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# Cristina Cerezales's *De oca a oca*: A Novel of Female Identity for the Post-Franco Era

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On February 28, 2004 Carmen Laforet died at age 82, 60 years after she wrote *Nada*, which initiated the Spanish post-Civil War female *Bildungsroman*, a genre that continues to flourish into the early years of the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> In her first novel *De oca a oca* published in 2000, Carmen Laforet's daughter, Cristina Cerezales has continued the tradition initiated by her mother in 1945 of writing fiction that centers on women's developmental stages. *De oca a oca*'s similarities to as well as differences from other novels of the genre offer an opportunity to reflect on some significant changes the genre has undergone. I will leave for another day fuller treatment of the phases through which the female *Bildungsroman* has passed and individual masterpieces it has produced, including Ana María Matute's *Primera memoria* (1959), Carmen Martín Gaité's *Entre visillos* (1957), *Las ataduras* (1960), and *El cuarto de atrás* (1978), Ana María Moix's *Julia* (1970), Paloma Díaz-Mas's *El rapto del Santo Grial* (1984), and Rosa Montero's *Temblor* (1990), in order to concentrate on *De oca a oca* and what it means within the context of Spanish women's lives in a post-transition, fully democratic Spain.

*De oca a oca* portrays a new Spanish woman who is finally emerging from Franco-era ideas about womanhood, and in the process it calls on many elements of earlier novels of female development—the girl's estrangement from her parents, her oddness and alienation within her local setting (the *chica rara*), her search for identity through memory, and her drive for personal freedom. Like her mother's *Nada* and many other female *Bildungsromane*, Cerezales's *De oca a oca* is a retrospective reconstruction of a woman's life during an important period of personal growth, and also like most other novels of the genre, it reflects the restrictions and possibilities for women's

formation of an independent identity at a particular moment in Spanish history. *Nada*, for example, evokes the 1940s during the early years of the Franco regime, *Primera memoria*, the Spanish Civil War, and *El cuarto de atrás*, the Civil War and the Franco regime. *De oca a oca* covers the late Franco era and the first 25 years of democracy. Juan Villegas and Carlos Feal Deibe found in *Nada* the stages of a ritual initiation rite, and *De oca a oca* follows a similar pattern (as do Matute's *Primera memoria*, Montero's *Temblor*, and Díaz-Mas's *Rapto del Santo Grial*). *De oca a oca* coincides with *Nada* in including a philosophical-existential dimension suggested by the novels' titles and related to the protagonists' search for personal liberation and their appropriate place in the world.

Cerezales converts the children's game "De oca a oca y juego porque me toca," a children's board game in which players throw dice and then advance a token, into a metaphor for the way in which memories of past events occur to a person somewhat haphazardly (governed by a throw of the dice) as they reconstruct the past that has brought them to their present situation. The structure of the novel is very similar to that of Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás*. Both novels feature a middle-aged woman protagonist who is a talented artist (C. is a well-known writer; Justa, a successful woodcarver), and both women remember select episodes of their lives as girls, adolescents, and young women. Cerezales's "oca" metaphor for the way memory works is reminiscent of Martín Gaité's relating time and memory to "escondite inglés" in *El cuarto de atrás*. Each protagonist's memories are prompted by an uncanny muse-provocateur. Significantly, Cerezales changes the gender of the muse from a man (C.'s muse is a mysterious man in black, while Justa's is Amadora, her grandfather's sister, her *madrina*). If on the eve of Spanish democracy Martín Gaité's protagonist has not completely escaped the patriarchal influence on female artistic production, Cerezales's post-Franco woman moves into a female-inspired orbit. Cerezales, however, maintains the magical quality with which Martín Gaité endowed the interlocutor. The man in black produces colored pills that enhance memory, and Amadora is clairvoyant. She aided families in finding loved ones who were missing during the Civil War. Because her supernatural powers were viewed with suspicion by the Francoist authorities, she had to leave Spain for a time.

While there are many similarities between Cerezales's female memory novel and others of the genre, *De oca a oca* resituates the

*Bildungsroman* in an internationalized, globalized Spain that still maintains pockets of deeply rooted traditionalism in gender relations and local customs. Earlier female *Bildungsromane* focused more on the traditional restraints on women's lives and the impossibility of complete liberation. John Kronik notes, for example, that *Nada*, projects the claustrophobic atmosphere of the early Franco years in which Spain was essentially closed off from the rest of the world and even its own recent past (the Republic and the Spanish Civil War). Kronik observes that the word "sofocante" "aparece con tanta frecuencia en *Nada* que se convierte en el *leitmotiv* principal de la novela" (195). He also calls the spatial arrangements of the novel a "caja china que aprisiona a una española . . . donde el hombre respira un aire de relativa libertad prohibido a la mujer" (196, 198), and he concludes that the novel is a "grito de una generación que tenía que gritar con la voz ahogada" (202). The ending of *Nada* in which the protagonist sets off for Madrid with her friend Ena's father to take a job in his company and continue her university studies in the capital has occasioned debate over whether or not the novel provides a feminist solution to a young woman's search for an independent identity.<sup>2</sup>

