si sabes algo es porque has leído una de las novelas del Mañas, que se dedica a contar historias de los demás, pero te aseguro que hay un mogollón de cosas que exagera y otras tantas que el muy listo se calla" (9). From the very beginning Kaiser's narrative voice sets the stage for an informal literary register and draws us into the narration. Mañas is also playing with the reader by having the main character question the validity and reliability of

his authorial voice on the first page of the novel. Kaiser suggests he has his own dirt on Mañas. “Anda que no sé yo cosas sobre él que nunca cuenta, y te podría contar más de una” (9). Kaiser proceeds to tell us about an intoxicated Mañas wanting to buy a gun (*una pipa*) from Kaiser to protect his family. ‘El Mañas’ is described as ‘*súper enzarzado*’, ‘*el muy payaso*’ and “un tío de esos que nunca mira a la cara y por lo tanto de quien no te puedes fiar ni un pelo” (10). According to the protagonist of our novel, the author of our novel isn’t the least bit trustworthy. Who are we to believe? Typically when entering into a novel there is the implicit suspension of disbelief agreed upon by reader and author; in this case, the veracity of the novel is put into question immediately by the impossibility of the author purchasing a gun from one of the characters in his novel, as well as the unlawful act it represents. The representation of Mañas also has its humorous side when Kaiser admits to taking a liking to the author. “Un poco más simpático de lo normal porque me impresiona la gente que escribe, todo tengo que decirlo; claro que para escribir como él, casi cualquiera” (10). The informed reader will know the repeated criticism of Mañas’ literary aesthetic and the accusation that anyone could write as he does.

The majority of the novel takes place in Madrid, although the protagonist does take a trip outside of the metropolis which illuminates and contrasts the countryside and the city. Though never explicit, we can deduce from certain textual hints that the year is 1996, because the Olympics in Barcelona and the World’s Fair in Sevilla are both mentioned as past events, and the Socialists have lost the election (which happened in 1996 after twelve years in office). That would put Kaiser’s birth year around 1978, which marks the year of the Spanish Constitution; it also would include him within the new generation of Spanish youth who never experienced first-hand the Franco regime, and whose only memories are of a democratic Spain. He is representative of a small percentage of the Spanish youth, immersed in the drug world as a dealer and an occasional user. Kaiser contends that he is a man, has already achieved anything a man can, and if you don’t believe him, ask his girlfriend.²¹

Structurally, the novel is built on the suspense of the story that Kaiser begins to tell us; he is dragged by a drug-dealer to the outskirts of Madrid and he fears his life is about to end. “Luego, unos metros más allá, me quita los grillos, levanta su pipa, una Star semiautomática de nueve disparos, y yo pienso: ¡Hijo de puta! Pero tío, veo que estoy empezando mi historia por el final, y antes de continuar tengo que contarte muchas cosas...” (11-12). After this cliffhanger, Kaiser then proceeds to narrate what led up to his brush with death. The *jerga* that he employs can be alienating and difficult for the reader to understand;²² the prejudices he displays can be offensive and contribute to the reader’s distancing from the character’s opinions. Including derogatory prejudices and colloquial language intensifies the rebellious nature of the characters and the novel. The introduction of Pablo, the owner of the *El Veneciano*, a bar where the characters meet and spend time together, illustrates this point. “Pablo tendrá unos cuarenta o cincuenta tacos. Siento no ser más preciso, pero con los fósiles me pasa como con los negros, sabes, que me parecen todos iguales” (18). Kaiser’s language is inundated with slang; in this

²¹ My (somewhat) absurd portrayal of Kaiser’s posture reflects his linguistic register as well as his convictions about his standing in society and his maturation level.

²² Especially for the foreign reader, either a native speaker or a non-native speaker. The slang pertains to Spain and the young generation of the time.

case he replaces *años* with *tacos* and calls older people *fósiles*, making himself understandable but showing his youth and informal register. Also, his portrayal of black people as ‘all looking the same’ shows his ignorance.

Pablo’s character leads the reader to witness bribing of a political official, the politician’s dismissive attitude regarding the public outcry, sexist remarks and the dire economic realities facing young Spaniards in Madrid. Pablo fines one of his waitresses 5,000 *pesetas* for compulsively biting her nails and, after she mixes the wrong drink for a customer, states, “Lo siento --le dice al chaval--. Tanta niña guapa sólo sirve para una cosa...” (30). Pablo treats his employees very poorly, favoring one character in particular, Gonzalito, because his father is an influential politician. Eva Martínez explains in her work on the Generation X that unfair labor practices were common in Spain.

Estas situaciones son muy comunes en nuestro país en el que existe una realidad muy similar a la que estos personajes pintan: trabajos temporales, contratos basura y sueldos de risa. Junto a ello, como también se refleja en las novelas, la existencia de jefes que ejercen su despotismo hacia personas que están por debajo de ellos...Los datos revelan que un tercio de los jóvenes trabajaba sin contrato laboral o con uno temporal. (217)

Eva Martínez asserts that the abuse of power by bosses, as well as the tenuous employment situation in Spain, closely mirrors the picture described in these novels. While the statistics (such as 44.8% unemployment rate for 16-19 year olds in 1998)²³ give an overall feeling for the economic predicament, Mañas is highly adept at representing what it is like to be in these conditions, putting a ‘human’ face to the statistics.

Being unemployed denotes that the person is actively searching for work without success. The statistics wouldn’t include someone like Kaiser, who works outside of the legal channels. Eva Martínez (through González Blasco) explains the powerful effect that being jobless can have on a person:

Según Pedro González Blasco, el paro afecta en muchos casos a lo que se es e incide en el proceso de construcción social de la identidad de los jóvenes, por ejemplo, distanciándolos de una sociedad que ‘aparca’ a muchos de ellos sin posibilidades ciertas, lo cual les lleva a desidentificarse socialmente o a ampliar su tiempo ‘normal’ de ocio a un ocio forzado y vacío. No es extraño, por tanto que el sentimiento de fracaso, nihilismo, apatía y junto a ello el deseo desenfrenado de consumo, de divertirse, y la dependencia económica de otros [...] vayan íntimamente relacionados con la situación laboral de sus protagonistas, tal y como pasa en la realidad contemporánea. Este peterpanismo es para los personajes una situación al mismo tiempo odiada y querida... (217-218)

²³ http://www.ine.es/en/prodyser/pubweb/esp/espif/espif_en.htm

In this tense relationship of reliance and lack of responsibility, the characters in these novels struggle to find their identities. They lack direction and float from bars to their parents' houses. And when they do make enough money to survive, it becomes a symbol of reaching adulthood. Witness Kaiser's statement regarding being called *un crío* by the mother of the man who gives him a ride to *El Escorial*. "Y eso ya fue mosqueante. Sobre todo si piensas que seguro que en una semana yo ganaba más pasta que su hijo en todo un año. Es verdad que con diecisiete uno no tiene derechos legales pero NO era un crío, y si no pregúntaselo a Tula" (147). According to Kaiser two important characteristics that define a man are how much money he makes and if he is a sexually-active heterosexual. Kaiser has a similar, angry response when Gonzalito, who owes Kaiser money, challenges him: "Pero Kaiser, no te las des de malo, tío. Que eres un enano, no te tengo miedo" (89). In this case, Kaiser shoots Gonzalito in the thigh and leaves him lying on the ground; later he dies. Kaiser knows that if people do not fear him, he cannot establish his business and no one will pay him; however, the insult that sets him off and results in murder is being called a child. The portrayal of Kaiser's overreactions to perceived threats to his manhood reveals a sharp critique of masculine identities in Spain. As we saw in *Historias*, questioning someone's masculinity results in serious consequences, whether it be violence or manipulation.

Thematically *Ciudad Rayada* foregrounds Kaiser's drug-dealing in Madrid and the electronic music scene in which he is involved. The presence of politics and history is more explicit than in *Historias del Kronen*, considering one of the characters who appears is a politician. Also some of the young characters actively engage in political debate and discussion, while others resist any mention of *El Rey* or politics. And whether or not they want to talk about it, the atmosphere is full of political corruption, in the news and with Gonzalo's father, and they are intimately aware of the details of the illegitimate use of political power for personal gain. Much of the knowledge is superficial, gleaned from television, informal discussions or preconceived notions, a commentary on the level of public discourse in Spain.

One of the most critical and crucial events in *Ciudad rayada*, around which the novel revolves, is the plan to rob Gonzalito's father, who is a prominent Socialist politician in Madrid. Mao, one of the four who participate in the crime, foreshadows their botched theft when he compares their robbery to the failed coup attempt of 1981. "Ya sabes lo que pasó con lo del Tejero, ¿no? Dos buchantes y todos a cuatro patas, menos el generalote y el Suárez. Panda de aguilillas. No se llega a achantar el Monarca y tenemos generalotes para largo" (41). His belittling of the now-entrenched democratic state and the ease with which it was almost brought down, according to his portrayal, leads another one of the friends to become defensive. "Ya está éste. Que no me toques ni al Rey ni a España, eh--dice Tijuana, que era muy patriota" (41). This interaction demonstrates how Mao touches a nerve when he trivializes a tense national subject, reflecting a segment within the Generation X who are very patriotic and nationalistic.

Even the most patriotic citizen could not justify the amount of political corruption going on in Spain after the Socialists came to power. "Almost every day, it seemed, the press carried new allegations of corruption" (Hooper 65). There are a lot of peripheral mentions of political corruption in *Ciudad Rayada*, including what's being shown on television in the background. A prime example occurs when Pablo visits Gonzalito's father to bribe him. "En la tele hablaban de uno de los miles de casos de corrupción que habían salido después de lo de Roldán" (20). There is no further explanation of what was '*lo de Roldán*', only that it was a case of political

corruption. This is one example where the information is very superficial, and the burden of being informed lies with the reader. John Hooper's explanation reveals to what extent this brief comment touches upon one of the more embarrassing episodes for the government.

Nothing came even remotely close in scale to the greed of - irony of ironies - the man put in charge of the Civil Guard [...] In the seven years following his appointment in 1986, Luis Roldán amassed a personal fortune of 5 billion pesetas (\$40 million or £26 million) in kickbacks on the construction of Civil Guard premises and facilities. (65)²⁴

The depth of irony at this political situation unfolds as Gonzalito's father is outraged at the coverage of the corruption and defends his fellow politicians. In the next breath he accepts an envelope stuffed with money from Pablo, a bribe. "Un canon político, sabes, porque el otro conocía a la banda en Sanidad y le evitaba problemas con las inspecciones y le daba licencias para conciertos, movidas así" (21). Kaiser shows his familiarity with this sort of illegal dealings and expects the same of the reader, with his use of the phrase, '*sabes*'. The 'you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours' attitude manifest in this transaction reflects the level of corruption in Spain at the time.

Gonzalo, a Socialist politician, defends the policies of the current government shortly before taking the bribe.

Qué gente. Pero si es que nunca hemos estado mejor en España. Hay más riqueza que en ningún otro momento de nuestra historia. Yo no sé de qué se quejan. ¡Claro que hay paro! Igual que en los demás países. Es lo normal en las sociedades postindustriales. Pero para eso seguimos haciendo una política social. Ya se verá cuando llegue la Derecha al poder. (20)

His diatribe about the unnecessary grumbling in Spain underscores the rhetoric at the time. He explains away unemployment as a typical consequence experienced in all post-industrial countries, ignoring the statistics which show Spain's terrible plight compared to other European countries. His argument regarding the amount of wealth in Spain does not take into account the distribution of this wealth among the population and the gap between the high and low classes. Also, the reader witnesses the favorable treatment received by Gonzalito, Gonzalo's son, debunking the merit-based myth that hard work can overcome social connections.

Another example of the distrust for the state is the story of the maid who worked for Gonzalo's family, Rita, whose boyfriend supposedly has ties to the Spanish secret police, CESID.

No sé, macho, con eso de que el novio de Rita era de CESID, cosa que, por cierto, cuando lo supimos lo flipamos cantidad, sobre todo por la pinta de pringao que tenía (igual con esa pinta disimulan más). Claro que vete a saber si no eran

²⁴ Hooper mentions that Roldán is serving 28 years in prison for his crimes.

fantasías de la Rita; aunque yo, tal y como son las cosas en este país, me lo creo.
(85)

Like much of the narrative in this novel, things aren't black and white; much of the narrative comes from second-hand storytelling and speculation which casts doubt on its veracity. Kaiser's statement about the state of Spain, though, might help convince the reader of the veracity of Rita's connections. It is an assertion ripe with resignation about Spain's dysfunctional government.

But this doesn't bother Kaiser in the slightest. The human aspect does slightly, as he shows a little bit more of emotion than Carlos, the protagonist in *Historias del Kronen*. Rita reappears at the end of the novel, and hers is not a happy story. "La únika nota triste llegó más tarde, a la salida del Parke de Atracciones" (221).²⁵ Kaiser displays empathy when he and Tula are walking among a group of prostitutes and come across Rita working as a prostitute after being kicked out of Gonzalo's house for listening behind doors. "Era por lo de mi novio, ya sabes, el del CESID" (221). She tells them her plight and plan for revenge. "Yo le birlao a mi novio una de las cintas, y les va a joder vivos, ya veréis. [...] Se la voy a enviar a los periódicos, y ya verás la que se monta" (221). Tula, Kaiser's girlfriend, doesn't understand what's going on. Kaiser shows his skepticism when he mentions that a copy of the tape which Rita had promised never arrived to them. He never hears or sees Rita again, but there is an explanation for that. "Como no he vuelto a ver a Rita, pienso que es posible que la hayan desaparecido. Estas cosas pasan, sabes. Claro que yo no me quejo, porque si este país fuera de otra manera, gente como yo y mi jefe no podríamos existir" (221).

Kaiser is well aware of how distorted the country is, but doesn't want to fix it. If he did, then his line of work would be obsolete or much more difficult. Rather than blindly placing his trust in professional politicians, he takes advantage of the system for his own benefit, just as the politicians and policemen do. The violence and corruption that are beneath the surface undermine the legitimacy of the police and the politicians. While the main focus is on Kaiser and his teenage friends, the underlying tone is of widespread violence, economic problems and state corruption, all of which is manipulated by the media. One character named El Barbas is a corrupt police officer who sells drugs and eventually ends up murdered by two young kids in a botched drug deal. Kaiser is a witness to all of it. Later the next day he buys a newspaper and searches for the story; he doesn't have to go far, as it's on the front page. The headline reads, "UN POLICÍA ASESINADO EN UN CENTRO COMERCIAL DE LA ZONA NORTE" (207), and part of the news article reads as follows: "El alcalde de Madrid convocará una manifestación contra la violencia juvenil. <<No podemos seguir así. No estamos hablando de un policía muerto en acto de servicio, estamos hablando de un ciudadano de la comunidad y, ante todo, de un hombre honrado>>" (208). It is ironic how the article attributes the death of the policeman to the rise in youth violence, when the reader knows that El Barbas' corruption helped feed the problem of street violence and the drug economy. El Barbas was killed in the act of breaking the law and the newspaper provides the coverup. Why does El Barbas do it? "Quiero decir que este es un trabajo chungo con una paga de mierda. A la gente o se la remunera bien o se remunera. ¿Quieres

²⁵ The words are spelled with 'k's instead of 'c's to mimic his state of intoxication.

acabar con la corrupción? Pues sube los sueldos, hostias” (83). His simple solution to the problem with corruption speaks to the earlier reference about how well Spain was doing economically and the unspoken gap in distribution of wealth.

By the 1990s many institutions in Spain had suffered a crisis in public confidence; this was especially true for younger Spaniards. One study in 1998 revealed that only 37% of the 21-29 year olds in Spain had “a lot or some confidence” in the Military and only 29% said the same regarding the Church. In 1994 those numbers were 34% and 32%, respectively. (Miguel 287-291) As for their interest in reading, film and music, which are key because of their influence on this generation in particular, 49% of the same youths were somewhat or highly attracted to reading, 80% to film, while 84% of them viewed music as somewhat or highly important to them. The contrast is stark. The combination of a lack of confidence in many of the Spanish institutions that once enjoyed a high level of respect, paired with an explosion of non-written cultural production and the consequential formation of an affection for this type of culture, helped create a social situation in which many Spanish youngsters neglected to read and favored watching television, movies and listening to music.

Kaiser’s description of his experience in class when first being introduced to *Don Quijote* serves as a metaliterary commentary on young people’s relationship to canonical texts. “Era una profe maja, que se pasaba el día trabándose y perdiendo la tiza, pero que nunca conseguía motivarnos. La verdad es que nadie le seguía la bola, y yo menos, porque en clase sólo hablaban los gilipollitas de primera fila” (189). It is telling how Kaiser views the students who do participate in class, and the physical division between those interested (in the first row of seats) and everyone else. With 400 years of distance from the text, and a lackluster learning environment, it is not surprising that a 16-year-old boy would be more interested in reading a novel like *Ciudad rayada* than *Don Quijote* (or watching the film adaptation). The canonical texts do not speak to many of this new generation of readers, a space awaiting Mañas’ texts.

In general the future is not a theme that comes up in *Ciudad Rayada* and *Historias del Kronen*; on the contrary, some characters and both protagonists avoid thinking about it. Critics have condemned the representation of apathetic and indifferent young people in these novels, and their reluctance to plan for the future, but many studies show that this is a common characteristic of youth which fades with age. “Es como si el proceso de avanzar hacia la adultez hiciera que los jóvenes se empezaran a preocupar cada vez más del <<mañana>>” (Miguel 259). The future and all of the responsibilities that come with it seems very far off for the characters of these novels, who reject the notion of a better future brought on by democratic change and rhetoric.

Kaiser’s final words echo this sentiment and demonstrate one of the fears of some of the young characters: they will grow up, and things will be different.

Prefiero kedarme en akel día en el parke de atracciones, y sólo sé ke no kumplo los dieciocho hasta diciembre del 96 y ke estamos todavía en los nobenta, ke espero ke no akaben nunca, porké en el 2000 tendré beintidós takos y eso será una mierda; o sea ke me kedo kon mis Gloriosos Nobenta, montado en un globo ke es un nobenta y nueve por ciento kojonado, la risa de Tula resonando komo

kampanillas en mis oídos, y yo todo pelota, eskupiendo al suelo y resoplando: Uff, ké globazooo. (223)

This outlook is common in younger people, a resistance to the social responsibilities inherent with maturity and the desire to freeze time and stay in their moment. In Kaiser's case, his *Gloriosos Nobenta* may not have been so glorious for other Spaniards, but through the prism of his narrative the reader gets a sense of the reality for some of the first generation of Spanish youth to not experience the Civil War or the dictatorship, but grow up in a democratic and much more European Spain.

Conclusion

José Ángel Mañas' first novels, especially *Historias del Kronen* and *Ciudad Rayada*, paint a sometimes painful and violent, sometimes exhilarating and energetic, portrait of what it was like for young people to grow up in the 1990s in Spain and in particular in Madrid. A useful analogy for a perspective on Mañas' novels is Kaiser's description of taking apart a television set in order to see the inner guts, sparked by the lights of the city at night. "Viendo el planetario de Atocha, y la M30, ya iluminada, y el Pirulí, y las torres inclinadas de Plaza Castilla, me acordé de una vez que jodí la tele y la abrí con un destornillador para ver las placas de circuito de dentro. Molaba" (196). Appropriately it is a television set that he takes apart in order to see what's inside. Certainly the language is vulgar, and direct, yet just like Kaiser removing the screws of the TV set, J.A. Mañas is pulling the cover off a new generation of young Spaniards and the society they are growing up in, to show how it works and what's behind the images. He's peeling back the skin of the city, no matter how ugly it may be under the surface.

Chapter 2: Hyperreality, an Imagined Island and Historical Ahistoricity in Ray Loriga's *Caldos del cielo* and *El hombre que inventó Manhattan*

“History ... is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.” (Nora 8)

“History is on our heels, following us like our shadows, like death.” (Augé 26-27)

“Our entire lineal and accumulative culture collapses if we cannot stockpile the past in plain view.” (Baudrillard, *Simulacra* 10)

Like José Ángel Mañas, Ray Loriga has often been discussed in relation to a perceived rupture with contemporary literary trends, and has been chided for a lack of substantive engagement with historical and social issues. Upon closer inspection, Loriga's understanding of his literary influences and an examination of key characteristics of his work suggest that such criticism may have been ill-founded. As I will show in this chapter, Loriga inscribes himself within a very specific literary and cinematic tradition. His novels resist the classification of the GenX category and a solely national view of literature. In addition, I will argue that his treatment of history is more complex than initially thought.

Rejection of Generation X Moniker, Assumption of Literary Influences

When Ray Loriga first emerged upon the literary scene in Spain in 1992, he was included in a new generation of young writers who were categorized by, among other characteristics, their texts' tendency to privilege visual and oral mediums over literature, popular culture over 'higher' culture, narrate stories focused on young characters and their struggles with sex, drugs, alcohol and finding their identities, a rebellious, outsider, punk attitude, and 'peripheral' position within the literary field. Another powerful critique was that the marketplace, and not the merits of the texts themselves, drove the popularity of these authors, turning them into best-sellers. Publishing houses realized the success of the 'young' writers and marketed youth as a commodity. Despite many critical works which have either re-imagined the GenX or undone the generational moniker altogether, the GenX and many of its stereotypes remain. In a review of *Ya sólo habla de amor* published by El País in 2008, sixteen years after Loriga's debut novel *Lo peor de todo* first hit the bookshelves, the same description of his previous novels emerges:

Hasta ahora, parte de la escritura de Loriga se cimentaba en una cuidada mezcla de recuerdos y memoria, enmarcada en una estética en la que mandaba la *road movie* y el *peterpanismo* de los personajes. Su escritura, a base de pinceladas,

parecía marcada por el alcohol, las drogas, el rock y una dosis no muy grande de sexo, pero *Ya sólo habla de amor* supone un cambio de registro notable. (Castilla, *El amor* 1-2)

While the first three novels published by Loriga do focus primarily on young people and to a certain extent their difficulty with reality and growing up into adulthood, his fourth novel published in 1999, *Tokio ya no nos quiere*, signaled a swerve in his aesthetics (noted here without denying the formal differences among his first three novels). Loriga also published three novels prior to *Ya sólo habla de amor* which were no longer focused on young protagonists or any sort of adolescent pangs. Yet the divergence from *peterpanismo* and other characteristics in his texts have merited little discussion or recognition. What many critics have not focused on is the historical rammifications of his novels, however steeped in memories, road movies and popular culture.

