

structure.¹³ If anything, *Primera memoria* ends on a note of non-completion. Clearly this has something to do with the fact that *Primera memoria* is the opening novel of a trilogy entitled *Los mercaderes*. However, the subtext of the fairytale is brought to a conclusion, even if the novel is not. Unlike the mermaid, the protagonist of Matute's novel does not disappear into a cloud of foam; her life, evidently, carries on.

What is intriguing about the novel is the fact that, although the discourse of the fairy tale is presented as non-salvific since illusion and everyday life are shown finally to be at odds with one another, fairy tales possess a significant function in the novel as a discourse which allows female life to centre itself. Throughout the novel, the protagonist is described as alienated from the masculinist equivalent of fairy tales, namely, the doctrines of the Church. Mosén Mayol, for example, in the eyes of most of the inhabitants of the village, is a quasi-divine figure, dignified, cultured, highly refined (pp. 49–50). But Matia is not as overwhelmed as her peers and friends are by his aura of sanctity. During the mass which she, el Chino and Borja attend, Matia's thoughts wander off to thoughts of the Little Mermaid during the religious chants:

“¿Por qué no tenemos las sirenas un alma inmortal?” No la tuvo, no la tuvo, y se convirtió en espuma. “Y cada vez que con sus pies desnudos pisaba la tierra sentía como si se le clavasen cuchillas afiladas y agujas. . .”

. . . quos pre-ti-o-sa sanguine redi-mis-ti. . . La Joven Sirena quería que la amasen, pero nunca la amó nadie. ¡Pobre sirena! (p. 59)

A distinction is thus being drawn between the immortality implicit in Christ's sacrifice for mankind and the inconstancy and perishability which characterise the Little Mermaid's life. Matia's alienation from the discourse of the Christian world is further suggested when Borja asks her if she goes to confession, to which she replies: ‘No tengo pecados’ (p. 164). Matia finally reveals herself as a liminal figure, standing on the outer limits of the society in which she lives, no closer now than she was before to the roots of her being.

In more ways than one, *Primera memoria* is a truncated text; rather than offering a tale of ‘linear socialization’, Matute's novel is characterized by disruption and psychic inconclusion (thereby echoing the second type of fairy tale as defined by Sara Gilead; see above). Though ultimately unable to provide a finality to Matia's life which is anything but proleptic, the discourse of the fairy tale is nevertheless promoted as the only hermeneutic strategy truly available to womankind.

¹³ ‘Ana María Matute's *Primera memoria*: A Fairy tale Gone Awry’, p. 11.

CARMEN MARTIN GAITE: *EL CUARTO DE ATRÁS*

The publication in 1978 of *El cuarto de atrás* established Carmen Martín Gaité (1925: Spain) as one of the major Spanish female novelists of the contemporary era. It has attracted a great deal of critical attention; in bibliometric terms, as Joan L. Brown has pointed out, it is ‘the most frequently examined novel by a contemporary Spanish woman author over the past decade’.¹⁴ *El cuarto de atrás*, which is dedicated to Lewis Carroll, opens with the protagonist (who is clearly a projection of the author herself) falling asleep while reading Tzvetan Todorov's work on the literature of the fantastic, follows with a description of her being woken up by a mysterious stranger dressed in black who gives her a searching interview during the night, and concludes when her daughter wakes her up early next morning; as a result the reader is led to question the boundaries between the real and the imaginary. As Marie Murphy has suggested, this particular novel's ‘playfulness, humor and technical virtuosity make it the author's most intriguing and open work to date’, seeming to enchant Martín Gaité's readers to the exclusion of all else.¹⁵ Despite its apparent uniqueness in Martín Gaité's canon, though, *El cuarto de atrás* is essentially a re-casting of *Entre visillos* (1957), the main difference between the two texts being that the publication of *El cuarto de atrás* after Franco's death meant that the author was no longer hampered by censorship.¹⁶ Just as important as the relaxation of censorship, however, is the status that *El cuarto de atrás* has as a re-written text, and therefore more a scriptural exercise than a documentary. In this reading of Martín Gaité's novel I shall be concentrating on

¹⁴ ‘Carmen Martín Gaité: Reaffirming the Pact Between Reader and Writer’, in *Women Writers of Contemporary Spain*, pp. 72–92 (p. 86).