*El cuarto de atrás*, while focusing on a mature woman who lives an independent life, is controversially feminist, because its protagonist relies on a male muse, and the novel subtly and ambiguously incorporates elements of popular romance fiction. The feminist message of Cereales's novel is much more forthright. Her protagonist Justa decides to leave Ignacio, her controlling, patriarchal husband who resents her artistic career (at least for a time) and travel to the United States, a decision fostered by a community of strong women and a homosexual man. Justa's decision is also favored by her age (she is 40) and the post-Franco era in which she lives. Even though many of the patriarchal constraints that circumscribed Andrea's life in 1940 have not entirely disappeared in the late 1990s,<sup>3</sup> the end of the novel suggests the possibility for reconciliation between past social forms and a modern woman's needs. Although the gender divide seems insurmountable at times, and Justa decides to leave her domineering husband, the ultimate message of *De oca a oca* is that the future lies in overcoming divisions of all kinds—tradition versus modernity, male versus female, art versus nature. Most of the novel's characters and the novel's ending represent a coming together, an integration of traditionally opposed elements.

Highlighting the social contradictions that face Spanish women today, *De oca a oca* is set in a small town named Olmeda in the Ancares region, a valley between León and Galicia and a pocket of traditionalism within a modernizing Spain.<sup>4</sup> Julio Llamazares describes an incident that underscores the way in which Ancares symbolizes Spain's uneven modernization. He traveled to the area in the dead of winter with the mailman driving a four-wheel-drive vehicle through meters of snow. Some local workers were clearing the snow with crude instruments, while not far away "apenas a cinco o seis kilómetros, la Nacional VI ve pasar cada muy poco los imponentes quitanieves de Obras Públicas. Los obreros se encogen de hombros. Ellos hacen lo que pueden. Expalar metros de nieve con una simple pala de allanar gravilla. 'Todavía', dice uno, 'hay españoles de dos y tres categorías'" (11). Llamazares describes his journey into Ancares as a return to centuries past: "Es como si, en el camino de subida a los Ancares, retrocediéramos varios siglos en el tiempo y centenares de miles de kilómetros en el mapa" (13). Fernando González notes that in the region "Sus métodos de trabajo, sus relaciones sociales, su entorno familiar, permanecen en una concepción medieval, mientras que la vivienda se mantiene inalterable desde antes que las legiones romanas se metieran río arriba, por el Sil, en busca de oro para el imperio" (39). Even though the Romans passed through the valley, its remoteness and difficult access allowed it to preserve (until very recently) ancient, Celtic ways of life. There is no evidence that the Moorish invasion had any influence in the region.<sup>5</sup>

In employing regionalist elements to portray the challenges to female development, Cerezales's literary mothers, rather than her own mother Carmen Laforet, are Fernán Caballero, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Concha Espina, and Carmen Martín Gaité, all of whom wrote novels in which a woman's personal growth takes place in a very particular regional setting. Like most of these literary "foremothers" Cerezales gives motherhood a central place in a woman's life by featuring regional customs relating to family life that are an integral part of the protagonist's struggle to find a niche for herself. In contrast to other post-War female *Bildungsroman* writers (Laforet or Matute, for example), Caballero, Pardo Bazán, and Espina, place motherhood at the center of their protagonists' stories.<sup>6</sup> Caballero's *La gaviota* marshals Andalusian customs to explore the fate of a talented female singer for whom motherhood finally replaces an operatic career; marriage and

motherhood in *La gaviota* are punishments for a woman's following her disinclination to observe the proprieties society expects. Pardo Bazán's Nucha of *Los pazos de Ulloa* gives up her religious vocation for a patriarchal marriage from which she finds refuge in motherhood. At the end of the novel and in its sequel *La madre naturaleza*, patriarchy remains intact and provincial male barbarism has not been tamed by civilized female influence. Espina's *La esfinge Maragata*, set in a region close to *De oca a oca*'s Ancares, considers the burdens women bear as mothers and farm laborers in an impoverished backward area of Spain.<sup>7</sup> In the end, however, Espina portrays the protagonist's sacrificial marriage as a noble gesture. Martín Gaité's *Las ataduras*, which has uncanny similarities to Cerezales's plot and setting, compares the life of a young woman in her native Galician village to her adult life in Paris where she lives with her artist-husband and two children.