Although the focus of this chapter is not an analysis of the merits of the Spanish Generation X as a category, Loriga's perspective regarding the GenX sheds light on how he views his own literary aesthetics. From nearly the beginning of the term being applied to these young writers, Loriga has rejected the notion that he belongs to the GenX. He gave a comprehensive response to the question in an interview:

[L]o de la Generación X, Mañas y demás, creo que era muy artificial puesto que éramos gente que tenía muy poco que ver en lo literario y que además no teníamos ningún contacto personal. Todos los escritores reniegan de ser metidos en una generación, pero si hablamos de los Beatniks o la Generación del 27, existía un lugar de encuentro, era gente que se conocía, incluso eran amigos y participaban de proyectos comunes. Luego cada cual podía ser muy diferente, pero había un núcleo. En mi supuesta generación nunca lo hubo. Cuando yo empecé a publicar no conocía de nada a ninguno de los escritores que luego me pusieron como compañeros de ruta y sigo sin conocerlos. (Club Cultura 4)

One of the main arguments that stands out in this rebuttal is the physical and intellectual distancing of the members of the GenX; while previous generations like the Beats held meetings, talked to one another about their ideas, collaborated on projects and were friends or acquaintances, Loriga establishes his solitary status with regards to the other GenXers. How can one belong to a generation of writers without any level of collaboration or connection?

With a touch of sarcasm and disdain, Loriga consistently distances himself and his aesthetics from the GenX in interviews. While mentioning Benjamín Prado or Enrique Vila-Matas as writers from his generation whom he follows, Loriga does not allude to any influence or familiarity with the texts of José Ángel Mañas or Lucía Etxebarria, the other young writers most often cited as comprising the Spanish Generation X.²⁶ On the contrary, he intentionally and forcefully denounces any semblance of their aesthetics with his own. In an online discussion with readers in 2000 on www.elmundo.es, his reaction to a rather innocuous question is telling.

²⁶ Generation in age, not a literary generation.

Pregunta: “[sic] Le gustaría ser doctor honoris causa como Lucía Etxebarria en otro país o en España?

Ray: No me gustaría coincidir en nada con Lucía Etxebarria.” (*Encuentros* 6)

If the evocation of the name Etxebarria provoked such a negative reaction in Loriga, the accusation that his Spanish literary education was lacking also elicited an impassioned response.

This is one of the critiques leveled against the Gen X in Spain and Loriga, that it lacked evidence of literary formation. Established writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, in his article concerning this new generation of authors, wrote, “El escritor es lo que lee, y estos escritores más jóvenes niegan explícitamente esta nutrición literaria; sus elementos nutricionales, aparentemente, son otros”²⁷ (7). Montalbán revises the metaphor of ‘you are what you eat’ to ‘you write what you read’, or in this case, what you watch and what music you listen to. From this perspective, these young new writers don’t reference great literary figures from Spain or abroad, but rather *The Terminator*, Bruce Lee’s movies, Bob Dylan, John Lennon and Kurt Cobain. Therefore the perceived assumption is that Loriga is not well read and that his writing style reflects a lack of healthy literary nutrition, a dubious assertion when the evidence is taken into consideration.

Loriga recognizes in many interviews his eclectic literary role models, both local and foreign, displaying at the minimum the memorization of the names of a myriad of writers and at most, a vast understanding of the literary field. In a 2004 interview with David Trueba, the novelist mentions J.D. Sallinger, Peter Handke, Marguerite Duras, Raymond Carver, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, *La colmena*, Evelyn Waugh, Mark Twain, Martin Amis and Julian Barnes. *Caídos del cielo*’s epigraph is a quote from a Jack Kerouac poem, the main character’s last words to his brother is a quote from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, the brother and the girl joke about fleeing to Prague because it is Franz Kafka’s homeland, and the protagonist owns poetry written by Robert Lowell. In a later novel, *El hombre que inventó Manhattan*, William Burroughs is a fictional character and the pretense of a discussion about Juan Rulfo leads to sexual misconduct by a literature professor. Loriga demonstrates an extensive grasp of literature, from canonical Spanish and English texts to 20th-century American, British and Latin American contemporaries. As Adelaida Caro Martín reminds her readers in a footnote, “Recuérdese que el mismo nombre “Ray” constituye un homenaje a Carver” (102). Loriga’s novel, *Sombrero y Mississippi*, published in 2010, is a meta-literary exploration and explanation of writing, a reflection upon his chosen office as writer and the many writers who have influenced his aesthetics. This is an issue that deeply absorbs Loriga’s attention and contemplation.

Another topic subject to constant analysis is the hyperreal depiction of how Spain’s youngest generation deals with contemporary reality. The hyperreal refers to the abundance of images, sounds and representations of an original, the ‘real’, that occludes the real; if the real does exist, it is hard to uncover, access, and comprehend. Loriga provides an apt metaphor in *Días aún más extraños*, contrasting his generations’ experiences with that of his grandfather.

²⁷ “A writer is what he reads, and these youngest writers explicitly deny this literary nutrition; their nutritional elements are, apparently, others” (my translation).

Mi abuelo pertenecía a esa generación que había asistido al nacimiento del cinematógrafo, y tal vez por eso, por haber visto las cosas antes que el cine, se sometía mal a la mera representación de las cosas. Los que crecimos con el cine, por la misma razón, soportamos mal la realidad. (59-60)

The complicated engagement with reality is rooted in the transformation of the representation of the thing becoming the thing itself. This difficult relationship with reality is reflected in the texts under study in this chapter.

Critics have cited his novels' evasive quality in regard to reality, and have underscored especially the absence of history and politics in the first novels. "It is interesting to note that a dominant trait of the Gen X movement is detachment, and at times reaching complete evasion, of historical themes. The Civil War is rarely mentioned in Gen X novels, and the transition to democracy is labeled a failed hippie movement" (Everly, *History, Violence x*). At a time period in Spain's history when revisiting the past was prevalent, Loriga's novels completely avoided any reference to a particular Spanish history. The histories he presented were from popular culture; films, music, television and even literature. These cultural expressions, typically American and British, shaped the form of the novels and narrated the histories of adolescents struggling with coming of age. While this immersion into visual and oral culture while eschewing historical memories irked some in the established literary guard, others saw the important step taken by writers such as Loriga. Kathryn Everly finds points of comparisons between Loriga's works and historical novels in the common transformation of the real into a story: "These similarities are rooted in the idea of how history is transformed through storytelling into an unstable reality. At the same time, the fascination with what is 'real' or authentic redefines textual notions of everyday existence and interpersonal relationships" (*History, Violence 2*). The difficulty with what is 'real' or authentic is a key concept throughout Loriga's novels, which ties into Jean Baudrillard's definition of hyperreality and Pierre Nora's description of an acceleration of history. The speed at which images are consumed, information is transmitted, and events happen have all combined to distance people from real things and an authentic past, erasing the barrier between virtual and empirical events. Loriga problematizes the ability to capture what really happened in his novels, using techniques such as fragmentation of narrative, stories that are not chronological, unreliable narrators, an overabundance of details, second-hand stories, and ellipsis (gaps in the narration which do not give the reader enough expected information). Absurdity, especially when relating to death, discredits the idea that things happen in a logical, lineal and sequential manner. In an ahistorical novel such as *Caídos del cielo*, bare of themes related to the Spanish Civil War and the legacy of the Franco dictatorship, there is an historical sense that captures a segment of the young generation's alienation from their recent national history. Paradoxically, this ahistorical novel historicizes a moment through representations of the apathetic posture of some GenX youngsters.

Historical ahistoricity: *Caídos del cielo* and the evasion of markers of reality, nation and history

Es una historia que no sucede en ningún lugar, es una historia que no ha sucedido realmente, es una leyenda y es un sueño, sería una historia de amor, chico conoce chica, boy meets girl, si no fuera porque en medio hay una pistola. (Loriga, La Curtea)

A closer look at the absence of Spanish history in Ray Loriga's third novel *Caídos del cielo* reveals that while not a central theme, the representation of historical and political indifference is itself an important gesture. While on the one hand it presents an historical apathy evident in a segment of Spanish youth in the 1990s, it also rejects the contentious political and historical debates of the time and proposes alternative conceptions of History and interactions with reality. As previously shown, the events of the twentieth century lent themselves to much reflection in Spain, especially the traumatic and divisive Civil War and subsequent dictatorship. After Franco's death, the implementation of a democratic state along with Spain's increasing incorporation into the European Community were hot topics; Loriga and other younger writers who were classified as GenX writers eschewed these debates. Yet as I will show in my analysis of *Caídos del cielo*, within the novel there is an exploration of how some young people engage with reality in a hyperreal Spain, revealing the meaning of History for them and extending it to popular culture. While the novel's action is not situated historically with dates, political events or allusions to what is usually considered to be historical moments, the historical context can be deduced from the references to popular culture. Formally, the non-linear, fragmented, nebulous story calls into question narrative fidelity and perspective while demonstrating the difficulty of getting at 'what really happened' and representing this accurately in written form, both critical to the field of History. The distancing between original and copy to the point where the copy replaces the original and becomes a simulacrum is evident in the comparison of one of the novel's final scenes to the Iraq War, hinting at Baudrillard's book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. The infiltration of film into the character's life reveals the force of the audiovisual media, and the television show, *Todos somos uno*, manipulates and frames the news to fit its narrative. The novel encapsulates the desire to escape the restrictions of societal pressure and simultaneously historicizes this ahistorical consciousness of some Spanish youth. In *Caídos del cielo* the reader accompanies the narrator on his nostalgic journey through childhood memories as he laments the irrevocable loss of his brother, and tries to understand why this happened without adopting a moralizing perspective.

The novel avoids the political and historical discourses taking place at the time in Spain. *Caídos* evades reality to the extreme, with hardly a reference to an external world except for popular culture; the characters' references are to other fictions and most of the action takes place in a nebulous landscape or in the memories of the narrator. As Loriga states in an interview:

(Q)uería que los personajes sólo existieran en la imaginación del lector y no pudieran ni siquiera ser nombrados. En *Caídos del cielo* son el chico y la chica, porque es una novela mítica en realidad. Es la carretera, el mar, el chico y la

chica, que no tienen identidad y sólo existen como un mito en la imaginación de la gente que lee su historia en los periódicos. (Beilin 205)

Loriga reiterates the notion that what takes place in the novel is only taking place in the imagination of the readers and lacks ties to reality, also highlighting the mythical nature of the text. In an interview on tour to promote the novel, he alludes to the setting of the novel and its connections to the genre of legend. “Es una historia que no sucede en ningún lugar, es una historia que no ha sucedido realmente, es una leyenda y es un sueño, sería una historia de amor, chico conoce chica, boy meets girl, si no fuera porque en medio hay una pistola” (Loriga, *La Curtea*). Loriga takes a well-worn story, adding another layer to it (a pistol), and then that layer is integrated into a novel that plays with fictionality, alienation from reality, and narrative forms. What occurs in the novel is a wiping clean of a recognizable Spanish landscape, a terrain without markers of nationality and history which will later appear in the movie version.²⁸ This ‘no place’ or ‘any place’ evokes a sense of mythology, a story that takes place/occurs outside of time and space. It is either a story that could happen to anyone, or no one.

The physical space in which the characters operate lacks any sort of detail or description which would connect it to empirical reality. There is no mention of street names, cities, states or countries, there are few markers from the outside world that readers can hold on to and relate to their own experiences; they cannot rely upon their own mediated experiences with this location, be it through photographs, second-hand accounts, movies or television. Loriga professes his intention in an article he authored for an English language photography magazine, *Aperture*. “I remember that in my first novels I was hardly able to write the name of a street” (*Images* 73). On the contrary, the landscape mirrors the no-man’s land of American road movies like *Thelma and Louise*. Rather than a connection with the reader’s physical world, this novel’s space fuses with the reader’s aesthetic experiences with film, television and music. Without an anchor to physical spaces outside of the novel, the reader is dislocated, or, more precisely, relocated to spaces only found in the creative imagination.

While the assumption is that *Caidos* takes place in Spain due to extratextual factors (Loriga is Spanish, the language is Spanish, and the novel was first published in Spain), only through a few textual clues can the reader fix the setting of the action. The key moment which sparks its development takes place at a Vips, a popular convenience store and restaurant in Spain. It is here that the older brother, after being accused of theft, pulls out the gun he found in a trash can and shoots the security guard in the face, killing him. In another scene, the brother and his female companion go to a roadside bar and consume *jamón, queso y cervezas*, typical Spanish cuisine. Linguistically, the use of *vosotros* adds to the hypothesis that what is taking place probably does so in Spain.

While the location has to be inferred in the novel, the movie version was clearly located in Spain. *Caidos del cielo*’s cinematographic qualities have been well documented, and the novel lent itself easily to adaptation to the screen. The movie, in contrast to the novel, is much

²⁸ In the same article, Loriga describes how with his movie he attempted to create a similar sensation produced by the novel: “When I shot my first movie, I sidestepped everything familiar, avoided anything of mine in every shot to such a degree that the entire picture seemed filmed in no place, or in any place” (73).

more explicit about the location of the action and includes a national component absent in the novel.

Efectivamente, *La pistola de mi hermano* presenta mayores rasgos de internacionalidad que su modelo literario al tiempo que, situándose en un espacio concreto, muestra elementos de una nacionalidad inexistente en la novela. Así, a diferencia de ésta, ubicada en un espacio apenas esbozado por unos cuantos rasgos (la carretera, el mar, un tragal) que podrían pertenecer a cualquier parte, el filme nos muestra un paisaje, rural y urbano, fácilmente identificable como español: los trenes de cercanías de RENFE, las matrículas de los coches, productos del supermercado, los rótulos de las gasolineras o la música y las atracciones de una feria rural nos indican claramente la localización española del filme. (Caro Martín 273)

The contrast between explicit international and national characteristics in the film and the lack of both in the novel differentiates the two, as the latter contains quite overt criticism of television, absent for the most part in the movie version. *Caídos* does possess references to international popular culture, which contributes to the impression that its action occurs independent of time and space, without a national identity.

History in *Caídos* therefore takes on a different meaning. Popular culture takes the place of politics, economics and wars as the important moments and figures in these young characters' lives. What allows the reader to historically situate the novel are the comments regarding popular culture; Kurt Cobain's death is the moment that places *Caídos* within a specific historical time. Cobain's self-inflicted death colors the characters' existence, their reality, and serves as a strongly important historical incident. For many young people of earlier generations the attempted coup of 1981, Franco's death in 1975 or the protests of 1968 marked their lives; for the brothers of *Caídos*, the premature death of a musical idol was one of their watershed moments. "Teníamos poco dinero y nos llevamos sólo el último de Nirvana. Poco después pasó lo de Kurt Cobain, y a los diez días lo nuestro. Por eso se empeñaron en liarlo todo, cuando lo cierto es que una cosa y otra no tienen nada que ver" (26). This citation reveals that the action takes place on or around April 14th, 1994, ten days after Kurt Cobain's suicide, and protests any rationalization of his brother's actions as being linked to what happened to the Nirvana lead singer. Kurt Cobain's influence on popular culture outside of the United States, as well as his tragic downfall, permeate the novels of the early GenXer's. Lucía Etxebarria's first published work is *La historia de Kurt y Courtney: aguanta esto* and in José Ángel Mañas' first novel, *Historias del Kronen*, the characters attend a Nirvana concert, the distorted English lyrics invading the Spanish text.

Kurt Cobain's suicide serves as a foreshadowing mechanism in *Caídos*, as one of the implications of the behind-the-scenes look at the brother is that he is not a villain, despite being painted as one by the media. "El día que supimos lo de Cobain, tres días después de que se dispara en la boca, mi hermano me dijo: Hay muchas maneras de acabar con un buen chico, algunas se ven y otras no hay modo de verlas" (26). While situating the historical moment, only three days' difference between Cobain's suicide and the brother's murder of the security guard, this citation early in the novel links the two as *buenos chicos*. One of the tenets of the police

investigation and the television shows investigating the murders is that there has to be something wrong with the brother, he must be a terrible person, dangerous, a homosexual, deviant in some manner in order to explain his behavior. The unexpected act of killing the security guard and later the gasoline worker needs a rationale, and the portrayal of the brother as *el ángel de la muerte* excludes the possibility of chance or momentarily losing control with undesirable and irreversible consequences.

Many references to American and British popular culture throughout the novel help to establish the value attributed to music and film especially by the young character. Among a few of the recognizable figures/bands are Bruce Lee, Sonic Youth, Harvey Keitel, Madonna, Harry Dean Stanton, Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley's daughter, Lisa Marie Presley, who had a brief and very well-known relationship and marriage to Michael Jackson. In one scene, Jimi Hendrix's song *Fire* comes on the radio, which in the book is transformed into *Let Me Get into Your Fire* (the chorus is actually "Let me stand next to your fire", a sexual reference). The brother sings John Lennon's *Woman is the Nigger of the World*, underscoring the unbalanced power structure for women in a paternalistic society. Each famous person or group brings his or her own connotations into a reading of the novel; for example, Jimi Hendrix might be associated with wild rebellion, sexual lyrics, drugs, or another tragic death of a musical deity at an early age. Also, those familiar with the music have a built-in soundtrack to the novel; the reader can imagine the song playing in the background of the scene. There are also references to literary mythical figures like Franz Kafka, Jack Kerouac, and Robert Lowell. Finally, within the text are allusions to titles of songs, such as the chapter *DEJAD A LOS NIÑOS TRANQUILOS*, suggesting the song by Pink Floyd *Another Brick in the Wall* and its chorus, "Teachers, leave them kids alone". This song's official video represents a factory line of similar looking children, suggesting a brain-washing suppression of individuality and imagination fomented in the school system (in the UK in this instance). The echoes of youth rebellion resonate with the characters in *Caídos del cielo*.

Formally the novel engages with the process of writing a history, as the younger brother attempts to access what really happened to his brother, and then present it to his reader in written form, similar to the process experienced by a historian. No one would confuse the narrator for a historian, whose attention to details, extensive research, chronological writing style and fidelity to the facts and truth all diverge from our narrator's text. Nevertheless, the narrator does engage in a retrospective activity with the goal of reproducing the truth about this fictional past. He finds it most useful to weave in and out of the present and the past, through memories, composing short non-linear fragments to explain the story of his brother. The younger brother's name and age are never given, and ultimately he serves as an unreliable narrator while seeking to resuscitate his brother's image and present another point of view to the established story. He recounts the events that lead to his brother's death, proposing an alternative narrative to that provided by the media and accepted by almost every character in the novel, even his mother.²⁹ As the younger brother puts it: "(S)ólo digo que cada pistola tiene dos lados y a cada lado hay una persona y que si se explica bien la historia, no como la contaron en televisión, la canción suena

²⁹ "Traté de explicárselo a mamá, pero ella prefería creerse lo que decían por la tele. ¡Ella, que era su madre!" (15).

de otra forma. Aunque, eso sí, sigue siendo una canción llena de muertos” (53). While the outcome, two deaths and a suicide by cop, are not in doubt, how it happened is.³⁰

To help frame their argument, the television news in the novel labels the brother *el ángel de la muerte* and engages in other forms of supporting a particular view of the events, evident in the younger brother’s description of the television show manipulating his appearance to provoke a particular response.

Insistían mucho en que yo tuviera aspecto de delincuente juvenil. En la sala de maquillaje me despeinaron un poco y me cambiaron la cazadora de mi hermano por una roja más vistosa pero demasiado nueva. La presentadora le dijo a la gente que era la cazadora de mi hermano. Me sentó fatal, pero no me atreví a decir nada. (72)

The narrator reveals what went on behind the scenes of the television show, where we witness intentional misrepresentations of the younger brother’s physical appearance. The consequences of these calculated distortions would be less significant if this form of news had not become a common practice of presenting reality and history. The criticism is that television as a reliable source of information and truth is dubious and unreliable, while ironically serving as one of the main sources of news in contemporary society. Kathryn Everly states: “In his works, Loriga criticizes TV’s superficiality and the erroneous sense of community it creates” (*History, Violence* 115). She also notes the irony in the criticism of the community sensation created by television, while the references to global culture in the novel produce a similar effect in the reader.

Ironically, the narrative we are reading suffers from the same questions of bias, and authenticity in the framing of the story. Access to what really happened is mediated through what the girl tells the younger brother; since he was not present for the majority of the stories he tells, the younger brother relies upon her memories to piece together the puzzle. There are firsthand accounts of the younger brother’s encounters with the girl, and in one of them she admits to lying constantly, about important and frivolous things.

Yo miento todo el tiempo, a todo el mundo, a cualquiera. Si dijera la verdad, mi vida sería espantosa. Sería una chica muerta. Una preciosa, honesta chica muerta ... mentiras de todo tipo, mentiras de todos los tamaños, mentiras pequeñas y grandes, de las que se ven y de las que no se ven, mentiras que sirven para algo y mentiras que no sirven para nada, mentiras que hacen daño y mentiras que curan. ... Mentiras que lo curan todo. (119)

Most of our reading is based upon a character who confesses to lying all the time, partly as a survival mechanism; the truth would overwhelm her and probably lead her to suicide. Her lies possess the power of healing, fictions that heal.

³⁰ I label it suicide by cop, as the character forces the police officers to shoot him by firing his final bullet into the sky. He intentionally provokes the cops to end his life, which is sometimes referred to as suicide by cop.

The girl's reliance on self-deceit impacts the veracity of the story. On a few occasions the younger brother presents her viewpoint and then challenges it. One contentious aspect of the story is when the brother kicks the girl out of the car towards the end of his journey. In the second chapter of the novel, only a few pages into the narrative, the narrator describes how he ejects her from the car. "Cincuenta kilómetros después, él abrió la puerta del coche y la echó fuera de un empujón. No iba deprisa" (14). So when the brother casts out the girl, the car was either going slow or stopped. This fact is important because towards the end of the novel the younger brother admits to having manipulated the truth; "Cuando la sacó del coche el coche estaba parado. Ella dice que la tiró en marcha pero yo sé que él era incapaz de hacer algo así" (143). The girl claims to have been thrown from a moving vehicle, contributing to the brother's portrayal as a rough, unsympathetic character; the younger brother resurrects the older brother's image and censures this circumstance.