¹⁵ *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson, Vol. II, p. 793.

¹⁶ See J. L. Brown, ‘One Autobiography Twice Told: Martín Gaité's *Entre visillos* and *El cuarto de atrás*’, *HJ*, 7 (1986), 37–47. See also J. L. Brown and E. M. Smith, ‘*El cuarto de atrás*: Metafiction and the Actualization of Literary Theory’, *Hispanófila*, 90 (1987), 63–70. There are also a number of good essays on *El cuarto de atrás* in Mirella d'Ambrosio Servodidio and Marcia L. Welles (eds.), *From Fiction to Metafiction: Essays in Honour of Carmen Martín Gaité* (Lincoln: Society of Spanish and Spanish American Studies, 1983); Manuel Durán, ‘*El cuarto de atrás*: imaginación, fantasía, misterio: Todorov y algo más’ (129–37); Kathleen M. Glenn, ‘*El cuarto de atrás*: Literature as juego and the Self-Reflexive Text’ (149–59); Linda Gould Levine, ‘Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás*: A Portrait of the Artist as a Woman’ (161–72); Elizabeth J. Ordóñez, ‘Reading, Telling and the Text of Carmen Martín Gaité's *El cuarto de atrás*’ (173–84); and Robert C. Spire, ‘Intertextuality in *El cuarto de atrás*’ (139–48).

the use of fairy tales and populist literature motifs, as well as their integration into the 'novel-as-self-reflexive' device.

El cuarto de atrás is predicated on the escapism characteristic of children's fantasy literature, as Martín Gaité would be the first to point out. As she notes in an interview: 'When one experiences the dazzling impact of reading at an early age, the effect is akin to that of an arrow wound. Reading provides insight into a secret world that liberates one from the hostile pressures of the environment, from the routines and deception that the confrontation with reality produces'.¹⁷ In line with the thrust of Martín Gaité's observation, *El cuarto de atrás* consistently draws attention to the haven provided by the world of fantasy, romantic fiction and the fairy tale in the narrator's mind. Intriguingly, however, the worlds of fantasy and reality are never presented in the novel as separate worlds; there is, indeed, often an uncanny interrelation, and even identity, between them. The novel opens, for example, *in medias res* with the narrator trying to establish the identity of the man who has sent her a love letter, and noting that his hand-writing seems vaguely familiar. The scene suddenly changes and the beautiful girl on the cover of a magazine sitting on the table is now looking at the narrator: 'Ahora la niña provinciana que no logra dormirse me está mirando a la luz de la lamparita amarilla, cuyo resplandor ha atenuado, poniéndole encima un pañuelo: ve este cuarto dibujado por Emilio Freixas sobre una página satinada de tonos ocres, la gran cama deshecha y la mujer en pijama, leyendo una carta de amor sobre la alfombra, le brillan los ojos, idealiza mi malestar' (p. 23).¹⁸ The world behind the glossy magazine has come alive, rather like the world behind the mirror in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. The woman behind the mirror lives in a world of love and romance: 'estaban de moda los nombres con E. largos y exóticos, el mío no sorprendía a nadie, empezaba con la C. de cuarto, de casa, de cama y de aquel corazón que dibujaba con tiza ante la mirada aburrida del profesor, el que se me aceleraba cuando Norma Shearer besaba a Leslie Howard, el que grababan los novios, atravesado por una flecha, en los árboles de la Alamedilla' (p. 25). She is the embodiment of the pot-boiler novel in which people do not eat or go to work, they simply fall in love. As the first chapter of *El cuarto de atrás* make clear, the narrative consciousness moves freely between different levels, from the narrator to the glossy face in the magazine, from this side of the looking-glass to the other.

¹⁷ 'The Virtues of Reading', *PMLA*, 104:3 (1989), 348-53 (p. 348).

¹⁸ All references are to *El cuarto de atrás* (Madrid: Destino, 1978).