As in the Andalusia, Galicia, and Maragata depicted by Caballero, Pardo Bazán and Martín Gaité, and Espina, respectively, in Ancares patriarchy is dying very slowly; men ostensibly dominate most aspects of life: "El régimen familiar típico es el 'patriarcal': el marido es literalmente 'el patrón' y la mujer una fiel servidora del mismo (Díez 61). The women, however, assert a subversive power through a shared sense of community, their at times nearly magical intuition, and their narrative arts. Justa's situation within the traditional patriarchy is exacerbated by her relationship with her mother Aurelia, which is strained for reasons directly relating to her gender. Aurelia bore a male child out of wedlock to a man whom she loved passionately, but he abandoned her pregnant. Raimundo, the child Aurelia bore as a single woman, was mute and possessed seemingly supernatural powers with plants and animals. When Raimundo died at age 10, the mother was devastated. She married Germán, a gentle and kind man, hoping to reproduce her special son, but instead she had a girl—Justa—whom she could not accept. Justa suffered from her mother's inattention when she was a young girl, and her childhood situation has deprived Justa of a sense of authentic being. Her memoir is an attempt to establish her identity as an artist and independent woman; the "ocas" on the journey to self-recognition and self-fulfillment include many fond reminiscences of Bernal, the schoolteacher's son whose friendship partially filled the void left by her indifferent mother.

Although Bernal and Justa were inseparable as children, when they reached young adulthood, they went their separate ways—Justa

to Paris to study fashion design and to model; Bernal to the United States. When Justa returned to her Ancares village, she found life there unbearable without Bernal, and she decided to marry the sailor Ignacio, who, for the moment replaced Bernal in her need for a close relationship left vacant by her mother. In addition, Ignacio at the time seemed capable of appreciating Justa as an accomplished professional, non-traditional woman. When Bernal returned and found Justa betrothed, he was so distraught that he immigrated permanently to California where he married and had a family. Justa herself has two sons, Matías and Lucas, the first of who takes his father's side in the tensions between Justa and Ignacio (in an attempt to emulate his father, Matías embarks on a sailor's career, against his natural inclinations). The second son Lucas is fond of his mother, but finally accepts his father's dictum to attend boarding school in another town, in part to escape from the conflictive household created by his incompatible parents.

As I indicated, Cerezales's emphasis on mother-child relations is a significant new aspect of the female *Bildungsroman* initiated by Carmen Laforet in the mid-twentieth century. In many other novels of this genre, blood parents are absent and are replaced by surrogates of one kind or another (for example, Aunt Angustias, Uncle Román, and Ena's parents in *Nada*; the grandmother, Aunt Emilia, and Son Jorge Major in *Primera memoria*). Even though biological mothers figure prominently in *De oca a oca*, there are also surrogate parents in the novel. Justa's surrogate parents—her grandfather, José, her grandmother Lisa, the grandfather's sister Amadora, and her grandfather's mistress Antonia—provide the opportunity to consider traditional aspects of Spanish society that continue to have a significant influence in rural and remote parts of Spain. When Justa was a child, she spent a great deal of time with her grandfather, the local miller whose mill she inherited and which provides her current home with Ignacio and her sons. The mill, even though it no longer functions as such, suggests the rural Spain of ages past, as many of the characters recall the days in which they came to the mill with their grain. The mill served as a focal point for local encounters and storytelling, a situation Justa reenacts on her fortieth birthday by inviting neighbors to her mill home to tell stories by the fire over a traditional meal.<sup>8</sup>

Oral culture, story telling, is one of the major threads in *De oca a oca*. Intertwined with Justa's recalling her own life story, her personal search for identity, are stories told by other characters—some female

and some male—that complement and complete her perception of her history, as well as that of her region and of her country. A visit to her ethereal, clairvoyant *madrina* at the beginning of *De oca a oca* to consult her about her impulse to leave Olmeda prompts the chain of memories that constitutes the novel. Amadora has the power to take her out of present time into a timeless zone that can be filled with moments from the past: “Amadora está frente a la ventana, pero sus ojos miran hacia dentro. Parece sumergida en otro tiempo y probablemente lo esté” (148). Immediately after the initial visit, Justa recalls a childhood scene in the cantina in which a woman is recounting how men used to lift women up over the fire (“A las mujeres nos subían al humo” 17) because the women, unable to afford underwear, were naked beneath their clothing. This memory causes Justa to lose “todo contacto con el presente” (17). She recalls that she often did not understand the stories she heard from her elders, but they fueled her own imagination,

su mente imaginativa va construyendo monstruos en el humo al hilo de la conversación. . . . Flora sigue hilando sus historias. Justa posa la mirada en la pared de la cocina, negra y desconchada. Formados en el vapor y el humo, ve aparecer monstruos y fantasmas de su imaginación. Es una película en blanco y negro, animadas las imágenes por el incesante vaivén de las llamas. Ve mujeres debatiéndose y gritando, mientras hombres perversos las arrancan del escaño para subirlas al cañizo. (18)

As Flora reveals the women’s consternation with this treatment (which today would be called sexual harassment), Bernarda interjects that the women put up with it because it was “tradicción” (19). The sound of young farm workers singing a traditional song as they return from the day’s labor in the fields, filtering into the cantina while Justa listens to Flora’s story, reinforces the ritual, unchanging nature of life in Ancares.