Not only does the girl lie, the younger brother concedes that he too has not been honest throughout the story. "Yo les dije a todos que desde que salió de casa no había vuelto a hablar con él, pero era mentira. Poco antes de mirar al cielo y darse cuenta de que ya se había terminado todo, antes de cruzar la arena con su pistola y su bala me había llamado por teléfono" (131). This phone conversation is crucial to understanding what happened to his brother and the contradictions between the media's depiction of the brother and the younger brother's portrayal of him. In this interaction the brother explains why he killed two people: "El guardia de Vips, el de siempre, el que siempre nos molesta, empezó a agarrarme por el brazo y a decir delante de todos que yo era un ladrón [...] Al de la gasolinera lo maté porque quería llamar a la policía, pero sobre todo por algo feo que dijo de ella" (133). While certainly not justifiable reasons for killing a person, his statements clarify the why and elucidate his mentality. The brother was standing up for his innocence and then that of the girl, in a way rebelling against the conventional storylines of accusations and insults tolerated by those without power. The truth comes to light when the brother reveals this phone call to the reader; "Primero colgó él y luego colgué yo. Nunca le hablé a nadie de esta llamada. Hasta hoy" (134).

The younger brother's aim at seizing the truth is key to the recuperation of his brother's memory, legacy and image. He thereby contests the simplistic While the headlines and news reports while presenting a specific reading of the events: "todas esas personas que salían por televisión contando lo que no habían visto en absoluto y olvidando lo que de verdad había pasado, agarrándose desesperadamente a esa imprevista desgracia que les había convertido por un momento en héroes del telediario" (54). Witnesses in this text lie, aching for their few moments of fame, and ultimately, the truth of what really happened is lost to the passage of time. The police officers who pepper the brother's dead body with bullets also wanted their moment of fame. "Tiraban por tirar. Todos querían ser famosos" (137). The allure of recognition and being the hero taint the narratives accepted by the majority of the characters in the novel. The novel's epigraph is from a Jack Kerouac poem: "Prefiero ser flaco que famoso". What the younger brother does is produce one of many perspectives on the history of his brother and his crimes; instead of an evil, wild attacker, he is cast as a youth who makes a tragic mistake with irrevocable consequences. Once the brother pulls the trigger and kills the security guard, his life is forever altered. He cannot undo the murder, leading to his flight towards freedom, or in this case, death.

Many of the actions that take place in the novel coincide with those of the road movie genre, inscribing it in this audiovisual tradition. The brother's suicide by cop brings to mind the resolution of *Thelma and Louise*, a film which is mentioned many times in the novel. In Loriga's novel, instead of driving off a cliff the protagonist fires his final bullet skyward, sparing the hundreds of nearby innocent bystanders, police officers and helicopter. Only when the good police officer, who looks like Harry Dean Stanton, and the younger brother ingest cocaine and drink beers together do the facts regarding his final hours come to light. "Tu hermano tiró al aire la última bala. No sé por qué. Podía haberme dado a mí o a cualquiera, pero tiró al aire" (138). From a rational perspective, the brother was a dangerous individual who had murdered two innocent people, hence the police's response; however, this final scene reveals that the brother opted to spare the lives of others, challenging the underlying narrative of a bad, dangerous killer. The characters in *Thelma and Louise* likewise are hardly dangers to other characters, their innocence is pronounced, and yet the movie ends with an inordinate police presence. As the empathetic police officer unsuccessfully attempts to save the protagonists from their death, the smart cop in *Caidos* becomes entangled in the absurd, twisted logic of the situation:

En medio del follón, con todos esos paletos destrozando al chico, me puse a pegar tiros a todos lados, era todo bastante raro, nadie hacía nada normal, todo el mundo estaba loco, así que yo dejé de apuntarle a él y me puse a disparar contra los nuestros. Sólo le di a uno, en una pierna. No creo que me pillen. (136)

This completely ridiculous and humorous image of a police officer turning and firing upon his own in defense of the brother, hitting one of them in the leg, adds to the illogical aspect of this scene.

The novel inscribes itself within a history of road movies, in addition to this spectacular death, with the overt signaling of the connection between the narrative action of the novel and what often happens in the movies:

Ya sé que en las películas siempre hay alguno que se hace el héroe y coge el arma del vigilante y todo ese rollo, olvídense de eso, esto es la vida real y en la vida real cuando a un tío le acaban de volar la cabeza a menos de dos metros, todos los demás se quedan tan quietos como estatuas de piedra. (37)

With an abundant number of fictional gestures in this self-aware novel, the postulation that '*esto es la vida real*' is met with skepticism and humor. Recurring comparisons of *Caidos* to 'the movies' only adds to the inclusion of this novel within a fictional world and tradition. A well-worn cinematic trope incorporated into the novel is the good cop/bad cop roles played by the first pair of police officers attempting to uncover the location of the brother.

Ya había visto eso en las películas. Uno hace de poli bueno y el otro hace de poli malo. El poli malo te asusta y entonces vas tú y se lo cuentas todo al poli bueno. Para que salve al chico y todo ese rollo. Como el policía bueno de *Thelma y*

Louise, el que hacía Harvey Keitel. Aquí el chico era mi hermano y bueno, ya vieron cómo les fue a las pobres Thelma y Louise. (44)

The younger brother learned how to deal with this situation ‘*en la vida real*’ by watching movies. And by alluding to “Thelma and Louise” several times, the narrative positions the reader to view these two police officer characters as another tandem in a long line of good cop/bad cop pairings.

When the good cop/bad cop tandem fails to produce the expected results, two new police officers visit the family, performing new roles: smart cop/dumb cop. Hollywood cinema has infiltrated the novel to the point that the smart cop, who does find a way to relate to the younger brother, evokes Harry Dean Stanton (from the movie, *Paris, Texas*). “El listo me caía bien, se parecía un poco a Harry Dean Stanton” (65). This first mention of Harry Dean Stanton is quickly followed by two more comments on the resemblance of the smart cop and the actor. The progression is from having a similar appearance to Harry Dean Stanton to being exactly like the actor: “Es extraño, pero parecía bastante honesto y era igual igual que Harry Dean Stanton” (67). The reader is encouraged to imagine the cop as being played by Harry Dean Stanton, as if he had been cast by the director of the novel to play this role. Again, reality has been colored by fiction, as the younger brother turns to popular culture to understand and express his existence.

The nexus of television and reality undergoes a critical evaluation with the evocation of the Iraq War. Before the brother’s death, he and the girl watch fireworks, which foreshadow the spectacular death of the brother when they are described as the bomb flashes from the television coverage of the Iraq War. “Todo lo que habían estado viendo por separado sucedió al mismo tiempo y durante un segundo pareció que aquello era una guerra de la televisión. Como cuando los americanos bombardearon Iraq y todo lo que se veía era un montón de colores, sin muertos, sin nada” (105). The surreal nature of the television clips of the Iraq bombings was the topic of a series of essays written by Jean Baudrillard, who famously declared that the Iraq War did not happen. Essentially, the distance of the audience from the representations of the war was so great as to suggest that the deaths were not real, the bombs were not real, and the viewers were merely spectators of a fictional representation. Something did happen, but the Iraq War it was not. What really happened was irrecoverable, buried beneath the bombardment of images flashing on the television screen: “*sin muertos, sin nada*”. The TV images take the place of the real bombs.

Briefly I wish to underscore the evolution of the title of *Caidos del cielo*, its translation into English and cinematic transformation, before proceeding to *El hombre que inventó Manhattan*. The novel *Caidos del cielo* is adapted to film, and in the process changed to *La pistola de mi hermano*. The first title is more poetic and has a veiled meaning, whereas the story’s spectacular nature and unambiguous meaning are prominent in the second title. This new title speaks to the sensationalizing aspect of the marketing of the movie (as well as later editions of the novel) and ironically the underlying critique throughout the novel of the manipulating machinations of the contemporary commodity culture. The English translation, published only two years later, went one step further, titled “My Brother’s Gun: A Novel of Disposable Lives, Immediate Fame, and a Big Black Automatic”. The focus switched from an allusion to tragedy, fallen angels and poetry to the sensational aspect of the story.

New York City: an Imagined Island

“Todas las historias de este libro son parte del sueño de Charlie, todas son inventadas aunque muchas, la mayoría, son ciertas” (16)

El hombre que inventó Manhattan (Manhattan) was the result of five years that Loriga spent living abroad in New York City and was published in 2004. The novel is a fragmented web or network of narratives broken up into short chapters of typically a few pages' length; the protagonists of each particular story have little, if any, interaction with the other protagonists and their stories converge at either random moments or not at all. *Manhattan's* unnamed narrator is a character who shares many traits with the author, Ray Loriga, and the temptation is to merge the two, but it is clear that the narrative voice is a fictional representation of Loriga himself. *Manhattan* presents a kaleidoscope of perspectives and memories of New York City in a long tradition of fictional representations of the emblematic cosmopolitan city of the twentieth century; Loriga acknowledges in interviews a few influences, such as Woody Allen's films, John Dos Passos' novel *Manhattan Transfer* and Federico García Lorca's *Poeta en Nueva York*, leaving unspoken the structural resemblance to Cela's *La colmena*.³¹ The novel investigates the hazy distinction between reality, representation, history, and truth at the end of the twentieth century, in particular the interaction of immigrants with a large metropolis, a playful analysis of memory and fiction, and with that a palimpsest or layering of present and past experiences.

The stories in *Manhattan* center primarily around characters who are immigrants living in New York City and the imagination of one in particular, Romanian Gerald Ulrak, referred to throughout the novel by his anglicized name Charlie. The narrator describes him as such: “Gerald Ulrak había nacido en un pequeño pueblo en las montañas de Rumania y siempre había soñado con un sitio mejor, Manhattan, y un nombre distinto, Charlie” (9). According to the narrator, all of the stories that follow are Charlie's invention and the fictional representation of New York, embodying the American dream, is Charlie's as well. Charlie invented the map of New York, the physical spaces, as well as its cultural events and deaths. “Inventó la White Horse Tavern y, alrededor, el Village. Inventó a Dylan Thomas bebiendo allí su última copa e inventó el hotel Chelsea, para dejarlo después morir allí, una mañana de 1953” (12).³² All of this Charlie

³¹ See Carmen de Urioste's “Los espacios vividos...” for a more extensive analysis of fictional representations of New York. p. 321 gives a sizable list of fictions within this tradition.

³² One of many references to popular figures in the arts who died an untimely death.

remembered or invented in Romania, while spending time as a child with his best friend, Pedja Ruseski, better known as Chad, who also lives in New York.

As well as Chad and Charlie, the list of characters includes the unnamed Spanish narrator, the Colombian superintendent who replaces Charlie after his suicide, the twin Korean-American sisters who work at Madame Huong's manicure/pedicure shop (where three of the narratives converge), the European Andreas Ringmayer III and the American Andreas Ringmayer IV, a famous Mexican male actor, and Arthur Flegenheimer, also known as Dutch Schultz, the son of German Jewish immigrants. The point of view is from the outsider, the foreigner, and most importantly, the self-exiled.

Loriga describes his text as an organic mixing of reality and fiction: "No es una novela, ni un libro de cuentos porque las historias están trenzadas. Es un libro sobre la relación con una ciudad a través de la ficción" (Rodríguez Marcos). One of the tenets of the text is that the human experience of a city is mediated and marked by representations of that city, as well as by how we imagine the city before we live in it and even while we live there.³³ "Yo me he sorprendido a veces soñando con Nueva York en Nueva York" (Trueba 1). The characters in the novel have particular notions of what New York City is, and what it should or could be. Their perspectives of the city collide with its urban reality; the lived experiences of past historical figures, the buildings and streets, the social relations, and the future. An all-encompassing representation of New York is an impossibility; this novel observes through a small prism a minute section of the historical and fictional experiences of New York (and the surrounding areas, such as New Jersey).

The majority of the protagonists in the narratives are rather insignificant members of society whose lives would be lost in the shuffle of the metropolis were it not for Charlie and this novel. Charlie himself would have disappeared without a trace if it were not for his stories:

Me dio entonces la sensación, allí sentado junto a aquella gente extraña en la pequeña pero elegante funeraria Ortiz, que si Gerald Ulsrak, alias *Charlie*, no hubiera sido el hombre que inventó Manhattan, habría resultado casi imposible decir nada sobre él, ni dedicarle una sola línea. Tan escasos habían resultado el resto de sus méritos. (46)

These are key concepts in *Manhattan*, the recuperation of the negligible marks left by the ordinary and extraordinary person, and a connection with the past. The image of footprints left in the snow, only to be instantly erased by the next person's footprints serves as an appropriate metaphor of the 'lost' histories of this novel. As the narrator tells us, one of Charlie's 'inventions' is "los pasos marcados en esa misma nieve y borrados enseguida por otros pasos" (12). The metaphor underscores the physical traces left by our bodies, but also the speed at which our presence vanishes. In the interior monologue of one of the fictional characters, Jimmy *el Pincho*, his attention is drawn to his footprints left in the snow, assuring him of his

³³ ¿Quién le parece el mejor representante de la literatura de Manhattan?

R. Como hay muchos Nueva York, han sido contados de manera diferente por John Cheever, Salinger, Burroughs, Damon Runyon... De eso también trata el libro: no sólo de mi idea de Manhattan, sino de mi idea forjada por otros escritores" (Rodríguez Marcos).

reality and the inability for anyone to negate his existence. These tenuous and easily erased footprints, immediately wiped away by the next person or the passage of time, reflect the novel's preoccupation with portraying the random, the banal, the daily/*lo cotidiano*, that which easily slips away into *el olvido*. The following quote from an interview with Loriga shines a light on this ephemeral quality of one's tenuous existence: "Aunque en el título hable de la invención de un mundo, de lo que quiero hablar en realidad es de quien deja una pequeña marca furtiva, casi como el que hace un dibujo en la corteza de un árbol, y desaparece" (Trueba). According to Loriga the novelist leaves his mark by calling attention to the traces that individuals leave in the passage. All that remains are those tiny traces of the previous act (which can be effortlessly erased), a quiet remnant.

The idea of imagining/inventing a city may be traced to Pío Baroja who appears in a newspaper article Loriga wrote in 2005 titled "La ciudad de Baroja", shortly after the publication of *Manhattan* in 2004. The article begins with this line: "El Madrid que yo recuerdo sin haberlo vivido, lo inventó un guipuzcoano, Pío Baroja" (1). Referring to Baroja's ability to vividly portray the dark side of Madrid in the late 19th century and early 20th century, Loriga attributes his conception of Madrid to Baroja's portrayal of a fictional Madrid. *Manhattan* is a contribution to the collective imagination of New York. *Manhattan* tempts its readers to suspend their disbelief and submerge themselves in this realistic (yet fictional) representation of the *intrahistorias* of New York City. However, there are textual markers throughout the novel and especially in the first chapter that call attention to the text's fictionality. In the introductory chapter the repetition of the words *inventar* and *imaginar* transports the reader to a world apart from reality despite the narration of historical events, places and people. The narrator also describes how Charlie and his best friend Chad would reminisce about their childhood, confusing what actually happened and what they remember happening:

Los dos rumanos apenas se veían ... pero cuando se veían, bebían, y cuando bebían, trataban de recordar, y a menudo recordaban con pelos y señales cosas que no habían sucedido. No importaba. Llevaban en Nueva York tanto tiempo que algunos recuerdos se habían quedado escondidos en ese lugar de la memoria que respeta por igual los acontecimientos reales y los inventados. (10)

With the passage of time memories fade and interweave with our imagination, and the source for these stories is a character whose memory is described as respecting as equal both things that happened and did not happen, a blurring of reality and fiction. "Y sin embargo, Charlie lo recuerda con diáfana claridad, que, por otro lado, es como suelen recordarse las cosas imaginadas o aquellas decoradas convenientemente por la euforia" (10). Memory's reliability as a recording and retelling of what happened is problematic; the novel consistently points to this characteristic to play with the reader's inclination to accept this questionable reality.

Baudrillard and *Manhattan*

In *Simulacra and Simulation* Jean Baudrillard defines the hyperreal as “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality” (1), a haunting and enigmatic portrayal of contemporary life. He provides the metaphor of a map that, preceding the territory it is to represent, actually creates it; the result is not a mirror-like image but a simulacrum. This process of the imagination creating a territory finds an echo in the first chapter of Loriga’s *Manhattan*, in which Charlie invents Manhattan, its city streets, its buildings, its cultural happenings, its deaths and its tunnels, before ever having travelled or lived there. Chad, Charlie’s best friend, describes Charlie’s process:

Tenía un plano y sobre el plano iba cruzando las calles con las avenidas como si se tratara de un tablero de ajedrez y aquí -comentaba Chad señalando la calle 34 con la Quinta en *el mapa de su memoria*-³⁴ dibujaba el Empire State Building y allí -decía llevando ahora su dedo hacia el norte- dibujaba el final de Central Park y luego Harlem y el Harlem hispano y hasta el mercado de la Marqueta. Y no había nada acerca de esta ciudad que no supiese a ciencia cierta o no fuera capaz de imaginar. (11-12)³⁵

Ironically, the precision of Charlie’s invention is illogically accurate, detailed and would coincide with what one would encounter if they were to head down to the city streets and follow his depictions of the city. Charlie has memorized his map’s territory, and what he hasn’t been able to remember he fills in with his imagination. There is an origin for the city in *Manhattan*, yet it and the city have been re-imagined by the character. His suicide is provoked by the disconnect between his imagined Manhattan and the one he encounters.

Baudrillard uses Disneyland as another means of explaining his theory which finds a parallel in this novel:

Disneyland is a perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulacra. [...] Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. (12)

The novel allows an author the space to construct a fictional world, with the implicit agreement between reader/text/author that the invented world is not real.³⁶ The reader can enter this world for a few hours, then close the book or the flap of their Kindle and return to the ‘real’ world, have a sip of coffee or take the dog for a walk. But if Disneyland is the ‘real’ America, as Baudrillard suggests, then could one infer that Charlie’s Manhattan is the ‘real’ Manhattan? Has Manhattan’s ‘reality’ been altogether replaced by its invented simulacrum? Kathryn Everly describes it as

³⁴ Italics are mine.

³⁵ Using a chessboard as an analogy speaks to the infinite possibilities in a finite space.

³⁶ But the reader, especially in linear narratives, is prodded to suspend their disbelief and engage with the text as if it were really happening.

such. “Loriga presents New York City as the ultimate simulacrum, a place that exists as the invention of those who live there” (*Beauty and Death* 149).

One of Baudrillard’s comments regarding the difference between pretending and simulating might shed some light on Loriga’s narrative strategy. “Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false’, the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’” (3). Simulation blurs the boundaries between true and false, something that fiction can certainly claim to do as well. “Todas las historias de este libro son parte del sueño de Charlie, todas son inventadas aunque muchas, la mayoría, son ciertas” (16). What does it mean to claim that the invented stories dreamt up by the character Charlie are true? This paradox comes at the end of the first chapter before the reader enters into the imagination of Charlie and the *intrahistorias* of fictional characters in the invented metropolis of Manhattan. The narrator has put doubts into the reader’s mind as to how to read what follows: Are these invented stories false? How can they be true if they are Charlie’s dreams and inventions? Consistently throughout the stories of the novel the narrator inserts references to dreams, memories, inventions and imaginations, highlighting the fictional ‘truths’ of the text.

Fiction is at the intersection of the real and the imaginary mediated through signs of language, a concept that permeates this novel in particular. Many of the events that happen in this novel are historically based, such as Dutch Schultz’s murder, Arnold Grumberg’s death by coffee mug shards, the attacks on the Twin Towers on September 11th, Charlie’s suicide or Loriga’s five year residence in New York and his subsequent return to Madrid.³⁷ In addition the detailed descriptions of iconic buildings, streets, subways, tunnels, freeways and restaurants are accurate or give the illusion of accuracy. The incredibly detailed accuracy of many of the extratextual references to New York’s landscape and history deceives the reader into believing this is ‘real’; reality serves as a springboard into fiction, but once the reader jumps, he or she can no longer assume the veracity of events.

The quote that begins this section, “Our entire lineal and accumulative culture collapses if we cannot stockpile the past in plain view” (10), is a consequence of the hyperreal that Loriga explores in *Manhattan*. The first part of this quote, ‘lineal and accumulative culture’, refers to the way in which the Western/Occidental world conceptualizes time and human impressions on time, the progress of Humanity and a time scale that finds its center-point as 0 AD, with every passing day moving forward and away from this date on a line marked with points of historical interest. This vision of time and culture falls apart, according to Baudrillard, without history. In *Manhattan*, the storytelling is not that of a lineal or chronological narrative, but rather a fragmentation of narratives and circular storytelling. Charlie is dead, he hangs himself, in the first chapter, yet later in the novel Charlie returns. In the 25th chapter titled “Sombreros”, he reappears and imagines what Heaven will be like after he has killed himself. The 38th and final chapter, “De ratones y hombres”, begins with the end, Charlie’s death. “De la muerte de Gerald Ulsrak, alias *Charlie*, ya no hay más que decir. Murió y la ciudad entera se fue con él, como se van los perros fieles tras sus dueños” (187). The city that went with Charlie or Gerald is the

³⁷ The story of the man falling on the broken shards of his coffee mug and dying comes can be found in the *Ocala Star-Banner*, February 23, 2002.

novel that we have finished reading, the invented stories and memories which are attributed to Charlie.

Limitations regarding time and space are not only questioned through Charlie, there is a simultaneity of stories being told about the past which transcend the boundaries of time. William Burroughs visits with Dutch Schultz in the 1990s, Schultz was murdered during Prohibition (although Prohibition was repealed by this time), a character retraces the final moments before Robert Lowell's death in a taxicab, and historical events remain in the imagination of the physical spaces of the present. One character, Molly, can be in two places at once, transgressing the restrictions of time and space. "Molly tenía un don, era capaz de estar en dos sitios al mismo tiempo, siempre que esos dos sitios no estuvieran muy lejos" (119). Molly's special 'gift' resolves the issue of space and time. "Molly sólo paraba en casa para dormir. Su vida se iba ahora entre el Barney's y sus muchos paseos por el barrio, la mayoría imaginados, pues a estas alturas le daban menos juego los pies que la memoria" (122). Molly's imagination frees her from the physical laws of space and time. In a sense, this novel intends to accomplish the same thing.