Memories of these stories, transformed in Justa’s imagination into Goyesque visions (“[a los hombres] les crecen cuernos y patas de cabra, como los del cuadro del libro del abuelo, y la mujeres se deshacen en el humo cuando las suben para arriba [23]), culminate in a night’s drawing spree that precipitates her break with Ignacio.



By candlelight, in order to keep from waking Ignacio, Justa makes a large charcoal drawing of demonic satyrs raising women into the air; the women escape from the men's raised arms and their spiraling bodies dissolve.<sup>9</sup> She achieves this effect by holding the candle to the paper. Caught up in the magic, ritualistic moment, Justa smears her face with ashes. At this point Ignacio enters and rips the drawing in half, while their younger son Lucas looks on. Ignacio is incapable of understanding what he considers Justa's insane behavior and decides to send Lucas, who tells his mother that it is the best drawing she has ever made, to boarding school to save him from his mother's "locura."<sup>10</sup> When Lucas utters his judgment of her drawing, Justa feels that she has recovered her son, who because of Ignacio's influence, had little by little become alienated from her. (Ignacio associates art with homosexuality, and when Lucas showed interest in doing art with his mother, he forced him to play sports with other boys instead.)<sup>11</sup> In fact, Justa feels much more comfortable in the home of her homosexual friend Felipe than in her own home where gender roles are so steeply divided: "La casa de la Oliva era para ella una isla en medio del valle de Olmeda. Una isla internacional, porque Felipe había creado en ella un mundo diferente. Llegaban visitantes de todas partes y se quedaban largas temporadas" (114). Ignacio, of course, cannot abide Felipe (and his partner Erik), whom he calls "ese par de maricas" (115).

Ignacio likewise distrusts strong women and blames Justa's "aquejarre" on her visit to Amadora, suggesting the patriarchal male's fear of women's supernatural powers. The community of women in Olmeda forms an important source of support for each of them. Amadora protected Juana from an abusive husband, and now that Juana's husband is dead, Juana lives with Amadora and cares for her in her frail old age. Even though Justa's grandfather José had a long affair with Antonia, now the tavern-keeper, she and the grandmother Lisa continued to be good friends. Women frequently gather to tell each other their stories (narration as a form of salvation is an important leitmotif in *De oca a oca*) and they band together whenever one of them is threatened. When Justa was an adolescent, Antonia initiated her into the importance of female solidarity. Lucía, who silently suffered a violent, alcoholic husband's abuse, afforded the occasion.

The very pregnant Lucía arrived at grandfather José's mill with two sacks of grain on her head, her feet in shreds from having walked a long distance carrying so much weight. Infuriated that

Lucía's husband would allow his pregnant wife to work while he slept off a hangover, the grandmother and Antonia doctor her feet. While they attend to her, she tells them that she has feared she would miscarry because her husband beats her. Later Antonia gathers the village women together at the tavern and insists on Justa's presence: "Quiero que te enteres de esto, al igual que mis hijas se enteraron cuando les llegó el momento. Existe una fuerza entre las mujeres para defenderse del hombre cuando abusa" (215). The men, drinking in the upstairs room, are specifically excluded from the gathering at which the women agree to give Lucía the recipe for "la *sopa mala*." Just possessing the recipe will provide Lucía with security and redress the balance of power between her and her husband. Justa was charged with taking the recipe to Lucía, a duty that also empowered her with the secrets of womanhood. In keeping with Cerezales's overall design to overcome the kinds of radical divisions between the sexes that occur in traditional Spanish societies like Ancares, Justa shared the story of Lucía with Bernal. However, she did not disclose the ingredients of the *mala sopa*, nor did he ask about them.

Justa's rites of initiation also include a vicarious encounter with sex that marks an early first step towards separation from the patriarchal world of the village's men. The intimate connection to her grandfather José was lost when she saw him having sex in the woods with Antonia. Years later Antonia tells her side of the story. She and the grandfather, for whom she worked in the mill, entered into an affair when the grandfather was distressed over being barred from joining the Republican army during the Civil War. The Nationalists, who ruled the Ancares area, insisted that he keep the mill going to feed Nationalist troops. In addition, he was angry that his beloved sister Amadora had to leave Spain for France when rumors began circulating that she had supernatural powers.<sup>12</sup> The entire family dynamic changed during the war years, because the grandfather seethed with repressed rage, and the grandmother, who felt guilty for disclosing Amadora's clairvoyance, also grew taciturn. When Antonia married and had children, the grandfather stopped "visiting" her. In 1948 during the most repressive years of the Franco regime, the police killed Antonia's husband, and she was arrested for harboring Republican fugitives. During her many years in prison, her children and all she owned were taken from her.<sup>13</sup> Justa's grandfather worked tirelessly to have her released from prison, and when he was finally successful

in gaining her freedom, they renewed their affair, which continued until he died.

On Justa's fifteenth birthday, another event in the woods marked a further passage towards maturity, probably announcing the onset of menstruation and her entrance into sexual womanhood. Felipe recalls seeing Justa in the woods carrying a dead deer, leaving "una estela de sangre detrás de sí" (110). The vision prompted him thereafter to call Justa "Diana la Cazadora," an epithet that foretold the fully separate identity she finally achieves. For Felipe this sighting was a transcendental event; at the time he was a seminary student without much vocation, and seeing the superhuman feat of the young girl Justa carrying an enormous dead deer made him understand God's word that "la fe mueve montañas" (111). Felipe's comment reminds us that Justa's story is the story of progressive solidification of inner strength. Although she experienced all the rites of passage most girls undergo in novels of development, her sense of fulfillment arrives latently because of the vacuum created by her mother's rejection, her grandfather's "betrayal" with Antonia, and her *madrina* Amadora's exile to France. Justa's delayed maturity can be interpreted as that of many Spanish women who suffered the repression of growing up during the Franco era.

The community spirit that sustains the village women as they confront ancient patriarchal traditions does not always adhere in relations between mothers and children of either sex, and these tensions between generations lead to personal growth and change within the static traditional society. The rift between Justa and her mother Aurelia is recreated in Justa's own mothering of her sons. Her relationship to her first son Matías is particularly strained, as she had already decided to leave Ignacio when she discovered she was pregnant with Matías. The son's existence trapped her in her unhappy marriage, and in some ways she reproduced in Matías what she had suffered herself. Like her mother, unhappy in her present situation, Justa could not give Matías her full, undivided love. The boy, in turn and like Justa herself, began a quest for meaningful connections, and at the end of the novel reconciles with his mother after several lonely years as a seaman. Justa also reconciles with her mother Aurelia on the eve of her departure for California. Cerezales's approach to mother-child relations brings to mind Nancy Chodorow's seminal study of the phenomenon in *The Reproduction of Motherhood*. Chodorow, taking a psychoanalytical

approach, pinpoints the reenactment of the mothering urge in a girl's close and unbroken connection to her own mother. Chodorow asserts that boys are socialized to break their early bond with the mother, while girls experience no such rupture. According to Chodorow, the continuous bond between mothers and daughters creates the desire in daughters to reproduce that bond with their own children.

Cerezales's novelistic exploration of the mother-daughter and mother-son relationships questions any such universal bonding mechanism. The situation in which she places her protagonist indicates that there is much more involved in mothering than universal psychoanalytic paradigms. Mothering is complicated by many factors other than a woman's bond to her own mother. One cannot ignore the social norms of the society in which the mothering takes place (in *De oca a oca* Francoist and post-Francoist Spain in a traditionalist Ancares). Also important to mothering are the relationship of the mother to the father of the child and the mother's extra-familial interests, such as her professional goals. Carmen Laforet's and many other Franco-era youthful protagonists achieved their identities outside of marriage and mothering. The representation of girls who have not experienced motherhood and may not even marry was a necessary stage in portraying more independent women during the Franco period when women's roles were officially limited to wife and mother. Cerezales's *Justa*, on the other hand, brings motherhood and family ties back to the center of a woman's concept of herself. When the state no longer legislates such a narrow view of female existence, her identity as an independent individual can include motherhood as well as extra-familial interests.

Paradoxically, *Justa* achieves her sense of self in part because of her ties to the traditions of her region—her connections to the strong community of women and her woodcarving, which has native roots. Cerezales develops an art/nature dichotomy that, like the male/female and tradition/modernity oppositions, dissolves into complementarity. The Ancares setting provides ample opportunity to contemplate nature. Local people live in close harmony with the natural world (the villages are surrounded by woods and the *pallozas* are divided in two parts, one for people and the other for livestock). Cerezales draws on the abundant fauna of the region to underscore *Justa*'s developing sense of self and her ultimate achievement of personal independence. Aside from the above-mentioned deer, birds are a constant symbolic presence. For example,

frequent references to geese, both domesticated geese owned by the protagonist and wild geese that fly overhead complicate the meaning of “oca” from the board game. The two types of geese underscore the “ocas” of Justa’s life as she moves toward the decision to leave Ancares and seek companionship that better suits her.