"Todas las historias de este libro son parte del sueño de Charlie, todas son inventadas aunque muchas, la mayoría, son ciertas" (16)³⁸

One of the true, 'invented' stories in Charlie's dream pertains to the narrator's meeting with author William Burroughs in a public bathroom, under the auspices of translating Burroughs' novel/screenplay, "The Last Words of Dutch Schultz", to Finnish. Immediately the absurdity of the situation stands out; not only does Burroughs live in this foul-smelling bathroom,³⁹ but he also carries two pistols with him (one for when he's awake and the other for when he's dreaming). Once again the barrier between fiction and reality is blurred, as this historical character and literary icon takes part in the stories of *Manhattan* and functions as an unreliable narrator of the true story of Dutch Schultz. Burroughs was one of many artists to take up the life and murder of notorious gangster Dutch Schultz and transform it into a fictional work;⁴⁰ the continued representation of this event has contributed to the story being relegated to the realm of myth, where truth and fiction intersect and overlap. The events surrounding his murder are so bizarre and yet banal that they are instrumental in its various representations, serious or ironic. Dutch was fatally shot in 1935 in the bathroom of the Palace Chop House in Newark, New Jersey, but didn't die until two days later in the hospital. Police interrogated a delirious, feverish Schultz on his deathbed with a stenographer present. This written record of

³⁸ These are the final words of the first chapter before the reader enters into the various (almost completely independent) narratives. It sets up expectations for the reader.

³⁹ Home to homosexual encounters in the novel and a nod to the sexuality portrayed in the infamous novel "Naked Lunch" as well as Burroughs' own sexual experiences and his drug habit which drained his financial resources.

⁴⁰ Just as New York City in the past one hundred years has repeatedly been the focus in fiction, there has been a fascination with the famous gangster's murder and subsequent two-day stay in the hospital; the transcription of his delirious ramblings mirror a stream of consciousness desired by fictional writers.

his final incoherent ramblings created intrigue (code for a hidden treasure? poetry? childhood memories?) and is the basis for Burroughs' novel/screenplay. The story being told in *Manhattan* is another layer in the reader's relationship to reality and to the history of Dutch Schultz.

Despite the reminders offered by the narrator about the *imagined* stories of this novel, the incorporation of so many details taken from reality and inserted into the narratives tricks the reader into suspending disbelief. Loriga writes in *Días aún más extraños* about this process with regards to Hitchcock, who took real street corners and reproduced them with such care in order to construct an imaginary world that the spectator could not doubt until it was already too late. "Seguramente un cesto imaginario hecho con mimbres de la realidad. Hitchcock tomaba esquinas muy concretas de lo real y las reproducía con sumo cuidado, para construir un mundo imaginario del que el espectador no pudiera desconfiar hasta que fuera ya demasiado tarde" (55). The narrator in *Manhattan* presents his story as fiction, but then pulls the reader in with historical characters, realistic portrayals of New York City, fictional stories based upon 'true stories' while Loriga was living in New York, and the similarities shared by the narrator and the author. The novel forces the reader to go through the process of either accepting the details or going outside of the novel to verify them.

The fragmented form of the novel and multiple levels of narration add dimensions of difficulty in getting at the 'truth' of Dutch Schultz and recalls the aesthetic structuring of the cut-up technique popularized by Burroughs and evident in his creative version of Dutch Schultz. There are six chapters in *Manhattan* which pertain to the story about William Burroughs, Dutch Schultz, and a fictional (and 'invented') character who takes part in his murder known as Jimmy *El Pincho* Bernstein. The short narrative fragments are not chronological and begin with the narrator and his editor meeting with Burroughs in the public bathroom, told in the first person perspective by the Loriga/narrator in the 5th chapter titled *Dos pistolas*.⁴¹ Some 30 pages later (chapter 13, *Pobre Dutch*) the Schultz drama reappears; now the narrator is still present but in a secondary role, making offhand comments about Dutch and his accomplices.⁴² However, there is an interruption in the final paragraph of *Pobre Dutch* that reveals that our narrator has metamorphosed into the fictional Burroughs character; "--A pesar de lo cual, y en contra de lo que puedan haber oído decir --dijo entonces Bill⁴³ Burroughs--, Dutch no era paranoico" (70). This revelation signals to the reader that this entire chapter and the following four chapters concerning Dutch Schultz and Jimmy *el Pincho* are all told from Bill Burrough's perspective; the fictional character is narrating the history of Jimmy *el Pincho* and Dutch Schultz, which has then been included in the novel by the Loriga/narrator. The various levels of narration, along with the shifts in narrative voice, create a distance between the reader and the stories, a distance intensified by multiples levels of mediation and second hand information. It must be noted too

⁴¹ For example, the reader learns in the first chapter of *Manhattan* that Dutch Schultz was murdered "con el asunto aún entre las manos" (13) in a bathroom in the Palace Chop House.

⁴² Referring to Lulu Rosencrantz (*una preciosa bailarina*), the narrator states, "Como dicen aquí, es su hueso débil" (70). Those readers who know the story of Dutch Schultz intimately or research it will realize that Lulu Rosencrantz was actually Bernard 'Lulu' Rosencrantz, one of Dutch Schultz's mobsters, and not a female companion.

⁴³ According to the Loriga/narrator, William Burroughs' friends call him 'Bill'.

that between the third and fourth chapters of the Dutch Schultz story fifty-eight pages go by, or one third of the novel.⁴⁴ This large gap in the narrative fractures the continuity of the reading experience and the mimetic illusion of reality.

Throughout *Manhattan* and especially in the narrative string regarding Dutch Schultz, the fictional nature of the story and the text is constantly underscored. Despite an incredible amount of correct historical details that coincide with the history of Dutch's murder, there are repetitive markers highlighting that the reader is engaging with a fictional text and not a historical novel or text. One of the marks of the fictionality of the text is the unreliability of the narrator, Bill Burroughs. A well-known drug addict, Burroughs is described by the Loriga/narrator as having left the *territorio de lo real* years ago.⁴⁵ Further proof comes when Burroughs swears he recently had a conversation with Dutch Schultz. "En cuanto a Schultz, es curioso que lo mencione porque no sé si fue ayer o la semana pasada, pero recientemente en cualquier caso he hablado con el holandés" (31). When the narrator and his editor assume this was either in his dreams or it was Dutch's ghost, Burroughs rebukes them. "No en sueños. Tenga usted en cuenta que sé muy bien lo que me digo. No en sueños. [...] Sólo los imbéciles creen en fantasmas" (31). Considering the textual clue given by the Loriga/narrator, Burroughs is seventy-seven years old when they meet (Burroughs was born in 1914) and the year is 1991. Dutch Schultz was murdered in 1935, fifty-six years earlier.

The technique of flooding a fictional text with verifiable facts, some not 'true', can serve to emphasize the fictionality of the text, according to critic Kathryn Everly. "Through this implementation of 'real' world facts about people and places in a fictional space, the author creates a hyperreal text: a text that contains all of its own referents and is a self-sufficient entity constantly referring to the constructedness of its own identity" (*History Violence* xi). Constant reminders that these are not real stories and are in fact Charlie's dreams do not prohibit the reader from suspending disbelief and believing the reality of the text.⁴⁶ The *guiños al lector*, or winks to the reader, function as a sign of the text's fictionality and the author's self-awareness of 'deceiving' the reader.

There are many factual errors or misrepresentations of historical details included in these stories. For example, Lulu Rosencrantz is described in the novel as "una preciosa bailarina" (70), whereas the historical Bernard 'Lulu' Rosenkrantz was one of Dutch's trusted gangsters. Also, the year of Dutch's murder in the novel is 1932. "Jimmy prefería trabajar solo, pero se decía que Joe estaba bien informado, y en el invierno de 1932 había que estar muy bien informado para robar por la calle. La mayoría de la gente no llevaba en el bolsillo más que facturas impagadas" (137). The reader is not given the historical context of the Great Depression, hence the irony that one of the characters, Joe, needs inside information about robbing people because otherwise he'd just find unpaid bills. Yet Dutch was murdered in 1935, not in 1932. Going back to the initial encounter between the Loriga/narrator and Burroughs, the

⁴⁴ *Jimmy el Pincho* and *Cerca del Belasco*, chapters 15 and 26 respectively.

⁴⁵ The narrator compares Burroughs' state of mind to that of Dutch Schultz on his deathbed.

⁴⁶ His unrealized dreams, I should add; one of the consistent reminders is that Charlie committed suicide, is dead, and these stories are all that remain of him.

former states that *Las últimas palabras de Dutch Schultz* was first published in 1975, when it was actually published in 1970 in London and then in 1975 in the US. Quite possibly an innocent mistake, the description of the neighborhood where the Loriga/narrator and Burroughs meet in the bathroom contradicts the claim that Burroughs was seventy-seven when they met. “El urinario en cuestión estaba en el Lower East Side entre la avenida A y la avenida B, en un barrio que nada tenía que ver entonces con el *bohemian chic* de los noventa ni con la zona en rápida expansión económica que es hoy en día” (29). This is a small discrepancy; would the ‘bohemian chic’ of the nineties include the year 1991? It is a trap too; the temptation is to go outside of the novel and investigate the veracity of these details when the novel is its own self-contained world and reality. Although it constantly refers to historical events outside of the text and includes ‘facts’ from the real world, the inclusion of these in the fictional text transforms them.

This description of the Lower East Side, in addition to blurring the context of the meeting, also provides the background of the neighborhood, what it had been through since this meeting (highlighting the distance in time from their meeting and the present), and reveals the layering of histories that occur in a physical space as well as how fast the transformation of a neighborhood can take place. The layering of (forgotten and overlooked) histories in one space is a constant theme in *Manhattan*, as the novel takes the reader back in time to experience firsthand the mob hit that took out Dutch Schultz. It is important to reiterate that the outcome of this particular narrative is already known by the reader with a historical knowledge of Dutch’s life, who has read one of the many novels concerning his life and death or has seen one of the many movies of the same, or who is an attentive reader; in the opening chapter to the novel our narrator compares John Gotti’s funeral, another famous mobster, to Dutch’s funeral. “Treinta años antes había muerto Dutch Schultz de tres disparos en los baños de un restaurante chino con el asunto aún entre las manos, pero al holandés sanguinario no le quería tanto la gente” (13). This sentence exemplifies the carefully contrived structure of the novel and its style; a nebulous historical time (the narrator does not provide the reader with the date that John Gotti died), random facts told in a dispassionate manner such as how shots were fired or that he was urinating at the time of the hit, and the many nicknames or disguises worn by the characters; Dutch Schultz’s birth name was Arthur Flegenheimer, a Jewish, German immigrant. Finally, the resolution to the narrative is revealed before the story is told, mirroring how Charlie’s suicide is narrated.

Jimmy *el Pincho*’s role in the murder of Dutch Schultz is an example of the tongue-in-cheek authorial self-awareness of playing with the historicity of the novel and the reader’s perception of reality and fiction. Who is Jimmy *el Pincho*?

Hay media docena de hombres sentados en sillas de madera alrededor de la pequeña barra, bebiendo alcohol ilegal en el garito de Jack Fogarty, en la esquina de la 42 y Broadway, y luego está Jimmy Bernstein, que está tomando un café y pensando en sus cosas. (75)

Jimmy is actually Jimmy Bernstein, yet another character not from New York with a dual identity, who in this scene is the contrarian, drinking coffee at a bar during Prohibition, another

extratextual clue. This detail also helps situate the narrative, considering that in 1933 the governmental ban on alcohol was repealed. The placement of Jimmy in historically realistic situations does not detract from the fictionality of his character, as evidenced in Burrough's initial description of Jimmy in *Pobre Dutch*.

De Jimmy *el Pincho* poco se sabe. Se decía que había matado a un hombre cerca del teatro Belasco. Era de fuera y llevaba poco en la ciudad.⁴⁷ Nadie le había visto antes y nadie le volvió a ver. *Hay quien asegura que nunca estuvo allí.* (70)⁴⁸

Jimmy *el Pincho*'s ghostlike description and Burrough's acknowledgement that others doubt his role in the mob hit both contribute to the uncertainty of the narrative. Later we witness the 'murder' referenced in this quote of gangster *pequeño gran Joe*, who suffers a pathetic and absurd death. Jimmy hits him on the head with a nightstick, knocking him unconscious in order to steal his coat to stave off the extremely cold winter weather. Ironically Joe dies because he spends the night coatless in the cold weather; the blow only knocked him out. This episode gives the impression that Jimmy is not a fictional character, as does his active role in shooting one of Dutch's bodyguards in the final Dutch chapter. "Jimmy se acerca a la mesa y, sujetando a Aba Daba Berman por la muñeca, le dispara en la cabeza" (185). After the murder of Dutch Schultz in the novel, however, the doubt reappears. "A Jimmy el Pincho nadie volvió a verlo. Hay quien dice que nunca estuvo allí" (186).

Not only does this doubt surface in Burrough's descriptions, but Jimmy's self doubt emerges with the metaphor of footprints left in the snow in the introductory chapter to the novel.⁴⁹

Jimmy salió a la calle y dio un par de pasos sobre la nieve. Enseguida se detuvo para ver sus huellas. Le reconfortaba ver la silueta de sus propios pasos; pensaba que ya nadie, ni siquiera él mismo, podría dudar que fuese cierto, que estaba allí, caminando Broadway arriba, una mañana de invierno de 1931. (78)

The tracks left in the snow on a winter morning in 1931 bear witness to Jimmy *el Pincho*'s existence, and by extension, to his participation in Dutch's murder (never mind the fact that Dutch was murdered in 1935 and not 1932, as represented in this novel). By reiterating the tendency to doubt Jimmy's involvement in this historical event and then supposedly disproving this doubt time and again, the suspicions of the reader are not assuaged but rather heightened. If the narrator continues to point out that Jimmy exists, even if other people say he doesn't, that will arouse the reader's skepticism. The reader who accepts the narrative on face value could search for extra-textual information to investigate Jimmy *el Pincho* and then realize he's a

⁴⁷ Another example of the ubiquity of immigrants in *Manhattan*.

⁴⁸ Italics are mine.

⁴⁹ "los pasos marcados en esa misma nieve y borrados enseguida por otros pasos" (12).

fictional character, but the fact is the reader does not have to go outside of the novel to be skeptical and come to that conclusion.

Sept. 11, 2011

Another historically significant episode present in the novel concerns the attacks on the World Trade Center Twin Towers on September 11th, 2001.⁵⁰ Although not a central moment in the novel (on the contrary, the attack on the Twin Towers plays a periphery role), the power of this recent historical event and the absence in physical space represented by the missing towers make an impact on the reader beyond its small narrative part. Kathryn Everly's insightful analysis of this historical reference is a good starting point for this discussion:

Because Loriga never mentions the destruction of the towers, the reader is left to fill in the gaps between the fictional reality and what we know to be true. The author chooses to maintain the illusion of permanence and create a simulacrum that is at once disturbing yet, in a sense, comforting. Here the text relies heavily on a cognizance of the historical, extra-textual circumstance for a complete understanding of the narrative. The chapter (in which Arnold attempts to cross the towers) would not exist in the same way if the World Trade Center still stood. Loriga brings notions of absence, contextualization of fiction, and simulacra to a poignant end as he reconstructs the destroyed and makes the reader compliant in this act. (*Beauty and Death* 150)

The chapter that Everly is referring to is completely absurd, as Arnold Grumberg the piano salesman repeatedly attempts to get to the other side of the two towers without going around them and in the process gets lost, an action juxtaposed in the reader's mind with the attack of the two airplanes going through the towers to bring them down. What is also absurd is that Arnold's frustration leads him to a sexual form of simulacra, as he enters a strip club for multiple lap dances. Everly's assertion that the chapter would read very different if the towers still stood is astute, although I highly doubt the towers would play much of a role in the novel were it not for the September 11th attack. And while it is assumed that the reader is aware of this historical event, there are multiple representations of the attack in the novel. They highlight both the real and hyperreal sensation of the two airplanes flying into the skyscrapers, killing thousands of victims. The first mention of September 11th appears in the list of Charlie's inventions in the opening chapter; "y el piloto despistado que se estrelló contra las Torres Gemelas y el otro imbécil que se estrelló unos segundos más tarde" (12). Clearly the narrator's stance on the attack is negative and judgmental, which is rare in this novel of an ironic and distanced narrator, and the distinction between reality and fiction is blurred.⁵¹ It is important to note the counterfactual

⁵⁰ Loriga was living with his wife and children in New York during the time of 9/11.

⁵¹ Over fifteen minutes passed between the plane that hit Tower 1 and the plane that hit Tower 2, not seconds, despite the fact that it might have felt like only seconds had passed.

description of the first pilot as well; there was no confusion involved, the terrorists knew where their targets were and intended to take them down.

There are other off-hand remarks to the attack on the World Trade Center towers, but one character witnesses the event firsthand in a precarious situation. Martha, the wife of Andreas Ringmayer III, gets in a car crash in the chapter *Kilómetro 26* and is trapped upside down in her car. While she is pinned in her car, she begins to go in and out of consciousness and hallucinate. A Spanish professor, Ezequiel, comes to her aid but due to his status as an illegal resident and pending allegations of sexual misconduct for having an inappropriate relationship with a male student, fears for his own safety and leaves her suspended in the car alone. Unable to discern whether she's dreaming or awake, she begins to daydream of a sexual relationship with a fishmonger and imagines a passing circus complete with elephants.

[D]etrás del circo vio la imagen invertida de Manhattan y le pareció que de una de las Torres Gemelas salía un humo negro como si se tratase de una gran chimenea, y al poco vio venir un avión cruzando el cielo y hasta creyó ver claramente cómo el avión se incrustaba en el edificio [...] <<Si no me sacan pronto de aquí, voy a volverme loca>>, pensó Martha, antes de perder el sentido. (150)

This is the only representation of the attack on the towers in the novel, and it comes in the context of a dreamlike (and absurd) state of mind and body. From Martha's view turned upside down, the image of Manhattan and the Twin Towers would also be inverted, reflecting a sense of reality flipped on its head when the two airplanes were flown into the Twin Towers. Such a spectacular and unimaginable event was witnessed on television sets across the country and the world, live, no doubt many thinking it was impossible, like watching a movie but real, that they were losing their minds. By placing the fictional witness of the attack drifting in and out of Martha's day dreams, doubting her sanity, losing consciousness after watching the plane crash into the tower, all while upside down, Loriga suggests the illogical and disorienting sensation caused by 9/11. Without directly stating it, the description of this event implies its break with reality and logic.⁵²

Martha witnesses 9/11 fifty pages after David Letterman does his first post-9/11 show, inverting the chronology of the narratives once more. Chapter 19, *Dios bendiga a David Letterman*, is dedicated to the anticipation of this first new Late Night show after the attacks, bringing normalcy back to the lives of the citizens of New York and the US. This chapter is the half-way point in the novel of thirty-eight chapters, another real event fictionalized. It takes place a week after the attack, and exhibits the mindset of the character David Letterman preparing for his return to the air. 9/11 was a large media event; not only did the public watch the second plane crash into the second tower on live television, the coverage afterwards was extensive and ubiquitous. So many people experienced the event through television that it's only logical for that same medium to provide society a sensation of security and sensibility. Television in contemporary society denotes for many the regularity and the rhythms of life; when

⁵² Which he does in an interview. Loriga: "Es que la muerte es absurda, empezando por el 11-S, que es algo todavía incomprensible, y terminando por ese personaje que muere degollado accidentalmente con su propia taza de té rota, que es una historia que venía en el periódico" (Rodríguez Marcos).

television is knocked off of its programming schedule, chaos ensues. Only David Letterman, comedian and host of Late Night, can calm the panic.

Quien no conozca a Nueva York, o quien haya estado aquí sólo de visita, no podrá nunca entender la importancia de este momento. Al fin y al cabo, muchos, casi todos los *shows* de la televisión norteamericana, y de la televisión del mundo entero, alteraron sus programaciones la semana posterior al 11 de septiembre, pero lo cierto es que este cómico corrosivo, alto, torpe y casi siempre mal vestido, es Nueva York [...] Dave es Nueva York y mientras Dave no se mueva, Nueva York seguirá detenido. (99-100)

One of the effects of the attacks was a worldwide disruption in television programming; restoring normalcy meant bringing back those shows, regardless of how meaningless and trite it may seem. For New York to survive and get past the tragedy, Dave (one of the iconic symbols of New York) had to reappear.

Ramón Romero, one of the characters in *Manhattan*, represents the personal need for Dave's return. Ramón is obsessed with David Letterman to the point that his perspective of the events of 9/11 are filtered through Dave:

<<Seis días sin Dave>> era como Ramón Romero había decidido llamar a esa extraña semana que comenzó con dos aviones estrellándose contra las Torres Gemelas. <<Me pregunto qué va a pensar Dave de esto>> era, de hecho, lo único que Ramón fue capaz de decir, mientras contemplaba los dos mastodontes caer uno tras otro como si se los estuviera tragando la tierra. (101)

While this character is in the process of experiencing the two planes crashing into the towers, his thoughts are focused on what David Letterman will think of all this. The week following the attacks, for Ramón, is known as 'six days without Dave'; this character's life is mediated through television to the extreme that his experiences of this historical and powerful event, where three thousand people died, concentrate on a late night comedian's personal experience and interpretation of the events. Rather than the President of the United States, George Bush, or New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Ramón needs Dave to come back on his show and make sense of the terrible tragedy that occurred. "En el fondo de su alma contaba con Dave para seguir viviendo con cierta normalidad, para recuperar el pulso de sus propias cosas" (101).