Like the geese Justa keeps at her mill, she is enclosed in a kind of *gallinero* at the beginning of the novel. Significantly, she wonders, “¿Se acordará Ignacio de meter las ocas en el gallinero? No puede contar con la colaboración de su marido. Ella y él se han convertido en dos polos opuestos y enfrentados” (14). As she observes the fall migration of some wild ducks, Amadora tells Justa that she will fly when it is time, “Cuando de verdad quieras ser pájaro y volar, volarás” (124). Justa’s son Lucas, the son most like her, also needs to be free; she worries about his being interned in a boarding school: “Él no sabe lo que es la pérdida de libertad. Veinticuatro horas sometido a la disciplina de un colegio. Él es un pájaro como ella, que necesita las ventanas abiertas para entrar y salir a su antojo” (96). As the novel progresses, the domesticated geese kept in the chicken coop are replaced by wild geese. The wild geese form a triangle when they migrate in order to protect one another, but the guide goose, which is distinguished from the other geese because it is conscious of its power, is not protected. Amadora theorizes that the same thing happens to humans: “Cuando se descubre el poder, se encuentra la libertad” (125). Every year when the wild geese migrate, some of Justa’s domestic flock join them: “Justa las ve partir con alegría hacia su libertad, mientras Ignacio se exaspera porque no lo puede comprender” (126).

The wild animals and natural settings that inform the stages of Justa’s life also inspire her sculptures. When she first met Felipe, she only carved birds: “Quizá se buscaba a sí misma en aquellos pájaros de cuellos largos entrelazados, con el pico señalando al vacío. . . . Sus pájaros no habían aprendido a volar. Permanecían patéticamente enganchados por el cuello en un intento de querer ser a partir del otro” (104). As evidenced on the ritual night of charcoal drawing, she does learn to fly by practicing her art and in the process overcomes her personal demons: her oppressive husband and the haunting memory of her nearly mythical half-brother Raimundo (“natural” in several senses of the word). Felipe, older than Justa, remembers her dead brother as a symbol of freedom: “Raimundo, que representaba para mí la Libertad con mayúsculas, el rey de la naturaleza, que conocía las

plantas y los animales y que, por no hacer uso de la palabra, no tenía que razonar ni justificar sus actos frente a los demás” (109). When Felipe rebelled and refused to return to the seminary, his mother used Raimundo as an example of what happens to boys who do not study; they are “salvajes.”

Significantly, Bernal, Justa’s childhood friend and potential new adult partner combines both art and nature. He, like Raimundo, is knowledgeable about the natural world, but he also appreciates artistic endeavor. He and Justa discovered a book of poetry by Juan Ramón Jiménez left behind by an American painter who had stayed for a time in the room that became Bernal’s. This book of poems, which likely belonged to Justa’s grandfather, accompanies Justa on shipboard as she travels to reunite with Bernal in San Francisco. During the voyage Justa finally acquires a full sense of herself as an independent person and as an artist (she has worked tirelessly to finish a set of sculptures before departing). In a coda to the novel selections from Juan Ramón’s “El nuevo mar” are interspersed with Justa’s own thoughts as she travels to the “new world.” She experiences the sense of personal plenitude that Juan Ramón evokes via totalizing sea imagery: “El hombre / debiera poder ser lo que desea, / debiera poder ser en la medida / de su ilusión y su deseo. / Entonces yo sería tú, que eres tú mismo, / que eres lo deseado del total deseo. / Tú solo, mar, lo sabes todo, todo lo olvidas; / tú solo, mar, te bastas y te sobras, / Eres, dejas de ser, a un tiempo todo” (279). Justa has finally freed herself, not so much from the bonds of daughterhood and motherhood that had confounded her identity formation, but from the restrictions that traditional interpretations of these roles had placed on her.

Juan Ramón’s poetry gathers together all the threads that have woven through the novel—memory, insanity (irrationality, difference), flying, and freedom: “Para olvidarme de por qué he venido, / de para qué he nacido, hemos nacido, / vengo a mirarte, mar, loco perpetuo. . . . En los días serenos, cuando el aire / con su cielo sobre él, arriba, cree / que te domina y que lo sabes, / tú eres ajeno a él, estás dormido, / estás soñando / la libertad que formas en el mundo con la revolución sorda por dentro” (259). These verses alternate with Justa’s own perception of the sea and her sense that she is flying “como un pájaro, un ave libre que ha logrado finalmente levantar el vuelo” (261). Just before departing, she received a letter from her older son Matías, who has been at sea for several years following in his father’s footsteps. He

has learned that his father's profession does not suit him, and he plans to leave sailing and work in a shipyard for a while. He writes conciliatory words about Justa and her need to escape Ignacio's domination: "Sí, ya lo sé, ahí estáis los dos [symbolized in his new profession], papá y tú, el mar y la madera, pero no está mal que nos encontremos los tres en armonía" (269). Juan Ramón's imagery evokes the sea as a philosophical center: "Tú, mar desnudo, / vives, mar, en el centro de la vida; / donde estés tú es el centro, / principio y fin de todo, mina viva" (270), and thus the sea serves as a unifying image for the three opposing characters—Ignacio, Justa, and Matías. The sea has been a man's realm throughout *De oca a oca*, even though the sea in much lore and literature across the ages has been associated with femaleness, the womb, and the protective caring of the mother (for example, Esther Tusquet's *El mismo mar de todos los veranos* and Carmé Riera's *Te dejo el mar* associate the sea with these female qualities). Via Juan Ramón's poem *Cerezales* breaks down the male/female dichotomy and evokes the sea as a totality that completes Justa's desire to feel at one with herself and her surroundings.

By focusing on the tensions marriage and motherhood engender in the life of an intelligent, artistically inclined woman within a very traditional society, Cristina Cerezales's *De oca a oca* addresses concerns central to today's post-Franco Spanish woman who still encounters traces of the Franco era patriarchal legacy. Male attitudes towards women have not changed as radically as one might have expected nearly 30 years after the dictator's death. Cerezales is joined by other women novelists (among them Lucía Etxebarria in *Amor, curiosidad, prozac y dudas* [1997] and *Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes* [1998] and Josefina Aldecoa in *El enigma* [2002]) in assessing this lingering legacy. These novelists, however, as well as others, such as Ana María Moix, Esther Tusquets, Marina Mayoral, Carmé Riera, Rosa Montero, and Soledad Puértolas, focus on women finding their identity in solitude or in the company of other women. Cerezales envisions a future for Spanish women that may include mothering and satisfying male companionship as well as a career and female relationships.

## Notes

1. There is significant controversy over whether or not *Nada* is truly a *Bildungsroman*. Barry Jordan has argued that *Nada* should not be considered a *Bildungsroman* because it is not “a manifesto of self-creation, but . . . a primer on self-discipline, a deportment book in tune with the Franco regime’s views on the position of women” (117). Jordan provides a list and a critique of major critics who have argued in favor of *Nada* as a *Bildungsroman*, or novel of development. Rather than enter into the dialogue on whether or not Andrea’s comportment can be considered growth or *Bildung*, I am using *Bildungsroman* in a loose way that can include a novel like *Nada* that focuses on the consciousness of a person en route to maturity who is shaped by a particular set of circumstances.

2. See for example Ordóñez and Jordan who argue against Andrea’s making a significant step toward liberating herself from the patriarchal society in which she lives.

3. I am assuming that the first narrative level (Justa’s present in which she recalls her childhood, and her marriage and her childrearing) are concurrent to the years in which the novel was written.

4. Although Cerezales lives in Madrid, she has spent quite a bit of time in the Ancares region in search of her family roots on her father’s side. Some secondary characters’ stories incorporated into the novel are based on narratives told to her by Ancares natives, who are acknowledged in the “agradecimientos.” She has only used a fraction of the material she has on Ancares for *De oca a oca*, so the region and its people will surface in other narratives she has completed or will complete.

5. Rosa Montero notes that modern elements are finally creeping into the ancient culture of Ancares, creating the contrast between tradition and modernity that Cerezales captures in her novel: “Un territorio perdido a medio camino de la civilización, el primitivismo y la magia. Con *compostores*—o hueseros—que arreglan con mano sabia las articulaciones dañadas. Con conocimientos de culebras para combatir el reuma. Con el *rock* duro de ACDC haciendo retemblar las ennegrecidas paredes del Carocos” (21).

6. Cerezales also returns to the third-person narration of the nineteenth—and early twentieth—century novels. Many earlier post-Civil War female *Bildungsromane* (*Nada*, *Primera memoria*, *Julia*) are narrated from the very limited autobiographical view of the protagonist. Although Cerezales focalizes the narrative exclusively through Justa, the viewpoint is less restrictive than in the homodiegetic narrations.



7. Pilar Lledó quotes Julio Caro Baroja, who links the Maragata and Ancares regions: “La cultura material de León es de una riqueza, una variedad, de una abundancia y de un valor informativo extraordinario para todo lo que es la historia de la tecnología y el folklore. Ya pocos son los años que restan para hacer un estudio de campo riguroso en zonas como Maragatería, Ancares, y otros núcleos montañoses...” (56).