The narrative takes the reader behind the scenes of the Late Night Show and into David Letterman's thoughts about the importance of this occasion. "Dave no era capaz de comprender qué importancia podía tener aquello. Acostumbrado como estaba a esa rutina que convertía los días en monstruos idénticos, no conseguía imaginarse a sí mismo enfrentado a lo excepcional" (102). With a monotonous regimen of rehearsed half-smiles and laughs, reading jokes, top ten lists and guest interviews, coming back on the air does not appear to be so remarkable. There were so many other incredible things going on, why does anyone care what David Letterman thinks or how's he doing? "<<Dave está bien --se dijo--, pero qué puede importar eso ahora>>" (102). While preparing for the show, he answers the question everyone

keeps asking him and his assistant, *¿Cómo está Dave?* Dave performs a sort of self-sacrifice to assuage the fears, the sadness and the anger of the masses. History has passed through the television cameras and now television is interpreting and making sense of that history.

Conclusion

Ray Loriga's novels, and in particular *Caídos* and *Manhattan*, exhibit an obsession with the mechanism of memories, representing past events (fictional and real) in written narratives, non-linear chronicles of characters alienated from their surroundings, popular culture, the difficulties with reality in the late twentieth century and early twenty first century, and by proxy, these novels make a statement regarding the condition of history and fiction. For many of the younger generation in these works, international popular culture (primarily from the US and the UK) is a substitute for national and global historical events. While young people tend to display an indifference to politics and history which dissipates with age, the fact that this is continuing to happen after grand changes occurred to the Spanish government and society might be troubling to some critics. Yet in *Caídos* one of the ironic qualities is its historicizing an ahistorical consciousness and moment in some Spanish youth, who instead have a passion for foreign rock music, films and even literature, as well as a desire to escape into the trappings of television. The narrator uses a narrative form which attempts to recreate what really happened to his brother, proposing an alternative narrative to the accepted ones put out by the media, in a search for the truth. These two novels explore the fictional world based upon real events, working through the mythical status of musicians, famous actors, well-known stories and even absurd reality. In each novel there is a sensation that what takes place is outside of time while simultaneously being historically anchored by popular culture. Loriga plays with the boundaries of fiction and truth, writing fiction within a long tradition of other fictions, and manipulates details to provide the appearance of reality while highlighting again and again the fictionality of his texts. His novels scream out, this is not real, what you are reading is fiction, and then proceeds to tell stories which integrate a great number of real people, places and events.

The characters who appear in *Caídos* are historical characters, in the sense that they would not have existed in the 1950s in Spain; they only make sense in a post-Franco, democratic, audiovisual culture and within the tradition of road movies and literature. As we will see in the analysis of another author often included in the GenX tradition, the female characters in Lucía Etxebarria's first fictional novel, *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas*, also are historical; they would be unimaginable in a pre-democratic narrative. In addition, we'll see how inherited burdens of the past and present are challenged, such as Catholic traditions, the role of women, the dominance of the male heterosexual reader, heterosexual norms, and capitalist economics.

Chapter 3: The Haunting Traces of History and the Generation X through the Gendered Lens of
Lucía Etxebarria's *Amor, curiosidad, Prozac y dudas*

Rosa: ¿Qué es la historia cuando podemos recibir setenta y cinco canales de televisión a través de la antena parabólica? (*Amor* 103)

Ana: Yo necesitaba una historia porque todos necesitamos un pasado, y yo confeccioné una historia como si de una colcha de patchwork se tratase, uniendo como pude trozos de recuerdo y retales de memoria, para que compusieran una historia que, creo, es la que más se ajusta a la verdad. (*Amor* 82)

Cristina: He crecido entre discos. (*Amor* 121)

There are quite a few Generation X characteristics shared by Ray Loriga, José Ángel Mañas and Lucía Etxebarria, such as their similar ages, instant popularity and commercial success, and some thematic overlapping such as an emphasis on international popular culture, and in particular film and music. Each writer's style and thematics are unique, and the grouping together of the three under one literary umbrella comes with obvious peril and contradiction. They have in common, however, an indifference to history, supposedly, which was one of many literary currents in the 1990s in Spain. The contentious debates surrounding Spanish memory and history in the post-Franco era extended from the political arena to many others, including the literary field. Some novelists post-1975, as Cristina Moreiras Menor states, "view the present as one moment in a continuous process of historical transformation, and offer an interpretation of the present through the recovery of historical memory" (135-136).⁵³ Paradoxically, this was in direct contrast to the tacit *pacto de silencio* which precluded these discussions from entering the public sphere, preferring to forget the past and its many horrors rather than reopening the wounds of the Civil War and subsequent dictatorship. Etxebarria and contemporaries wrote novels which explicitly evaded these historical questions, rather focusing on the present moment. While their novels no doubt are immersed in the contemporary realities of the young generation of Spaniards after the transition to a democratic government, I will argue that Etxebarria's debut novel, *Amor, curiosidad, Prozac, y dudas* (*Amor*) engages the recent past by challenging the historical narratives of gender propagated by the Franco regime and the Catholic Church. *Amor* foregrounds women's acceptable social roles and sexual norms. Despite many advancements in the social and political sphere for women and dissident sexualities after the rise of democracy, Etxebarria's novel confronts the still prominent inequalities illustrated by the experiences of the Gaena sisters.

⁵³ "Authors such as Bernardo Atxaga, Antonio Muñoz Molina, Lourdes Ortíz, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, Juan Benet, Juan Goytisolo, Juan Marsé, Jorge Semprúm, Luis Llamazares, and Alejandro Gándara approach Spanish reality from this historiographic (and therefore traumatic) position" (137).

As mentioned previously, in the 1990s, a new literary movement emerged in Spain, categorized at the time as the Generation X, that focused on present-day youth in Spain, their experiences in the new Spanish democracy, and the impact of popular culture on their characters. The characters on the surface appear to be unconcerned with the Spanish past, but as Mark Allinson states, “Despite the increasing disavowal of Franco’s legacy by the young in Spain, the history of the dictatorship remains central to the formation of Spain’s particular youth culture” (265). This current chapter will bring into focus how the vestiges of Spanish/Franco History regarding gender and the social norms of previous eras are principal concerns in *Amor*. While the grand narratives of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship hardly warrant a mention in *Amor*, the rights of women are explored prior to and after the Transition to Democracy. Twenty years after the arrival of democracy, the traditional dominant systems of power still wield considerable weight. While not explicitly linking the Catholic Church to Franco’s regime, there is an implicit understanding of the partnership between the Church and the dictatorship, both of which played an important role in establishing laws limiting the freedoms of its female citizens. The female characters struggle with their Catholic upbringing and education, and the institutionalized second-class citizenship of women in Spain and in the Church. Their position on the lower rungs on the social ladder is evident in the still entrenched and enforced archetypal female roles of the mother, the housewife, and the need to conserve their virginity through sexual abstinence and ignorance. For the sisters who do abandon these roles, the dehumanizing multinational corporations and tiered inequality (due to gender and the demographic lottery, as one character calls it) wear down their ambitions in the workplace. The injustices perpetrated by these companies are confronted, and the solution for at least one of the sisters is to quit and no longer play by their rules.

The novel details the stories of three women, the Gaena sisters, who narrate in the first person their memories, current situations and inner thoughts. This is a novel about how three sisters arrived at this present moment, fractured, shattered, but surviving, symbolic of Spanish women during the time period leading up to Franco’s death and the Transition to democracy. Most of the action occurs in the past, with the protagonists narrating what happened to lead them to a hospital on the outskirts of Madrid, the oldest sister Ana interned there after a ‘nervous breakdown’. Cristina, Rosa, and Ana are not only plagued by large historical forces exerting influence upon them but also are haunted by their personal histories. Their individual stories accentuate analogous battles fought by women in contemporary Spanish society, such as sexual and physical abuse. Cristina, the youngest sister, reveals that she was molested by her twenty-year old cousin when she was nine years old. Ana, the oldest sister, divulges her hidden traumas, that she watched her father physically assault her mother when she was a young girl and then was later raped by her boyfriend, Antonio. Burying the traumatic experiences of the past is a common trope throughout this novel, bringing to mind the silencing of Spain’s past from the Civil War to the dictatorship of General Franco.

These secrets echoed in the silence surrounding another pressing issue, the situation of homosexuals and dissident sexualities in Spain, particularly lesbians, embodied by a peripheral homosexual character named Gema, the bisexuality of Cristina and Line, and the possibility that Rosa, the middle child, is a closet lesbian. Cristina and Rosa engage in feminist discourse, which is reflected in the novel by the paucity of male characters, who when they do appear almost

exclusively exhibit the worst possible traits of human beings and wreak emotional and physical havoc on the female characters. The male characters undergo humiliation and ridicule throughout the text; as a result, many male readers are intentionally alienated, contributing further to the text's opposition to systems of power. Other sections, however, attract the heterosexual male reader with highly eroticized and explicit descriptions of sexual encounters. Blatantly graphic sexual language, especially coming from a female author, would not have been possible during Franco's rule with strong censorship in place, and the fact that a woman speaks publicly about female sexuality undermines the long-standing social repression; the characters' relationship to pleasure negates the dominant narrative proclaiming sex for a woman to be motivated solely by biological, reproductive reasons.

One of the immediate criticisms of GenX texts was that they were not 'serious' examples of literature, but rather products of a new publishing marketing machine which found a new formula for best-sellers, emphasizing the hip, rebellious nature of the young writers and their adolescent characters. Their indifference to Spanish history and politics was cited as another symptom of their dubious aesthetic quality; however, there were many critics who praised Lucía Etxebarria's forays into the literary field, and her success both commercially and critically is evident by the position of her novels on the best-sellers' lists and the awards bestowed upon her novels. *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*, Etxebarria's second fictional novel, won the Premio Nadal in 1998, and in 2004 *Un milagro en equilibrio* won the Premio Planeta de Novela. Some argue that these awards are nothing more than promotional efforts to boost sales, but the committees are populated by very well-respected authors and critics and there are an ample number of entries.⁵⁴

Historical Backdrop

In order to analyze how the novel and its female characters question the historically entrenched social and sexual expectations for Spanish women who were born in the 1960s and 1970s, it is important to first provide a background of the conditions which produced their predicament. During the Second Republic from 1931-1936, women enjoyed many rights which were subsequently removed under the Franco regime. Historian Adrian Shubert:

The situation of women in liberal Spain was very similar to that of women in other industrializing western nations, but after the Civil War Spanish women found themselves in a very different, and less favorable, position [...] They lost their political rights, the suffrage they had achieved in 1933 - a loss which was shared by Spanish men as well - but the changes went far beyond politics. Given free rein by the Franco regime, the Church was finally able to impose its moral vision on Spanish society as a whole...*Women could aspire to marriage and motherhood but little more.* (italics are mine 214)

⁵⁴ "Al Premio Nadal se han presentado este año un total de 364 novelas [...] El jurado estaba formado por Pere Gimferrer, Jorge Semprún, Rosa Regas, Andreu Teixidor de Ventós y Antonio Vilanova" (2, http://elpais.com/diario/1998/01/07/cultura/884127601_850215.html).

While women once enjoyed comparable lives to those in other western countries, after the successful military uprising in 1936 they were stripped of their newly gained rights. Women's ambitions were relegated to the realm of the home. The following quote from Shubert is telling in that it refers to the situation of Spanish wives prior to the Second Republic, which is what the law reverted to during and after the Civil War. "Upon marriage she automatically lost most of her legal rights and became an *appendage of her husband*" (italics are mine 32). The use of the word appendage, with its negative connotations of being added to something more important, highlights women's subservient position and their dependence on their spouses. Cristina in *Amor* criticizes the popular creation story from Genesis of Adam and Eve, in which the birth of woman originates from the rib of man, integrating women's second-class citizenship into the myth of origin.

What were some of the consequences of this drastic reversal? As Carme Molinero states, "el régimen franquista anuló todas las reformas del código civil republicano, entre ellas el matrimonio civil y el divorcio, y reimplantó el código civil de 1889" (111). By reinstating a civil code instituted fifty years prior, adultery was considered a cause for divorce only if it was committed by a husband's wife; if this were to occur, there existed "el derecho del marido y el padre 'a lavar con sangre su honra' - artículo 428" (111) which was in effect until 1963. As for a husband's indiscretions, they would not trigger a divorce unless they reached the status of public scandal. Also, "no sólo el aborto fue considerado como un crimen de estado, se prohibió y penalizó la venta de anticonceptivos y se censuró la educación sexual" (110). The prohibition of abortions and birth control, and the censorship of sexual education reverted women's civil rights to the previous century, as the control of a women's body in many respects was regulated by the patriarchal State and the Church.

The structuring social principle became the importance of the heterosexual family unit, and in particular, the authoritative role of the husband and the obedient wife and mother. "(L)a política antifemenina se encubrió con un discurso de protección a la familia" (114). Veiled in a need to preserve the family unit, husbands would work outside of the home, providing financial stability for the family, and women would serve the needs of the household, in particular raising the children. Laws were put in place to ensure a difficult path for those women who wanted to work outside of the home, including the need for written permission from one's husband before being able to take a job. On its face this was a way to free women from the enslaved life as factory workers, yet these restrictions functioned as a means to keep the ideal family intact. Once these laws and norms were in place, Carmen de Urioste attributes their continued success in limiting women's possibilities to the collaboration of the State, Society and the Catholic Church: "el eje Iglesia-Estado Sociedad funcionó durante cuarenta años como el Panóptico de Bentham en la disciplina de la mujer española, tratando de hacer de ella un elemento sociosexual dócil y sumiso" (*Las novelas* 124). Various tools were utilized "por la ideología franquista para reforzar los ideales de femineidad, de sumisión, de humildad y de heterosexualidad diseñados para la mujer española" (124), among them the passage of these laws and the significant role of the Catholic Church.

Elvira Antón looked at the part that advertising played in the promulgation of the ideal female and male in Spanish society during the Franco regime and afterwards, which helps to

establish what were the social norms for women in these years. She first establishes the source of the normalized gender roles. “Institutionally preferred notions of masculinity and femininity during the Franco regime were clearly determined by the patriarchal structures on which its social, political and economic organization depended, and the patterns of behaviour and morality established by the Catholic Church” (206). But what were these ‘preferred notions of masculinity and femininity’? The ideal woman “was a passive and submissive image inspired by the Virgin Mary” (206), and this exultation of the Virgin Mary included her sexual virtue. “As Miguel Delibes’ arch example of Catholic womanhood, María declares in *Cinco horas con Mario*, ‘purity is a woman’s most prized possession’ (Delibes 1977, p.187)”. This emphasis on the preservation of one’s chastity until marriage, as well as the biological and reproductive role of sexual intercourse between a male and female partner, is one of many persistent beliefs challenged by the women and their experiences in Etxebarria’s novel. Male stereotypes are also disputed in this novel; men, according to Antón’s research, were expected to be “physically strong, successful, determined, articulate and self-confident”, and with the Spanish bull as a symbol of masculinity, embody the “bravery, strength, aggression, virility and purity of race” (207) of the *macho ibérico*. “The idea of the ‘stud’ appealed to the ‘unquestionable’ notion of the virility of the Spanish man” (207). Virility speaks to the importance of procreation and building a strong family line with sexual intercourse as a tool for breeding rather than as a source of pleasure, especially from a female’s perspective.

The products directed towards the female consumer tended to be of the household variety, further acknowledging and reinforcing the woman’s role in the kitchen, in the house and as the mother. On the other hand, among the most prevalent products targeting male consumers were alcohol, tobacco, and cologne. Despite advancements on certain fronts regarding gender roles in advertising after the transition to democracy, “Women continue to be modelled as good mothers and housewives, passive and subordinate to the husband and *his* desires” (208) and “notions of male success are still essentially associated with physical prowess and sexual conquest” (211). We will see that the male characters in *Amor* fail to live up to the expectations, and in particular the sexual traits, associated with an ideal male figure.

The Demystification of Virginity in *Amor* through Sexual Violence, Ignorance, Apathy

As mentioned earlier, the Catholic Church was free to impose its moral belief system upon much of the public. Their discourse regarding female sexuality was very clear and was disseminated through the educational system. The sisters’ difficulties in coming to terms with their individual sexualities stem in part from the lack of sexual education in school, the dearth of reliable sources of information about sex, and the Church’s role in forging an ideal conception of female sexuality. Cristina, Rosa and Ana are all taught about the importance of preserving their virginity until marriage, using the Virgin Mary as a model. Cristina, who was born in 1971, recalls some of the lessons she learned:

Obvia decir que en el colegio el tema ni se mencionaba. Nos advertían, eso sí, de que teníamos que llegar vírgenes al matrimonio (las pobres monjas, qué

ingenuas...), y con eso estaba todo dicho. Y siempre se nos describía a los hombres como una especie de maníacos sexuales que sólo deseaban una cosa, y que una vez que la consiguieran nos abandonarían. (134)

Discussion about sex is taboo, and the younger generations are taught to avoid and evade sexual topics in the public sphere. The dominant narrative preaches that a women's worth is tied to the preservation of her virginity, and by extension, her role as mother and wife; men, on the other hand, are sexual beasts that must be kept at bay. There is a complete lack of any other sexual education for the three female protagonists who are taught by celibate nuns in an all girls' school, a dubious source for this type of information to begin with. The threat of abandonment by men is utilized to implement this system, which for the Gaena sisters would be powerful considering their father's abandonment of the family. The stories of these three sisters exemplify the consequences of this education.

Sexuality widely diverged for girls and boys, according to the Catholic doctrine and moral acceptance in Spanish society. Cristina, in a blatantly disdainful tone, describes her interpretation of a young Catholic girl's situation and expectations based upon religious ideology:

(E)l Gran Secreto de la Existencia. Resulta que, por el mero hecho de haber nacida niña, el Señor había colocado un tesoro dentro de tu cuerpo que todos los varones de la Tierra intentarían arrebatarle a toda costa, pero tu misión era mantener ese tesoro inviolado y hacer de tu cuerpo un santuario inexpugnable, a mayor gloria del Señor (Él). El inicio de tamaña responsabilidad vendría marcado el señalado día en que por vez primera tu cuerpo te ofreciera unas gotas de sangre, sangre que te recordaba el sacrificio que tú deberías hacer por el Señor (Él) para devolverle el que, en su día, Él había hecho por ti. (19)

The story emphasizes the value attributed to a women's virginity, men's natural desire to possess this treasure and the religious discourse that supports and sustains the argument. Cristina emphasizes the gender of God and Jesus on a number of occasions to show the psychological effects that a gendered god could have on young girls. "Desde el momento en que me dejaron claro que Dios era un hombre, ya empecé a sentirme más chiquita, porque así, sin comerlo ni beberlo, me había convertido en ser humano de segunda categoría" (16). God is male and the Savior is Male, and for centuries female sexuality was determined by men. In God's plan, young girls are given a treasure they must protect, and this is one of their life's goals until marriage. This is outside of their control and to rebel is a sin against God, a desecration of one's body by having sex before marriage. By instilling fear and shame into young girls, the hope is they won't question the logic (Jesus sacrificed for you, your period is a reminder of this sacrifice) and submit to their sexuality being defined by this creed.

While the three sisters do conserve to varying degrees the idea that their virginity is, at least at first, a valuable piece of themselves to be given to a special man (and certainly not to a woman), either their experiences refute this notion or they modify their relationship to virginity as they mature. Rosa's desire to lose her virginity is provoked by her age, twenty-one, and angst

at being stuck from her perspective in the childhood stage of her life. Rosa unemotionally recalls her first time having sexual intercourse while trying to determine the identity of a mystery caller who leaves messages playing a song she loved as a child on her answering machine. “Está aquel profesor con el que perdí mi virginidad, no porque él me gustase demasiado sino porque yo consideré que a los veintiún años ya iba siendo hora de dejar de ser doncella” (164). Originally Rosa had saved herself for her beloved cousin, Gonzalo, who was obsessed with the youngest sister, Cristina. However, after being a university student without sexual experience and frustrated by her unrequited obsession with Gonzalo, Rosa is motivated to have sex as a symbol of leaving behind her childhood. Rosa even chose her married professor, supposedly a safe individual who would not read too much into her sexual debut and quickly move on; ironically, the married professor attributes a great deal of value to their encounter and pledges to leave his wife for Rosa while doggedly pursuing her. “Sin embargo, para mí se había tratado simplemente de una prueba empírica, y no particularmente satisfactoria, por cierto. Para mí el tema de la virginidad no tenía mayor importancia” (164). Not only was losing her virginity not important, the experience was nothing more than an unsatisfactory test .

The manners in which Ana and Cristina lose their virginity are harrowing tales of sexual violence perpetrated by male figures of power. After alluding several times to her first experience during the course of the novel, Ana finally reveals to the reader near the end of the novel that she was raped by her boyfriend, Antonio, when she was a teenager. Her loss of innocence is inflicted by her first true love and forever marks her. Ana’s adult life is influenced powerfully by this violent attack.

Y de la misma manera hay gente que nos crea, que nos convierte en las personas que somos, gente cuyas acciones marcan el resto de nuestras vidas de forma que nunca volveremos a ser como antes, y que, sin embargo, no se responsabilizan de nosotros. Antes de que Antonio pasara por mí, yo había sido una persona, y después de aquello me convertí en otra totalmente diferente. (188)

Her rape becomes a turning point, the before and after moment of her life. Ana later confesses that her life has been dedicated to proving her worth to Antonio; she cannot escape the effects of the rape. The rape, festering beneath the surface for fifteen years, comes to light when Ana confronts Antonio. Ana’s husband, Borja, and Antonio were best friends as children and many years later Antonio visits them in Madrid; after a night of drinking, Ana summons the courage to challenge her rapist. Antonio’s reaction is blank, fearful and feigned incomprehension. “¿Era posible que él no se acordara? Quizá sencillamente no quería recordarlo. -Yo estaba borracha. Tú también, creo. Dejé de ser virgen aquella noche” (186). After multiple attempts to get Antonio to remember the rape, she realizes that either he never recognized the gravity of this event or, more likely, he had spent his life trying to forget it. Antonio’s reaction is symbolic of a desire to brush the past under the rug in Spain, to forget past violent acts and move on without justice or closure.