8. Communal activity around a fire, especially story telling, reflects the ancient way of life in the typical Celtic-age houses of the area. Although now nearly extinct, the *palloza* or circular one-room stone house was the center of Ancares life from prehistoric times until well into the 1970s. The house was covered with a thatched straw roof that kept the heat from the central fire trapped in the structure. All life’s indoor activity, especially important in the harsh winter months, took place around the fire. Juan Gabriel Pallarés recalls that “Cuando yo vivía en Balouta la iluminación sólo se conseguía a base de lámparas de carburo, además de unas pocas linternas. La luz eléctrica, que ya es un hecho normal entre los habitantes de las regiones presaharianas, o en muchos pueblos de las montañas del Irán, seguía siendo un hecho casi imposible para los habitantes de esta aldea leonesa. Por eso, la verdadera TV de Balouta fueron siempre los recuerdos y el arte de narrarlos en torno al fuego. Al anochecer, frecuentemente, nos reuníamos los habitantes de la aldea en torno a algún hogar, bajo los jamones y cecinas que se curaban al humo, en esa semioscuridad latente que traslada como por arte de magia a los hombres actuales hacia el pozo sin fondo de lejanas épocas. Se solían escuchar historias transmitidas por tradición oral que por lo general venían de los abuelos, de decenas de generaciones antes, historias lejanas que hablaban de lobos y licántropos, de santas compañías (sic) y piedras druídicas, de aperecidos (sic), de cuando la guerra y la guerrilla antifranquista” (36-37).

9. Justa’s drawing on this occasion is reminiscent of a series of wood-carvings by real life Ancares artist Domingo González Vázquez titled “Quabhras,” which reveal the artist’s knowledge of Goya’s “Aquelarre.” Justa, like González Vázquez, carves pieces of wood she finds, following natural shapes already suggested by the wood, to create fanciful figures. In the painting phase of Cerezales’s artistic career, she did a stunning series of portraits and landscapes on Ancares in the mid-1980s, in which she highlights the isolation and natural beauty of the region and the care-worn, expressive faces of the inhabitants. This article, which focuses on *De oca de oca*’s contribution to the post-War novel of female development, must unfortunately leave out an analysis of all the uses of the visual in the novel. For example,

*De oca a oca* is divided into 4 sections, each titled with a color: “Blanco,” “Amarillo,” “Azul,” and “El color de todos los colores. El mar.”

10. At the beginning of the novel, Justa indicates that one of the reasons for wishing to order her thoughts about her life is to “recobrar su identidad y conjurar el pánico a la locura” (12), a panic Ignacio has instilled in her. In an update of Alejandro’s interning his wife Julia in an insane asylum in Unamuno’s *Nada menos que todo un hombre*, Ignacio insists that Justa see a psychiatrist.

11. Interestingly, the masculinist view of art as an effeminate profession is a central theme of Carmen Laforet’s *La insolación*, a *Bildungsroman* with a male protagonist, published in 1963. *Al volver la esquina*, the sequel to that novel, written in the late 1960s and published posthumously in 2004, continues the theme.

12. Belief in witchery and *mal de ojo* is widespread in Ancares. Many local tales involve spirits and supernatural beings: “Desde pequeños los niños del Bierzo y la sierra de Ancares, se veían envueltos en un sinfín de creencias que la religiosidad y cultura popular habían ido creando y transmitiendo por tradición oral . . . La explicación cuasi-mitológica de los fenómenos naturales, la amenaza constante de los males que podría acarrear el contravenir las normas establecidas, iban encauzando la vida y actividades del niño dentro de las normas establecidas por la colectividad. Cuando había tormenta los mayores explicaban que era el diablo que corría con los zocos (José Luis Alonso Ponga and Amador Dieguez Ayerbe 47). The same authors also *tell* of a woman, who, like Amadora, was suspected of having supernatural powers; everyone, especially children, shunned her: “La tía Jesusona era una de estas ancianas que contaba muchas historias, era una anciana muy pobre que vivía sola, iba cuando podía a casa de los vecinos, si éstos la dejaban, porque no todos permitían que entrase en su casa, por el peligro que significaba. . . los niños se santiguaban para alejar los malos espíritus que pudiese traer la anciana, y los que eran un poco más mayores la miraban con descaro. . . La tía Jesusona contaba muchas historias, pero la que más aceptación tenía entre la concurrencia era la de un alma en pena, que el pueblo, los contemporáneos de la tía Jesusona tenían como verdadera. . .” (48).

13. Rosa Montero notes that many *maquis* operated in the Ancares area and that the population “sufrió profundamente en la posguerra” (21).

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