Regardless, Ana’s brutal and shocking account of the experience is distressing and forces the reader to suffer through her attack, pushing it to the forefront and finally confronting this haunting sexual assault. It is a description of something that many people do not want to talk about or acknowledge, especially in Spain during this time period. Ana takes the reader through

the rape step by step, remembering “cómo ponía los cinco sentidos en mover todos los miembros a la vez para que él no lograra penetrarme, pero él era mucho más fuerte que yo” (187). Antonio’s physical strength was too powerful for Ana to overcome, in spite of her resistance. It is clear from this description that there was no confusion as to whether or not Ana wanted the sexual encounter to continue. “(L)e mordí la cara con toda la rabia de un perro acorralado” (187), showing the dehumanizing effect of the rape on Ana, taking away her self-worth, as she refers to herself as a ‘cornered dog’. The final description is of the forced penetration, that caused both a physical and a psychological suffering:

cómo me dolía entre las piernas, un dolor agudísimo, como si estuvieran introduciéndome un hierro candente, un dolor que me perforaba como una aguja al rojo vivo, que se me iba metiendo dentro, muy dentro, más allá de músculos y tendones, más allá de capas de grasa y de filetes de carne, en el centro mismo de mis terminaciones nerviosas, en el núcleo exacto de mi alma. (187)

The physical pain is a powerful sign of the damage done to her most inner being, her soul; this *tesoro*, according to the nuns who taught Ana and her sisters, was not given freely by Ana to Antonio, it was plundered. This rape highlights that Ana did not have the choice to remain a virgin, did not have the ability to control her own sexuality.

Ana’s rape reveals the lack of support at the time for women relating to sexual aggression; whether for revenge, to prevent the same thing happening to another woman, or to seek justice, Ana’s attacker is never charged with a crime and never has to answer for his sexual attack, to society or to Ana. She is conditioned to blame herself for the rape, holding herself responsible for the decision to accompany Antonio on his *moto* up to the mountains. At the time, ‘Anita’ does not even comprehend what rape is.

En aquellos tiempos nadie hablaba de violaciones. La Anita que yo era ni siquiera sabía qué significaba la palabra y pensaba que todo había sido culpa suya. Ella le había acompañado al monte. Había ido sola en la moto. Se lo había buscado. Los hombres son animales. No pueden reprimir sus instintos. Eso me habían dicho las monjas toda la vida, y era responsabilidad mía mantener intocado mi cuerpo, ese templo sagrado que Dios me había dado. (193)

Ana’s sexual ignorance lays the groundwork for her response to the rape, and she reiterates the Catholic teachings of her body as a sacred temple to be protected from the ravaging of men/beasts. There is a symbolic linguistic transformation from Anita to Ana, signifying her loss of innocence and trust. Ana does not even know the meaning of the word *violación*, hence she never reports the rape and there is no resolution to her attack. When she arrives home late in the morning, Ana faces her mother’s rage; her mom does not inquire about what happened or show any concern for Ana’s physical or emotional state; she automatically assumes Ana’s guilt and slaps and berates her. Treating a recent sexual victim like this only conditions her to shoulder the blame more and to be fearful of disclosing the traumatic experience to anyone. The reader is the first person that Ana tells about the rape; not even her husband was aware of it. “Siempre temí

que Borja notara que yo no era virgen, pero cuando llegó el momento ni siquiera mencionó el tema; no sé, quizá no le había importado, quizá ni siquiera se había dado cuenta” (180-181). Ironically, one possible source of Borja’s ignorance of his bride’s ‘impurity’ originates from the same insufficient sexual education that Ana and her sisters endured; for Ana’s husband, her celibacy was either trivial or taken for granted.

The only sort of ‘justice’ for Ana is when the narrative comes full circle and Antonio is found dead of a drug overdose in the exact same spot where he raped Ana. “Antonio había muerto a causa de una sobredosis y que la Ertzainza había encontrado su cadáver en un pequeño bosquecillo cerca de la autopista, a la salida de Orio” (191); within a few days, Ana has what is termed a nervous breakdown, is institutionalized and determined to divorce Borja. Already a broken man per Ana’s description, it is insinuated that Antonio’s mysterious death was provoked by the confrontation with Ana at the bar. With Antonio’s death, Ana can finally move on. “Antonio me había tratado como una puta y yo había organizado toda mi vida para demostrarle a él, al mundo y a mí misma que no lo era” (193); once he is gone what is the point of her marriage, her material goods and her life hitherto lived? Finally free from the bonds of the rape Ana makes the decision to start her life again, at age thirty-two, but this is only possible after confronting the violence that altered her life and her identity. It is hard to read this without thinking about the decision in Spain to bury the violence committed during the Civil War and the dictatorship as a means for a peaceful, sustained transition to democracy.

Cristina, the youngest sister, also suffers a series of sexual attacks, albeit not of violence but of manipulation, incest and betrayal. After her father (whose name is never given) abandons the family, his absence is filled by a twenty year old cousin, Gonzalo. He moves in along with his aunt to comfort the sisters’ mother and provide stability and support to the Gaena family. Instead, the father’s replacement promptly begins to sexually molest Cristina, who is only nine years old. Once again, not until almost the end of the novel does this come to light. Cristina reveals her personal secret that she withheld from everyone, including the many psychologists she visited. “Pues sí, Gonzalo fue el saqueador de mis tesoros virginales, si es así como queréis llamarlo” (238). Not only does Cristina admit the physical abuse committed by Gonzalo, she relates to the reader the first time that they engaged in this activity. “Sus dedos iniciaron una aventurada incursión por debajo de mis bragas” (239),

Su mano seguía avanzando y el resto del cuerpo permanecía quieto, mientras miraba fijamente la tele. Él también prefería fingir que todo seguía como siempre, que no estábamos saltándonos ninguna regla. Y así seguimos, con los ojos puestos en la pantalla y el cerebro concentrado en lo que sucedía debajo de la manta a cuadros. (239)

The timing of the sexual molestation of Cristina is historically relevant, as television serves as a distraction for what is going on underneath the covers. No other time in human history was it possible to watch scenes acted out on a television screen, a diversion from reality, while simultaneously violating a nine year old girl. The metaphor of the action beneath the covers, not talked about, buried and silent, is a recurring one throughout the novel, underscoring the

preference to not talk about these subjects. Also, despite her nonchalant attitude, it is clear that Cristina knew they were breaking rules and doing something prohibited.

Cristina's experiences with Gonzalo forever mark her sexuality. For many years she is a troubled child, attempting suicide many times throughout her teenage years. Mental health experts cannot get to the root of her issues, although an excess of testosterone is cited as one possible cause. Cristina acknowledges her promiscuity as a possible consequence of her sexual molestation as a child, since she describes the constant sexual desires once Gonzalo began molesting her.

Cada día aprendía un poco más. Avanzaba peligrosamente, como a través de un campo minado. A veces, cuando veía a otro chico mayor que me gustaba, a los estudiantes de los Maristas con los que coincidíamos en el autobús, al chico de la panadería, al quiosquero, me entraban ganas de intentarlo con ellos, y me preguntaba si responderían de la misma manera que Gonzalo, o si no sería algo exclusivamente de éste. (240)

This is Cristina's sexual education, one of incest, of a nine year old girl being sexually exploited by her much older male cousin. She never says anything, does not tell her sisters, her psychologists, her friends. The reader is once again the first person to find out about her buried past.

Gonzalo manipulates Cristina into keeping their secret quiet. There are verbal threats in order to maintain the status quo.

Pero no podía decir una palabra, porque Gonzalo me había hecho jurar que lo mantendría en secreto, me había hecho entender que todo el mundo pensaría que él estaba abusando de mí porque yo sólo tenía nueve años y él veinte, que si alguien se enteraba me echarían del colegio, me encerrarían en un reformatorio o en un hospital psiquiátrico... (240)

Gonzalo is prescient in his predictions; despite Cristina's continued repression of these experiences, she is confined many times to psychiatric hospitals as a teenager. Spanish society would not have approved of their relationship. Cristina, however, recovers control of her sexuality, as she says, "(t)enía reservada mi virginidad" (241) for Gonzalo. "Fue natural que cuatro años más tarde fuera Gonzalo el encargado de llevársela. No podía haber sido ningún otro. No me forzó. Yo lo había decidido así. Había decidido tomar el control. Y no me arrepiento" (241). Cristina reasserts her power of the situation and chooses Gonzalo to be her first at her sister Ana's wedding. Ironically, Cristina states that it could have been worse. "Habrá quien diga que he sido una víctima. Puede. Pero, sinceramente, creo que ha habido primeras experiencias muchísimo peores que la mía" (241). Unwittingly (she is unaware of Ana's rape), Cristina's comment evokes the sexual assault suffered by her older sister.

Cristina's experiences with Gonzalo are another example in this novel which dispel the idealized myths surrounding virginity and sexual purity, and shed light on how past traumatic experiences shape a person's identity. The typical story of a young girl who has a boyfriend, gets

married, then has sexual intercourse, becomes a mother and happily runs the household is contrasted with the reality of these three sisters. Even the one who follows this path, Ana, fails.

What is their sexual education?

As well as the complicated and abusive manners in which the Gaena sisters lost their virginity, the policies in school evading sexual education and their families' avoidance of the topic cause the sisters to search for information about sex in other places, especially from friends, popular culture and actual practice. Cristina encounters sexuality at a very young age, and eventually turns to pornographic movies, discussions with friends and trial and error as her sources for sexual education. Rosa also relies mainly on movies, albeit of a very different nature than those watched by Cristina, and by experimentation. She rejects the validity of the stories told by her classmates. Ana learns primarily from her relationship with her husband and through magazines. Etxebarria challenges the reader to imagine the consequences of women whose primary references for sexual data are products of popular culture, pornography, trial and error, and the narrow creed preached at school and in the home. This distortion of information seriously influences their lives and their decisions.

Ana's very limited, sparse sexual awareness is evident when she acknowledges the possibility that she has never had an orgasm: "cuando leo los consejos sobre vida sexual en el *Mía* y veo esas barbaridades que escriben sobre el orgasmo me pregunto si yo alguna vez habré tenido uno, y llego a la conclusión de que no he debido de experimentarlo, porque si hubiese sentido un orgasmo lo sabría, digo yo" (157). As an isolated housewife without much interaction with the outside world, Ana utilizes what is available to her, magazines. The media can create unrealistic expectations, and in this case it functions as the sole source of sexual information for Ana. Later she reveals to the reader that she never used a condom with Borja because he found the rubber material to be uncomfortable. Without any sort of background to know whether or not this was typical or acceptable, Ana is compliant and follows her husband's wishes. To prevent becoming pregnant she takes birth control pills; the impetus is on her, not Borja. Not surprisingly, birth control pills were not a legal form of contraception during Franco and their use was not very common compared to other western countries. "(B)irth control was much less practiced in Spain than in other countries even in the late 1970s and Spaniards made considerably less use of more modern methods. Of course, the fact that birth control was illegal until 1978 contributed to this" (Shubert 213). Shubert declares that the impetus for birth control had been "a matter for men" (213); Ana's use of the pill shows a shift in the use of more modern methods and that women were now more responsible for their bodies. Eventually Ana recognizes her unsatisfactory sexual experiences and expresses regret. "Y yo, yo, ¿qué? Yo sólo he conocido a dos hombres, y ninguno merecía la pena. Como tampoco merecía la pena hacerles caso a mi madre y a las monjas" (193). She no longer gives credence to the teachings of her mother and the Church, instead is forging toward a divorce and a new beginning.

Rosa's sexual history is comprised of experimentations gone wrong, resulting in dissatisfying experiences and contributing to her sexual repression (be it heterosexual or homosexual). Her first sexual encounter unveils the various forces acting upon her, some

ingrained into society long ago, and some due to her ignorance and innocence. She asks the question:

¿Por qué yo, a las doce años y siete meses, me dejé magrear impunemente los pequeños senos comprimidos dentro de mi sujetador marca Belcor, modelo Maidenform, talla 80, color rosa salmón, que me venía grande y hubo que ajustar, por un adolescente granujiento con pelusilla sobre el labio inferior? (129)

Her answers reveal that without any sexual education or knowledge regarding sex, she had no basis against which to compare her experience. “Porque no había conocido más educación sexual que la proveniente de un libro para niños titulado *De dónde venimos* que la tía Carmen había tenido a bien regalarme al cumplir los ocho años” (130). There was no guidance from her mother, her school or any other trustworthy authority; her sexual education consisted of one book that she received as an eight year old. With this lack of preparation, Rosa had to resort to other means for gathering information regarding sexuality. Symbolically, her bra is too large, as if Rosa were trying to be mature and grown up before her time.

Another reason for letting an immature boy with zits touch her chest after they kiss is because one of the sources for her sexual knowledge was film, demonstrating the influence of film on the establishment of one’s sexual identity and actions at an early age. This is a constant thematic in *Amor*, how characters’ actions remind them of movie scenes, how people look like actors and actresses, and how their actions are influenced by what they have witnessed on the big screen.

Porque en las películas que yo había visto, y que constituían mi única fuente de información sexual a excepción de los relatos de Verónica, Leticia, Laura y Nines (fuentes no autorizadas y poco fiables), el apasionado beso final de los protagonistas desaparecía con un fundido en negro. Así que yo no tenía ninguna razón para creer que después del beso apasionado el chico no juguetease con los pezones de la chica. (130)

Part of the irony of this statement is that for Rosa, while her young friends are not reliable, the implication is that movies are reliable. Film continues the trend of the silence surrounding sex and sexuality, as Rosa describes the scene fading to black after the final kiss. What happens next is left unsaid, hidden from the audience and left to the imagination.

Meanwhile, Cristina’s sexual education is much more sordid and explicit than that of her sisters. Cristina, due to her sexual abuse, becomes aware of her sexuality at a very young age. Despite this unfortunate introduction, she still remains ignorant about sex. “Afortunadamente, o no, tampoco me relacionaba precisamente con expertos (entre nosotros, mi primo, el supuesto donjuán, no tenía ni idea de follar)” (134). Due to not having an experienced partner teach her, Cristina and her friend Line decide to rent pornographic movies, so they could “adquirir información de primera mano sobre todo tipo de técnicas y posturas que en aquel momento sólo podíamos imaginar” (135).

Como resultado de esta atípica educación sexual me quedó la idea de que los tíos siempre se corrían fuera, excepto cuando querían tener hijos, porque eso habían hecho mis cinco amantes y eso hacían los chicos del porno. Y se me fijó una obsesión por las pollas grandes, ay, ¡pobre de mí!, que ya nunca me abandonaría; y es una desgracia, porque la experiencia y el tiempo me han demostrado que, al contrario de lo que el porno me había hecho creer, las trancas de veinticinco centímetros no suponen la regla, sino la excepción. (137)

Cristina clearly relates her sexual experiences to the pornographic movies she has watched, and uses them as a foundation for what is normal sexually. The sexuality propagated by pornography is unrealistic, such as large penises and the custom of coitus interruptus. The illusion of reality is not conserved in the pornographic movies, as Cristina relates a long list of the easily spotted irregularities which break the narrative thread of the movies. In spite of this acknowledgement, these movies influence her sexual perspective, expectations and preferences. Cristina may believe her sexual education to be unorthodox, but in contemporary society and with easy access to free pornographic materials online, this type of sexual education will become more commonplace. As this episode demonstrates, regardless of the apparent indifference to history in this novel, the characters are historical; only recently has it been possible to rent pornographic movies, watch them at home and learn about sex in this way.

Free Sex/Explicit Sexuality/Rebuke of Patriarchy

The novel talks freely about sex, as the characters, and particularly Cristina, narrate without restrictions or inhibitions various perspectives on sexuality and their personal experiences. Explicit sexuality functions as a way to attract readers and sell books, and it also serves as a rejection of the previous narratives forced upon Spanish women from 1937 until the death of Franco, and even currently in force today in some pockets of society. Alfredo Martínez-Expósito's article titled "Changing Sexual and Gender Paradigms" explores the rise of openly sexual Spanish texts in the twentieth century, especially post-1975.

The emergence of overt sexual themes in the Spanish novel of the last quarter of the twentieth century is closely related to the profound changes (political, legal, religious, and social) taking place in Spanish society over those years [...] Strictly censored during the dictatorship, erotic literature gradually became associated with a set of forbidden topics, such as violence, nudity, drugs, and critical comments about the conservative values defended by the regime and the Church. Not surprisingly, these were the themes that dissident writers of fiction embraced to express their opposition to the authoritarian regime. (174)

As Martínez-Expósito makes clear in his introductory comments to his article, the unconcealed presence of explicit sexuality in the Spanish novel post-Franco was a direct reaction to, in part, the need for political and social changes. Inherent in the eroticism of a novel like *Amor* is an

implicit rejection of the previous regime's codes of moral behavior and belief system. As we will see or have seen in other sections of this chapter, that includes the acceptable roles of women in the public and private spheres of society, the acceptable forms of sexuality, the biological/reproductive (and not pleasurable) importance of sex and the dominance of men in politics, sports, the workplace and the Church. Twenty years after Franco's death and *post-movida*, the integration of explicit sexual content didn't carry the same weight as during the Franco regime or immediately afterwards, but it still reflects an oppositional stance to the conservative values exemplified by the Catholic Church and sections of Spanish society. In addition, the sexuality portrayed in *Amor* is from a female perspective, challenging the historically entrenched 'modesty' of Spanish women. By writing openly about sex, this novel shatters the silence.

Two of the shifts in discourses topical in *Amor* are the emphasis on a woman's sexual desires and pleasures, and the introduction of female sexuality into the public sphere (this novel being but one example). In the sections of the novel narrated by Cristina, her voice unwaveringly details explicitly various sexual encounters with men and women, including the very first scene of the novel. The language used to describe sexuality is vulgar and colloquial, mimicking orality, for example using the word *polvo* (screw) in place of sexual intercourse and going into specifics regarding sexual intercourse. The novel from the first chapter on also provokes the estrangement of the male reader, in line with the challenge to patriarchal society and the pre-established positions of women within Spanish society. Cristina describes her first screw (*un polvo*) in over a month in the first chapter, "A de atípica",⁵⁵ and the depiction of this unfulfilling encounter ridicules the penis of the man who she's sleeping with and men in general. In this passage one can see the degree to which the novel's beginning chapters establishes a colloquial, open tone.

En primer lugar, lo tenía minúsculo. ¿Que qué entiendo por minúsculo? No sé...¿Doce centímetros? Una cosa mínima, en cualquier caso. Era una presencia tan ridícula -su aparato, quiero decir-, que estuve a punto de proponerle que me tomara por detrás, sabiendo que no me dolería. ¿Cómo iba a dolerme algo tan pequeño? (13)

As well as the vulgar nature of the description, Cristina's repetitive disgust with a ridiculous, miniscule 12 centimeter penis might provoke a reaction of laughter or shame in the male reader. The penis has served as a symbol of masculinity in many societies for centuries, and in contemporary society men's consternation with having an adequately long, 'powerful' penis is so prevalent that there is a medical condition known as Small Penis Syndrome. According to a composite review of studies done by Kevan Wylie and Ian Eardley, the average erect penis length is between 14-16 centimeters, only 2-4 centimeters longer than the member engaged in sexual intercourse with Cristina. The repeated ridicule of this penis might play on the male reader's fear of sufficient penis length, and it is no coincidence that this jab at men come in the first words of the first chapter of the novel. Cristina later admits her preference for very large

⁵⁵ The first 'chapter' of the A to Z structure; there is one previous chapter that serves as a preface to the novel.

penises, caused in her mind by her sexual education (porno movies), and acknowledges the unfortunate consequence of this preference (very large penises are not the norm). Regardless, the insertion of a deficient penis length into the novel's initial paragraph constitutes the first salvo in the text's disputes of long-standing stereotypes regarding the patriarchally dominated Spanish society; one technique to achieve this dissension is through instigating disgust and uneasiness in the male reader.

Cristina's recent sexual encounter is a metaphor for the triumph, or at minimum her resistance and determination, of the female over the male. Desperately hoping for the sexual act to end as soon as possible, in vain Cristina describes how "aquel micromiembro se restregaba patéticamente en mi entrepierna, resbalando una y otra vez entre mis labios, y cada nuevo empujón no era sino otro intento vano por introducirse en una sima cuya hondura -de dimensión y de apetito- le superaba" (13-14). Cristina's vagina exceeds this nameless man's sexual desire, and her vagina's dimensions overwhelm the pathetic attempts of this miniscule penis to insert itself in her 'abyss'. This vivid description of the sexual encounter emphasizes the male's futile attempts and plays with expected masculine roles as dominator and penetrator. Throughout the novel, the male characters either reject the women who love them, fail to recognize their love, fail to fulfill their desires or flee. Male readers are left to either empathize with the female characters of the novel, disassociating themselves from their gender, or to associate themselves with the absurd, pathetic representatives of their sex.

The recurring inability of the male characters to fulfill the desires of the female characters is exemplified by the sexual experiences of the three sisters and their friends. Ana proclaims to have never experienced an orgasm. Rosa's experiences with her four lovers over the course of her life also have failed to leave her pleased in any meaningful manner. "He tenido cuatro amantes, ninguno de ellos fijo ni particularmente memorable." (163). While she never explicitly states whether or not her amorous adventures have led to an orgasm, but it appears that her lovers/boyfriends were at the least easily forgotten.

Out of the three sisters, Cristina is the only one who has explored her body and reached climax,⁵⁶ and even she readily admits the difficulty in a man's ability to please her. The reader's insight into Cristina's views regarding the female orgasm come during a very public conversation on a crowded bus with only male passengers. With Line, a close friend, Cristina discusses her sexual exploits from the previous few nights and complains about the inherently gendered inequalities of the orgasm.⁵⁷

Line: Ellos, los muy cabrones, sí que lo tienen fácil -suspira-, porque al final no importa que la cosa les salga mejor o peor, el caso es que siempre se corren, mientras que nosotras...es como jugar la lotería.

Cristina: Exacto, como la lotería; nunca toca.

⁵⁶ The reader witnesses this during her first sexual encounter with Iain, her ex-boyfriend, when Cristina describes how he bound her and covered her eyes, and penetrated her with a vibrator.

⁵⁷ The fact that they have casual sexual encounters and that they discuss them freely in a public setting pushes the boundaries of a woman's sexuality beyond the traditional private sphere.

Line: ¡Tampoco exageres...! Aunque la verdad es que son todos unos inútiles. La mayoría se cree que con metértela, ¡hala!, ya está todo hecho. (98)

A comparison of a female having an orgasm with winning the lottery comically undermines a man's ability to produce pleasure in a woman; men are represented as being totally inept sexual partners, useless and not knowledgeable about how to please a woman. This discussion also reorients the traditional expectation concerning women and sex. The reproductive, biological argument concerning heterosexual sex takes a back seat to sexual desire and pleasure, opening the possibility to homosexuality as well.

Heterosexual relationships are only but one type of sexual affairs recounted by Cristina, Rosa and Ana; sole sexual acts are also introduced, partly as a response to male impotence. Line loudly relates her unsatisfactory night and introduces the topic of female masturbation to a crowded busload of men.

Line: En cualquier caso, querida, y para que te consueles, que sepas que, visto lo visto, mejor me habría quedado en casa para hacérmelo con el dedo. Así por lo menos me habría corrido.

El conductor, que estaba atento a la conversación desde el principio, da un respingo y, como consecuencia, el autobús pega un frenazo salvaje. Nosotras salimos disparadas de nuestros asientos. (94)

The bus driver's reaction is a humorous imitation of a possible male reader's reaction to this commentary and its frankness. Even after the Transition, whether or not women masturbate, they are not supposed to talk about it. Line's insinuation that female masturbation is a more reliable source of sexual pleasure than intercourse in a public space shocks the male passengers. One might ask if men can't provide this sexual pleasure, is there a need for them? As this novel demonstrates, a literary text can exist without any male protagonists;⁵⁸ why not a void of male sexual partners as well?

Before the tragic death of Santiago from a drug overdose, Cristina and Line participate in sexual acts with him laden with suggestions of bisexuality. Interestingly, the physical and invisible barriers separating the two women are never transgressed, as Cristina and Line never touch each other in Cristina's graphic descriptions of their love affair. Instead, Santiago is the focus, and the two women perform sexual acts upon him. The vivid description encourages the reader to imagine the scene, and a tension emerges between a novel alienating its male readers and attracting the heterosexual male gaze with a mixture of erotic voyeurism. Cristina, the first person narrator, employs the 'tú' form (second person voice) when referring to Santiago, implicating the male heterosexual reader in the sex acts and engaging his sexual fantasies, such as in the following line which introduces the encounter: "(y)o quería follar contigo y tú querías follar con ella y ella quería follar con todos y con ninguno" (223-224). This episode demonstrates the tension between pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable for sexually active women, and inviting (instead of alienating) the male heterosexual reader. Not long into

⁵⁸ And hardly any male characters at all.

the threesome, Cristina steps back and takes on a voyeuristic role, watching ‘you’ (Santiago) and Line engage in a variety of sex acts, strengthening the pornographic aspects of the episode. The overt descriptions of sexually ‘perversive’ acts like the threesome among Santiago, Cristina and Line is one example of a potentially subversive event which simultaneously serves to fulfill a male (and possibly female) reader’s sexual fantasies. While undermining the reproductive, biological component of human sexuality and the emphasis on monogamy in a relationship, this steamy scene maintains the heterosexual male’s gaze and stimulates him. In addition, it does not cross some of the prohibited boundaries; Line and Cristina do not touch each other during the encounter but rather focus their sexual energies on the man. His position as the central figure is preserved.

In addition to the possible bisexuality of the protagonist, there are references in *Amor* to female homosexuality that contrast with the heterosexual norms expected of traditional women. This is key because of the silence of dissident sexualities in Spain, and in particular of lesbians. Many forces under Franco conspired to promote a very strict interpretation of permissible sexuality. Homosexuals were on the periphery of society and therefore missing in representations of popular culture apart from jokes and insults. Those who did openly express their ‘deviant’ sexuality suffered for it. Jill Robbins:

Numerous studies have chronicled the repression and the humiliation they (older gay couples) suffered under the Franco regime, and even until 1981, when finally, as Gema Pérez Sánchez puts it, “the new Spanish democracy...eliminate[d] homosexuality as a category of social danger subject to security measures”. (xi)

Robbins analyzes the silence surrounding female homosexuals, who to this day are underrepresented in many aspects of society and continue to quietly reside in the shadows.⁵⁹ Currently there exists a shortfall of critical texts focused on Spanish lesbians and their histories.

By 1997, the year of publication of *Amor*, homosexuals were not under legal assault in Spain as they had been during the second half of Franco’s regime, and in particular, when *La ley de peligrosidad social y rehabilitación* was promulgated in 1970. “Los que realicen actos de homosexualidad” (12553) were subject to fines and “Internamiento en un establecimiento de reeducación” (12553). The idea of reeducation shows that homosexuality was considered to be a temporary state than can be reversed or undone. Note that the law does not state *los homosexuales* but rather those who engage in homosexual acts, alluding to homosexuality as an act rather than an integral part of one’s identity, negating homosexuality as a permanent state of being. By 2005 marriage between two members of the same sex was legalized and Spain which is now one of the most progressive countries towards LGBT, although homophobia is still a concern. More overt and violent expressions of homophobia are not as prevalent, yet there remains a reactionary situation with regard to gay symbols, marches, and beliefs that heterosexuality shall continue to be the norm; accepting homosexuals but never questioning the underlying foundation which marginalizes sexual differences. While *Amor* does not engage in

⁵⁹ See her book, *Crossing through Chueca*, for a detailed analysis of female homosexuality, Spanish literature and the contemporary situation of gay rights in Spain.

the recuperation of historical memory regarding the suffering and humiliation endured by homosexuals in Spain, the novel does represent sexual encounters with those of the opposite sex and gay characters as commonplace and acceptable.

Carmen de Urioste explains the typical lack of representations of dissident sexuality until the 1990s in Spain as a direct result of its repression by the dominant culture.

Esta ausencia de representación de las sexualidades disidentes no puede ser entendida sino como una práctica más del control sociocultural ejercido por la cultura dominante, para la cual la aceptación de las sexualidades alternativas pone en entredicho sus propios fundamentos de dominación. (*Las novelas* 123)

She links the absence of representations of dissident sexualities, and in particular lesbians, to the dominant sociocultural practices in Spain. One manner of combating this prejudice is by writing novels which include homosexual characters who are portrayed in a favorable manner. The mere presence of lesbians in mainstream novels interjects their existence into the national dialogue and reminds readers that they exist. In *Amor*, none of the three sisters identify publicly as a lesbian (however, this does occur with the protagonist in Etxebarria's second novel, *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*). While many critics focus on the sexuality of the three sisters in *Amor*, there are secondary characters such as Cristina's friends Gema, who is a lesbian, or Line, who is bisexual. These characters introduce lesbianism and bisexuality as normalized human sexualities, not as necessarily subversive or perverse. "La gente se sorprende mucho cuando se entera de que Gema es lesbiana. Como si fuera marciana. Y luego dicen esa memez de 'Huy, pues se la ve muy femenina...' ¿Qué esperan? ¿Que se corte el pelo al uno y se vista de comando? ¿Que haga culturismo?" (134). Gema's feminine appearance surprises those most accustomed to the image of the butch lesbian, with short hair, a more masculine build and male clothing.⁶⁰ Her representation also establishes the perspective that being a lesbian is not alien.

Gema's experiences serve as a point of reference for Cristina and Line, and Gema's own perspective on her sexuality challenges traditional concepts of homosexuality. Cristina and Line ask Gema if she had slept with men as well as women, and Gema responds that she had slept with a few men, including a particularly unattractive and overweight linguistics professor. Cristina jokes that this must have caused her to become a lesbian, provoking a rebuke from Gema and debunking the myth that lesbians are solely women who have not slept with the right man. "Cristina: No me extraña que decidieras hacerte bollera. Después de una experiencia semejante, cualquier cosa. -No me seas reaccionaria. Ser gay no es ser cualquier cosa -replica Gema indignada" (201). Cristina's reaction here stands in for the conservative (*reaccionario*) perspective on homosexuality, that it can stem from a poor sexual experience with a man or men.⁶¹ Gema defends her sexual identity and rejects the idea that her sexuality (or anyone's

⁶⁰ Jill Robbins in *Crossing through Chueca* describes the absence of any discussion of social classes and lesbianism in Etxebarria's *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes*, such as how 'butch' lesbians tend to be in the lower economic rung. Or in other words, the question of class and sexuality does not enter into the portrayal of lesbians in Etxebarria's early novels.

⁶¹ Hence the internment and 'rehabilitation' of those committing homosexual acts under the *Ley de peligrosidad social y rehabilitación*.

sexuality, for that matter) can be a choice. It is crucial to keep in mind that even this character who openly identifies herself as a lesbian had first experimented sexually with multiple men. Her case demonstrates how strong the heterosexual narrative is, especially on young people who are still in the process of establishing their identity, and especially without positive lesbian models available.

The Evolution of Spanish Female's Economic and Social Roles in *Amor*

This section will focus on the economic decisions each sister makes and how these coincide with historical periods in Spain. Just as the three women's sexual histories represent the transition from the Virgin Mary model toward liberated woman, Cristina, Rosa and Ana also mark the economic transformation from housewife to corporate riser and ultimately to capitalist repudiation.

Cristina is the most rebellious of the three sisters, representative of the Generation X. Among this generation's characteristics are its slogan of 'no future', an indulgence in international popular culture and particularly music, an hedonistic search for immediate pleasure, and sexual promiscuity; Cristina "es la mujer liberada sexualmente que dispone su cuerpo de manera democrática" (Urioste, *Las novelas* 126). Her rebellious image extends far from her choice of dress, music, indulgence in drugs, contentious relationship with her mother, and her rebellious attitude. For example, Cristina enjoys reading, which her outward appearance (she compares herself to Kate Moss at one point) belies. "Hubo un tiempo en que me llevaba un libro al bar y así entretenía los ratos muertos en que no tenía que darle de beber a nadie, pero el encargado se ocupó enseguida de hacerme saber que lo del libro no estaba bien visto, que no daba buena imagen" (41). Her zeal for reading and literature is prohibited by her boss; obviously the expectations for an attractive, scantily dressed waitress are a lower level of intelligence and cultural knowledge. Cristina is the opposite of the typical assumptions associated with the image she projects, resisting easy classifications.

Her economic liberation and the supposed GenX emphasis on the present are reflected in her choice of employment, as a waitress at a bar, despite her university education. I write 'supposed' because although the GenX tends to eschew politics and history, as this novel demonstrates the past is a constant in their narratives affecting how their lives have been shaped. In addition, the rejection of the future has political implications, as the integration into the European Union, further globalization of the economy, and the democratic government were all touted as improvements for the present but most importantly the future. As Teresa Vilarós writes, "negarse ahora al futuro es también rehusar las visiones de futuro que parecen ofrecerse en la contemporaneidad europea. La movida como síndrome de retirada encuentra continuidad necesaria en la perpleja, y compleja, parálisis de la posmovida" (*El mono* 58). The complexity of the paralysis patent in the GenX is in part a rejection of the current systems in place and the narratives of progress and the future. At any rate, Cristina is an example of this complexity, as her studies have progressed to the point that she is in the process of writing a graduate thesis on the history of love. She is a very skilled worker who is trilingual and was previously employed by a multinational corporation utilizing her English abilities. While only one point of view,

Cristina's descriptions of her experiences at the company and the decision to quit her job elucidate the choices made by many young people who divert from the expected path. Instead of her choices being governed by financial motivations, Cristina represents a movement towards more free time and independence at the expense of monetary gains. Ironically, however, as a waitress her wage is more than sufficient for her to support herself:

En el bar gano más de lo que ganaba en aquella oficina, y mis mañanas son para mí, para mí sola, y el tiempo libre vale para mí más que los mejores sueldos del mundo. No me arrepiento en absoluto de la decisión que tomé, y nunca, nunca jamás volvería a trabajar en una multinacional.

Antes me meto a puta. (34)

The last line of this passage stands out as it compares the prostitution of the body with the prostitution of one's self in the corporate world. The trade-off, as her more responsible sister Rosa remarks, is in the loss of security with her position and her future. "Tampoco tienes ninguna posibilidad de promoción. Ni ningún futuro" (48). While her mornings are free and her salary is adequate, Cristina's decision has elevated the present over the future. Unlike the opportunities for advancements at the multinational corporation and retirement benefits of such a job, at the bar there is little to no possibility for upward mobility, reflecting the 'no future' attitude of the GenX.

Compromising future stability for the present underpins the narrative utilized by Cristina's previous employers to persuade her to stay at her former job, despite the inequalities and low pay. The discourse manipulates the uncertainty of the future and the present economic doldrums to justify low wages, worker obedience and the conservation of the status quo.

(B)astante afortunados podíamos sentirnos de estar allí, con un canto en los dientes nos podíamos dar, porque por cada uno de nosotros había cuatro muertos de hambre, cuatro buitres carroñeros volando en círculos alrededor de nuestras cabezas, dispuestos a hacerse con nuestro puesto a la mínima oportunidad, como el jefe de personal no perdía ocasión de recordarnos. (32)

The poor economic situation in Spain at the time serves as a rationalization for the second-rate treatment of Cristina, who works much harder than her boss and for much less pay.⁶² According to Spain's Instituto Nacional de Estadística, the unemployment rate in 1995 varied between a high of 23.49% and a low of 22.65%. For women under 25 (Cristina falls into this category), the unemployment rate was between 50.08% and 48.29%. Overall women fared worse than their male counterparts, with the rate vacillating between 30.41% and 31.62%.⁶³ Cristina represents the rejection of the narratives proclaiming progress and economic miracles fostered by the

⁶² An eerily similar discourse circulates in EU member States such as Spain and Greece in 2012 as their economies teeter on the brink of economic disaster. Unemployment rates in April of 2012 for young persons (under 25) were at 51.7%,⁴ and overall 24.3%, the highest of the 27 member States of the European Union.

⁶³ <http://www.ine.es>

capitalist society in Spain in the 1980s. She rejects the paths chosen by her sisters; her path is a third alternative, openly embracing the ephemeral aspects of contemporary society, quitting her job at a multinational corporation and ‘finding herself’ while working as a waitress at a bar.

Ana, at 32 years old, is the oldest of the three sister and personifies the ideal Catholic, traditional woman, a virgin until marriage, a wife and mother who has devoted her life to raising her son and taking care of the household while her husband provides financially for the family. “Ana es la tradicional ama de casa del período franquista” (Urioste, *Las novelas* 125-126). When she reveals that she lost her virginity before marrying Borja, the illusion of her purity is shattered. Her decision to divorce Borja also undermines the appearances of the ideal heterosexual family unit, as does her disillusionment at finding out the sex of their child (male): “muy dentro, muy dentro de mí misma, sentía que haber dado a luz a un niño era algo así como pactar con el enemigo” (190). Ana’s ultimate act of desperation, her desire to get a divorce, is interpreted by society in the novel as a nervous breakdown; she ends up hospitalized but intent on her decision to leave Borja.

One of the questions left pending in the novel is how Ana will support herself financially after her divorce. Her only training was as a secretary, which she did to fill the time until her fiance Borja graduated from school. Without a higher degree of education and no professional work experience outside of the home, the ability to find a job and support her basic economic needs is doubtful. Ana’s reliance on Borja encompasses both the emotional and economic aspects of life. Additionally, the economic conditions in Spain in the mid 1990s were very difficult, making the possibility of choosing her personal liberty an even more burdensome decision. With Borja, she ‘enjoyed’ a very comfortable lifestyle, evident in the expensive brand name furniture, appliances and other products populating their apartment.

Rosa represents the professional woman who has moved up the corporate ladder and has now become a director with “Diez millones de pesetas al año. Un BMW. Un apartamento en propiedad. Ninguna perspectiva de casarme o tener hijos” (216) and a feeling of emptiness, loneliness and despair. The middle child, Rosa has dedicated her life to her career and as a result her private life has lacked meaningful relationships, and yet in spite of her superior performance at the multinational corporation her achievements have not resulted in merited advancements up the corporate ladder due to her sex. “Yo misma debería ser vicepresidente. Estoy mejor preparada, con mucho, pero con mucho, que el inútil que tiene el puesto. Pero soy mujer, así que no me ascienden” (46). Rosa is not married, having chosen her career instead, but she constantly laments the poor odds for balancing marriage and work. A Harvard-Yale study from 1987 serves as her primary source; “Ya dicen los agoreros que a los treinta años es más fácil que te caiga una bomba encima que un hombre” (53). While based upon a faulty model and disproved by other studies on the topic, Rosa nevertheless uses this often-cited line to sustain her one-track mindset. Whereas Cristina left the world of the multinational corporation, refusing to participate in the system that dehumanizes its workers and takes away their agency, Rosa does not. However, she is aware of the effect her job has on her life and her humanity: “Y entretanto la vida se me va entre números y cuentas, documentos internos y disquettes de ordenador, y resulta difícil recordar que mi cerebro no está hecho de chips, que soy humana...Aunque cada día se me note menos” (132). The criticism of the contemporary globalized workplace is multifaceted, as it takes into account the dehumanizing effects, the gendered inequality and demographic luck.

Rosa highlights how, “a pesar de los avances sociales y los cambios notables respecto a las condiciones laborales, yo llego a trabajar entre doce y catorce horas diarias, tanto como los más explotados obreros del siglo diecinueve” (54). Has her inhumane work schedule served as an adequate cover to hide not only her misery but also her sexuality?

While at first glance the character of Rosa appears to represent the lonely businesswoman who has had to forego happiness in her personal life in order to achieve success in the business world, a persuasive argument can be made that she also embodies a closet lesbian. Carmen de Urioste puts forth a compelling defense of her description of Rosa as “lesbiana en el armario” (*Las novelas* 125); among the supporting evidence is Rosa’s divided closet as a metaphor for her life, with her very organized public life mirrored in her ordered and very non-offensive wardrobe. Her private life finds its closet equivalent in turmoil, more feminine, attractive and sensual clothing scattered about and without any clear arrangement. Another piece of evidence is the attraction that Rosa felt for a particular girl in school who lacked traditional beauty. Urioste points also to Rosa’s habit at the all-girl school of analyzing her fellow classmates as they went up to the chalkboard to do activities, and her preference for the non-traditional beauty of this young girl. Rosa’s masculine tendencies which foster her business triumphs also can be construed as a hint at her sexuality. Kristin Kiely cites Rosa’s statement, “Pero a pesar de la sobreabundancia de machos entre los que elegir, yo seguía sin sentirme particularmente atraída por el sexo opuesto” ‘But in spite of the overabundance of males to choose from, I continued not feeling particularly attracted to the opposite sex’ (66) as but one example of her clandestine homosexuality. Describing her ridiculous and less than pleasurable first sexual encounter with a boy as a twelve-year-old, Rosa decides to renounce her sexuality and instead focus on her studies. “Se acabaron los experimentos con los chicos” (131). Finally, at the end of the novel after Ana has made her first independent decision, to get divorced, Rosa alludes to her own secrets which she might have to finally admit to herself and everyone else: “Reconocer ante el mundo que no me gusta mi trabajo, que no me gustan los hombres, yo qué sé” (267).

Despite these indications of her homosexuality, there are also many statements made by Rosa as well as her actions which contradict this reading of her character. With regards to her coming out of the closet on the final page of the novel with her proclamation, “que no me gustan los hombres” (267), if this were the case then one would expect Cristina to respond to her sister’s shocking revelation or at the least mention it, but she does neither. Rosa’s dislike of men coincides with the feelings of many of the female characters in the novel and takes root after her many unsuccessful and not memorable sexual experiences with men, as well as the unequal treatment she receives at her workplace. Certainly this would add to her frustration, being passed over for advancements because of her sex, and having to hide her femininity to be taken seriously at her job. Rosa cites numerous times from a book designed to give advice to women on how to succeed in the workplace; in simple terms it proscribes to its female readers the need to negate femininity and embrace masculine values, while accepting that often their behavior will be interpreted differently due to your sex. Rosa’s ‘masculine’ behavior plausibly originates in the need to survive and thrive in her job.

Rosa’s lack of sexual pleasure in her encounters with her male partners follows the pattern of the other female characters in this novel who rarely find fulfillment in their relationships with

men. Rosa's 'experiments' with boys, as Kiely notes, did not end when she was twelve; on the contrary, she recounts her four lovers (her sexual history) as she tries to discern who is making mysterious phone calls to her private line late at night. As for the attraction Rosa expresses for the odd schoolgirl, it is trite in comparison to her absolute devotion and obsession with her cousin, Gonzalo. In this thorough description, Rosa fantasizes about Gonzalo in vivid detail:⁶⁴

Los labios seguirían bajando hasta la ingle, y encontrarían un falo perfecto, enorme, casi art déco, que parecería dibujado con aerógrafo, sin venas azules ni imperfecciones, un falo que estaría allí esperándome desde tiempos inmemoriales, y me lo metería en la boca, hasta el fondo, aspirando su olor dulzón, acariciándolo con la lengua, y después me montaría encima de él como había visto hacer en las películas y él me agarraría fuerte por las caderas, haría que me moviese arriba y abajo, dejaría impresas las huellas de sus dedos en mi cintura y me arrebataría de golpe esa virginidad incómoda que llevaba lastrándome desde hacía tantos años. (69)

Rosa's fantasy with Gonzalo is explicit, graphic, detailed, and vivid. She has obviously thought about this possible encounter many times. It should be noted that part of her fantasy is informed by, once again, what she has seen in film. The reason she ultimately has sex and loses her virginity to her professor is because she had saved it for Gonzalo, her cousin, but he was never interested in Rosa. Part of Rosa's disdain for her sister Cristina stems from Gonzalo's showering of attention on her. Rosa has not given up hope on Gonzalo's affection; maybe he is the one making the late-night phone calls?. "A veces fantaseo con la idea de que sea Gonzalo. Quizá Gonzalo siempre supiese lo que yo había sentido durante todos aquellos años en que convivimos" (167). Even in the present time of the narrative Rosa expresses a secret wish that Gonzalo recognizes her devotion to him and has reciprocal feelings.

Finally, one of the great concerns for Rosa is that at her age, thirty, and her level of education, university-educated, her chances for marriage are very slim. She cites a Harvard study which projected that only a small percentage of university-educated professional women would end up getting married. Why would she be so concerned about marriage if she was a closet lesbian (who at the end of the novel contemplates coming out)?

Y mientras conducía de regreso a Madrid, ante la perspectiva de tener que enfrentarme a una sucesión infinita de días iguales, grises, borrosos y anodinos, sola, esclavizada, condenada a jugar como peón en un tablero que no entendía, sin compañero ni amantes, sin hijos, sin amigos íntimos, pensé más de una vez en soltar las manos del volante y dejar que el coche se despeñara en una curva. (220)

If Rosa were a closeted lesbian on the brink of revealing her covert sexuality to Cristina, why would her inner monologue refer to being without a *compañero*, and not a *compañera*, and emphasize not having children? Rosa states multiple times her distress at being unmarried and

⁶⁴ This quote also exemplifies the tension between alienating and attracting the male reader through eroticism.

alone, without a male companion or children. I believe that more evidence is required to make a definitive statement regarding whether or not Rosa is a closeted lesbian, although from the textual evidence a very plausible reading is at minimum she has conflicted emotions.

Masculine Absences and Traces

There are no male protagonists in *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas*. While male characters are referred to in the narrative, none is given an active role in the narrative. This unusual feature of a novel titled “Love” caught the attention of a reviewer who wrote: “Ningún personaje masculino aparece en la novela y la autora adelanta su voluntad de no incluir nunca hombres en sus libros. ‘Es algo absolutamente deliberado’, señala (Etxebarria), ‘porque ya estoy harta de leer novelas donde aparecen 200 personajes masculinos y ninguna mujer’” (Villena 1). The intentional exclusion of male protagonists supports the idea that this novel is directed towards a female audience, and that there is a deliberate attempt to demystify male figures, empathetic or otherwise. Etxebarria overturns the male-dominated narrative to the opposite extreme. Male characters’ perspectives do not surface, as the three sisters serve as narrators, and most of the male characters appear in memories being narrated by the sisters to the reader.⁶⁵ Therefore, it is accurate to say that what we encounter are traces left by males in the lives of the three sisters. Their actions have left scars on the protagonists. While Etxebarria pronounces that the novel is not *antihombres*, the men referenced in the novel exhibit the worst human qualities and contain very few if any redemptive qualities.

Among the male characters evoked in the novel, there is the protagonists’ father who abandons his wife and three daughters, physically assaults their mother and —it is insinuated— had been sleeping with other women for many years. Another relative of the sisters is Gonzalo, who moves in with the family after their father leaves. Gonzalo molests Cristina while she is only nine years old, and five years later at Ana’s wedding has sex with Cristina, ‘taking’ her virginity. Antonio, Ana’s summer boyfriend, rapes her in a forest when she is a young teenager, and years later feigns amnesia regarding the event. There are the men who Rosa work with, and Cristina used to work with, at the multinational corporations; forty-something bosses who accomplish very little work, are incompetent and unable to do their jobs, and make a much higher salary and have job security because, as Rosa states, “le tocó la lotería demográfica” (31) by reaching adulthood in “*los felices ochenta*” (31). Rosa’s description of her prospective dating pool, while humorous, certainly paints a pathetic picture of the typical spoiled thirty-somethings and their expectations for their wives, rooted in conservative values.

Los hombres de mi edad han vivido en casa de sus padres hasta los veintimuchos años. Esos, si no siguen viviendo allí. Y durante todos esos años han vivido en una casa donde su mamá no trabajaba y se dedicaba a hacerles la cama y la comida, en una casa donde ellos no tenían hora de llegada, pero sus hermanas sí.

⁶⁵ A few male characters do make a cameo in the present, such as the man who orders a drink from Cristina at the bar.

Y para colmo, la mayoría han ido a un colegio de curas en el que se les enseñaba a buscar niñas dulces, calladitas y sumisas. (46)

This profile of Spanish men from Rosa's perspective focuses on their lack of independence from their mother to the detriment of her daughters.

The only two slightly sympathetic male figures are Santiago, the poor fellow who falls hopelessly in love with Line, and Borja, Ana's husband, who treats her well but is never introduced to the reader. Santiago is a slightly tragic figure who shoots up heroin alone while Line and Cristina go to the bathroom. They come back to find him limp and clearly dead, and believing there is nothing they can do to help him, abandon him in the car. The cold indifference that Line demonstrates towards Santiago and her instinct for self-preservation chill Cristina and the reader. "Vámonos de aquí. -Parecía asustada de verdad-. Qué suerte hemos tenido de no haber sido las primeras en probar el material" (248). Cristina is haunted by Line's words and the sight of Santiago's listless corpse. This event serves as a lesson for Cristina, and for the reader it reveals the tragic end to one of the few positive portrayals of men in the novel.

He intentado olvidarte como he podido, he intentado olvidar toda aquella historia del polvo blanco y la jeringuilla y la cuchara y el limón. He intentado olvidar que tuve algo que ver en eso...Pero la memoria, la muy traidora, aprovecha cuando duermo, cuando estoy inerme e indefensa, cuando soy incapaz de luchar contra ella, y aquellas imágenes vuelven a aparecer para torturarme. (225)

Cristina is unable to forget the horrors of her past and her possible involvement in Santiago's death. Try as she might to actively forget, she cannot do so.

The other favorable masculine representation is Borja, who presents, however, a certain negativity. Described as a loving husband, Borja does not comprehend Ana's emotional paralysis. Rather than discuss it and find solutions, Borja and Ana pretend as if things were normal. Ana's disillusionment regarding their son adds to the negativity; after months of preparation for giving birth to a daughter, it turns out there was an error in the analysis of the ultrasound and Ana's baby is a son. Outwardly she professes her happiness, "pero muy dentro, muy dentro de mí misma, sentía que haber dado a luz a un niño era algo así como pactar con el enemigo" (190). The characterization of men as 'the enemy' and the inclusion of her son in the group contribute to the sensation of *antihombre* that Etxebarria intends to dispel in her interviews. Their son's name is Borja, continuing the cycle.

Father, Where Art Thou?

Para colmo se trataba de Dios Padre, y cuando le rezábamos nos referíamos a él como Padre Nuestro. Mi padre se largó de casa cuando yo tenía cuatro años, así que no confiaba mucho en las exigencias de los deberes paternos ni creía que alguien, por el mero hecho de ser mi padre, estuviera obligado a prestarme una

atención especial, aparte de que Dios, además, era chico, y lógicamente se ocuparía primero de los suyos. (Cristina *Amor* 16)

The traces, scars and imprints left behind by the male characters in this novel are one of major themes of the novel. Fathers and men in dominant positions have a key role in *Amor*, although all of them are physically absent. God the Holy Father, Franco or the nation's Father, the Gaena sisters' father, Antonio, Santiago, Iain and Borja all leave their marks on the three main female characters. While at first glance the novel resists an anecdotal reading comparing the sisters' stories to recent Spanish history, there are instances which evoke the previous government's influence on society, culture and the Spanish people. The sexual violence and incest perpetrated against the sisters, in addition to being personal burdens they can never escape, can also be read symbolically as the violence committed by the State during the years of Franco's rule. It is no coincidence that the Gaenas' father abandons them in 1975, the year that Franco died. This is never explicitly mentioned, but from textual clues we can deduce that the novel takes place in the year 1995. Cristina recalls that she was four when her father left, and she is currently twenty-four; she was nine in 1980 when Ian Curtis, the lead singer of Joy Division, committed suicide. That would fix the year of her birth as 1971, and the year her father left as 1975. Ana also talks about her father leaving when she was twelve years old, and she is currently thirty-two. Twenty years earlier corresponds to 1975. Another clue which further strengthens the connection between their father and Franco is that the sisters have never had contact with their father after his departure, and the repercussions of his abandonment of the family are numerous, like the other burdens of their past. Their memories haunt them to the present day, just as after Franco's death his presence was still felt in Spain.⁶⁶

While their father is originally idealized by Cristina, this image is shattered by Ana's hidden and repressed memories which she reveals for the first time about their father. First Ana alludes to the hints of infidelity; "Tía Carmen sugiere que había otra mujer, mamá opina que debía de haber varias" (88). Their mother quietly suffered as her husband committed adultery, and as we later find out, he was physically and emotionally abusive as well. Ana as a five year old witnesses her drunk father hit her mother and force her to the floor. "Papá ha agarrado a mamá por su larga melena de princesa y la obliga a arrodillarse, a arrastrarse por el suelo. Veo la expresión de dolor en el rostro de mamá" (90). By forcing his wife to her knees, the father belittles her, denigrates her and physically puts her in a submissive and secondary position, similar to a despot and his subjects. The image of a husband towering over his wife through subjugation can be read as symbolic of the position of women under Franco and his role as the nation's father. Present as well is the memory of violence and terror, features of the dictatorship: "Él le pega una bofetada que rompe el aire como un disparo, y yo noto que me estoy haciendo pis encima, de puro terror" (90). Ana runs away, back to her room, never to talk about what she's seen and heard. Her comparison of the sound produced by the slap in the face to a gunshot suggest the gunshots of a firing squad. Their mother never once spoke of this abuse, nor had Ana

⁶⁶ The attempted coup of 1981 is an example of the still precarious situation of the Spanish Democracy after Franco's death. In addition, many of the leading conservative politicians were prominent figures in Franco's government. They continued to have political sway in the democracy.

until this moment. One of the consequences of this violence is that their mother never again wears her hair long, a way of subverting the physical control of her husband.

The narrative structure of Ana's revelation weaves in and out of the present and the past tense, a common trope in this novel, showing the impact that the past has on the everyday lives of these women. The image of the mother's short hair leads Ana to think about the need to trim the rosebushes on her terrace, which then leads her to conclude that she was metaphorically trimmed as a child. "Alguien me podó a mí, creo, y por eso soy como soy, ordenada y de buen aspecto...Una tijera se llevó por delante las yemas rebeldes, los futuros capullos, las rosas cubiertas de espinas. Si hubiese nacido más tarde, quién sabe, habría podido ser Cristina" (90). This last statement is incredibly important, as Ana concedes that her upbringing during a very different historical moment in Spain than her sister resulted in her modest, appropriate and acceptable behavior and personality. Before rebellious thoughts could conceivably creep into her psyche they were snuffed out, cut away, never allowed to grow and mature. We understand that the metaphorical shears were held by the repressive cultural and political forces of Spanish society, the Catholic Church, and the Franco government. Ana would have been twelve years old when Franco died and fifteen by the time a democratic government was in place. In comparison, in the novel Cristina is twelve in 1983, a year after Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE) won national elections and took control of the government. During this historical epoch the *movida* emerges, known for a fluidity of identities (sexual and otherwise), experimentation, rebellion against all things repressive, conservative and traditional; Ana's and Cristina's childhoods would have varied significantly and are reflected in their actions and their personalities. While Cristina is identified with rebellion constantly, it takes Ana thirty-two years to reach the point when she decides to divorce her husband and no longer accept the emptiness of her life. The sisters' historical circumstances mold their personal realities.

The only access the characters have to their father is through their childhood memories, scattered, blurred and overlapping. Ana describes her history as "una colcha de patchwork" (82), an amalgam of memories (true and imagined), stories passed down by her mother, and mental images, all of them out of chronological order and superimposed. Rosa visits the site of their final summer spent together in Fuengirola on her thirtieth birthday, drinking alone to the point of unconsciousness. She recalls how before her father left, she was a prolific singer; after he was gone, she stopped. Even Cristina, who was only 4 when their father left, describes the feeling of abandonment. "El mundo se destrozó para mí cuando nuestro padre nos dejó. Yo sólo tenía cuatro años y la gente cree que aquella Cristinita no se enteró de nada, pero sí que me enteré. Me enteré de todo, perfectamente. Me enteré de que la persona que más quería en el mundo se había marchado" (238). Just as Anita becomes Ana after her rape, Cristinita symbolically transforms into Cristina after losing her innocence. Cristina resembles their father the most physically and in temperament, and is the dad's favorite child. Twenty years later Cristina still recognizes the traumatic impact of his desertion.

Conclusion

As can be seen from this analysis, *Amor* is a novel very much concerned with the past and its influence on the three main female characters regardless of no explicit references to Franco, the Spanish Civil War or the Transition to Democracy. These characters, who seem indifferent to the Spanish history which shaped them so, are historical. They are located within a very definitive historical moment and embody the tensions and expectations of particular historical periods. All three inhabit a world very representative of 1995 Spain, replete with references to the influence of popular culture on their lives, commodification, the growth of multinational corporations in Spain, a sensation of alienation and depression, political and historical apathy and many other elements common to Spanish GenX novels. The characters are constantly bombarded by images and music; Cristina declares, “He crecido entre discos” (121). Their lives are perpetually marked by popular culture and the characters compare their experiences and other characters to popular American films and actors, and to advertisements for products such as clothing. In order to impress Gonzalo, Rosa declares, “Intenté imitar las expresiones de deseo que había visto adoptar a las chicas de los catálogos de lencería” (70). She deduces, incorrectly, that by projecting this image that Gonzalo will fall in love with her. Ana remembers her father as very good-looking, “una especie de Gregory Peck con acento malagueño” (84). Each character’s identity is manifested by their preferences for commodities; the brands they purchase symbolize their affluence (or lack thereof) and the image they are projecting to the world. The brands that Ana purchases, Roche Bobois, Gastón y Daniels, Vilches, and Ágata Ruiz de la Prada, send a different signal out than Rosa’s brand name furniture and clothing, which communicate “una imagen sobria” (55).

Another characteristic popular in Spanish GenX literature is the fluidity of identities, which in *Amor* finds its expression in almost all aspects of the characters’ psychological ruminations. They are trying to pin down their identities, which are in constant motion. Sexually, economically, culturally, and as women, the sisters search their pasts for the keys to their current situations, and their reflections lead to a better understanding of their selfhood. If an essential ingredient to understanding one’s identity is one’s history, this novel serves as a champion of the need to gaze backwards and analyze how these personal and historical moments mold a person. Marc Augé talks about the importance of the birthplace in the creation of an identity, and this is also evident in *Amor*. All three sisters were born and raised in Madrid and continue to live there. The impact of the city/metropolis on young people is another thematic that weaves through many GenX novels. As for the formal aspect of the novel, orality, first person narratives and stream of consciousness exemplify the writing style in *Amor*, as does a fragmentation of the chronology of the narrative and the novel’s short chapters (organized from A to Z to give the narrative a sense of continuity despite the fragmentation).

All of this leads to a story of three sisters who attempt to come to grips with their personal pasts, their sexual histories, economic decisions and social roles. Their narratives combat the various expectations for women, debunking myths surrounding female sexuality such as the idealization of virginity or the normalizing heterosexuality of previous generations. Each character represents a failed model. Ana, the traditional housewife from the Franco era, ends up not being a virgin before marriage, resents her male offspring, moves to divorce her husband and is left at the end of the novel in a mental health hospital. Rosa, possibly a repressed lesbian, has found no fulfillment in her successful professional career, lamenting her lonely existence,

continued dehumanization, empty wealth, and failed relationships. Cristina appears to be the most content of the three, despite her ephemeral relationships, suicide attempts, 'dead-end' job, and party mentality. All three have traumatic, repressed memories that they reveal for the first time to the reader, buried experiences which continue to resurface and mark their lives and their actions. Their father's abandonment coincides with the year that Franco died, suggesting an anecdotal reading. In addition, the Catholic Church's doctrine undergoes criticism from the sisters, specifically the lack of sexual education, the subservient position of women and the reliance upon the Virgin Mary as their sexual and social model. They rely heavily upon drugs of varying legalities to survive and forget, unsuccessfully. Only by confronting a myriad of personal tragedies and deeply disturbing experiences can the sisters possibly overcome their restrictive, depressing, alienating circumstances, a lesson which could be extended to Spain and its relationship to the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The Generation X has been a problematic classification from the start. Known alternatively as the Slacker Generation, the 'Me' Generation, or the MTV Generation, this category describing people born between (more or less) 1965 and 1980 contained negative implications of laziness, boredom, aversion to hard work and dedication, indifference to history and politics, a preference for low, popular culture and an indulgence in the consumer market. Heterogeneity is nevertheless one of its salient attributes. Other aspects include a diversity of topics addressed, including race, class, sexuality, and identities. The X in the designation represents this abundance of possibilities and contradictions, as a stand-in for meaning. The juxtaposition between the previous generation and the GenX was stark: "‘Instead of getting free love, we got AIDS,’ says Douglas Rushkoff, author of 1993's *GenX Reader*" (Stephey 2). In Spain, the contrast was exacerbated by profound political changes. As young children, the GenX in Spain experienced the Transition to Democracy and the concurrent *pacto del silencio*, taking the dialogue of historical memory out of politics and into other realms of culture. After Franco's death, there was a countercultural wave of identity exploration and anything goes attitudes, as Spaniards tested the boundaries of their new freedoms. GenX follows on the heels of this movement. As the national party waned while the economy struggled, the country began to lose some of its autonomy with further integration into the European Union, and a new generation of writers and artists turned their attentions to this new Spain and its problems.

As in other countries, the Spanish *Generación X* was applied broadly as a demographic generational marker, but the term was also used more narrowly as the designation of a literary movement. One of the common criticisms of the GenX authors were their novels' lack of interest with the country's recent past and possible future. Rather than participate in the struggle to rewrite and reimagine Spain's history in the twentieth century, their texts focused on the generation of Spanish adolescents and their struggles with identity formations, alienation from peers and society, and navigating the complex audiovisual, international culture. What is missed in this harsh criticism is the critical aspect of these novels, as well as their engagement with history (and to a smaller extent, politics). It is true that the content and the aesthetics are not revolutionary; authors in Spain and abroad had located the action of their novels in bars, parties, and on the outskirts of society for some time. Film and literature have had a strong connection dating from the advent of movies. Drugs, literature and inspiration (or evasion of reality and immersion in one's imagination) are also well-worn topics. In Spain the fear of foreign cultural influences had appeared in the early years of the closing century (Modernismo, Ultraísmo, Surrealism among other movements) inspiring violent reactions by critics. Colloquial language, vulgar language, *jerga* (slang), and orality have all had dominant roles in low and high culture. Even the predominance of young people who are indifferent to their country's history and politics is a recurring topic in society and culture. On closer inspection, however, GenX novels do reflect an awareness of the implications of social and historical changes on Spanish youth as well as an ability to deftly paint a portrait of an ahistorical period.

Ray Loriga's early novels serve as an example of narratives removed from the realist form, avoiding details referring to the outside world which would help locate the action and fix it to a specific place. In *Caídos del cielo*, the reader must deduce the time and location from

textual clues. The first murder takes place in a VIPS, a chain of convenience stores and restaurants in Spain, and the narrator mentions Kurt Cobain's recent suicide multiple times, helping to establish the year as 1993. Otherwise, the novel exists solely in the imagination of the reader, a mythical landscape and story with a tragic ending. The decision to write a novel so disconnected from the contemporary historical and political debates is itself a historical and political comment. *Cáidos* evokes the lack of historical consciousness of the new generation. *El hombre que inventó Manhattan*, a later novel, represents a hyperreal society immersed in myth, as realist details abound but are manipulated by the author. Historical figures such as William Burroughs and Dutch Schultz interact with fictional characters like Jimmy *el Pincho* and the narrator, who suspiciously resembles the author. The state of history is such that real events are lost to the passage of time and its mythifying capabilities, and the barrier between fiction and truth are constantly breached.

Conversely, José Ángel Mañas' novels *Historias del Kronen* and *Ciudad rayada* exhibit a realist form as the first-person narrators relate their adventures in Madrid in a colloquial language replete with details from the metropolis. While the emphasis of both texts is the raucous lifestyle of the protagonists Carlos and Kaiser, respectively, in the background there are undercurrents of economic inequality, political corruption, police corruption, homophobia, the diminution of historic events to television news clips, and young characters' cognizance of how the transformation of Spanish society affects their lives. While Carlos chooses to accept his advantageous situation in life without examination, his friends lament their difficulties in the job market, the loss of autonomy for a Spain further integrated into the European Union, and what the future will bring. Carlos embodies the lack of concern for history or politics and the desire to protect himself from pain by shutting out the world, a dehumanized individual who ultimately murders his friend in a drug-fueled rage. In *Ciudad rayada*, the characters witness political bribes, a fraudulent cop who sells drugs and is murdered in a botched deal, and the failings of the economy. Kaiser is a young drug-dealer seeking to establish himself in the market, and he acknowledges that his success is in part based upon Spain's deterioration. Characters realize not only that changing the entrenched system is difficult to impossible, they would rather continue with the current dysfunctional model.

The final author analyzed in this dissertation is Lucía Etxebarria, whose debut novel, *Amor, curiosidad, Prozac y dudas*, probes the Generation X and its predecessors through a gendered lens. Three female protagonists, all first-person narrators and sisters, represent three historical time periods for Spanish women and the social changes from Franco's dictatorship to the postmodern '90s. Each character embodies a particular expectation for women; Ana, the oldest sister, is the traditional housewife who is financially reliant upon her husband. Rosa, in contrast, is a hard-charging businesswoman who has relinquished her private life for her professional one. Cristina, the youngest, reflects the newest generation's rejection of both paths. The sisters overcome haunting personal childhood tragedies buried deep in their subconscious; there is rape, child molestation, their father's physical abuse of their mother, and his abandonment of the family. While Franco is never once mentioned in the novel, the fact that their father leaves the family in 1975, the same year of Franco's death, is not lost on the reader. One of the recurring threads throughout the text is the characters' need to confront the traumatic

events that have impacted their lives before being able to move on. This thread cleverly mirrors the contemporary debate about whether or not Spain should confront its violent, recent past.

The GenX novels are historical in their ahistoricity. While the criticism that these novels are not engaged with history is justified on its surface, the GenX novels are in fact a response to the contemporary situation and a rejection of the tired historical narratives (from their perspective) of the Civil War and Franco's regime. These authors had the luxury not to write about the Civil War; it wasn't their war but belonged to the generations of their parents and grandparents. They were born without memories or very few memories of the government under Franco. They are far removed, in their minds, from the previous tragedies, and even worse, they feel as if they have nothing comparable to rebel against. However, the GenX novels find astute ways to simultaneously present the ahistorical consciousness of a group of adolescents while raising questions about the implications of such a position.

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