The 'novela rosa' (especially in its Elizabeth Mulder form), itself a grown-up version of the fairy tale, is the hermeneutic sub-structure underpinning the novel. This is so for sociological reasons; as the narrator suggests: 'es muy importante el papel que jugaron las novelas rosa en la formación de las chicas de los años cuarenta' (p. 138). The 'novela rosa', thus, has its documentary aspect, but also operates as a running commentary on the fiction/life interface. This becomes evident when the 'novela rosa' bursts into the interview between the narrator and her interviewer, the mysterious man in black. The man in black appears concerned and suddenly we read: '“Oh Raimundo – exclamó Esperanza, mientras brotaban las lágrimas de sus párpados cerrados –, contigo nunca tengo miedo. No te vuelvas a ir nunca.” Era de una novela que venía en “Lecturas”'. Estaba escrita la frase, según era estilo entonces, al pie de una de las ilustraciones, donde se veía a una mujer con la cabeza apoyada en el respaldo del sofá y a un hombre inclinándose solícito sobre ella' (p. 38). We later find out that this scene is one from a novel written in her youth by the narrator-protagonist (p. 140). At this juncture the narrator expects her guest to reveal his identity: 'aquel momento en que estaba a punto de ser pronunciado el famoso “¿no te acuerdas?”' (pp. 140-41). No revelation is in fact forthcoming but the expectation created by the 'novela rosa' hovers in the background. Later on, the man in black lights two cigarettes in his mouth and passes one to her. The narrator notes: 'Muy de novela rosa este detalle' (p. 190).

Throughout the novel, the narrator-protagonist seems to live certain parts of her life according to the happy ending concept of Hollywood films in the 1950s. But she is choosy. She describes a novel she read in her childhood, for example, about a young girl who went to college and married her Latin professor, and remarks 'para ese viaje no necesitábamos alforjas . . . tanto ilusionarse con los estudios y desafiar a la sociedad que le impedía a una mujer realizarlos, para luego salir por ahí, en plan happy end, que a saber si sería o no tan happy, porque aquella chica se tuvo que sentir decepcionada tarde o temprano; además, ¿por qué tenían que acabar todas las novelas cuando se casa la gente?' (p. 92). Though absorbed by the dream world of film, the narrator simultaneously remembers the point at which she began to doubt the authenticity of the Hollywood dream.

The romantic novels which interrupt the present tense of the narrative at various points are not simply an example of socially-produced wish-fulfilment; the narrator herself created some of the fictions in her childhood. The protagonist mentions that in the past she was involved with one of her friends in writing a 'novela rosa' who had a protagonist called Esmeralda: 'también debe haber trozos de una novela rosa que

fuimos escribiendo entre las dos, aunque no llegamos a terminarla, la protagonista se llamaba Esmeralda, se escapó de su casa una noche porque sus padres eran demasiado ricos y ella quería conocer la aventura de vivir al raso, se encontró, junto a un acantilado, con un desconocido vestido de negro que estaba de espaldas, mirando el mar' (p. 58). The present scene in which the narrator is being interviewed by a mysterious stranger is thus a duplication of a novel written by the narrator in the past. Time itself adds another dimension to the Heidenberg principle of uncertainty which already seems to be prime mover of the novel.

The 'novela rosa' is not introduced in a random, innocent way in *El cuarto de atrás*; it is often linked to the self-reflexivity technique. As Biruté Ciplijauskaitė has pointed out, the narrative of *El cuarto de atrás* is characterized by both confession and self-analysis, themselves part of the self-reflexive stance adopted by the narrator.¹⁹ The second page of the text provides an early example of this: 'He dicho "anhelo y temor" por decir algo, tanteando a ciegas, y cuando se dispara así, nunca se da en el blanco; las palabras son para la luz, de noche se fugan, aunque el ardor de la persecución sea más febril y compulsivo a oscuras, pero también, por eso, más baldío' (p. 10). This sets the tone for most of the book which is set during the night, the subconscious, where the world takes on an uncanny appearance. At the beginning of Chapter IV, for example, the narrator returns to the back room to find that the intruder dressed in black has been looking at her papers:

- ¿Por qué ha entrado en mi dormitorio? - le pregunto desabridamente. Se echa a reír y mi rabia crece.
- No le veo la gracia.
- Perdone, es que parece una frase de folletín. (p. 99)

As we can see from this scene, the man in black and the narrator are both conscious of the way in which their meeting each other echoes the plot of a romantic novel; they suddenly become like characters from an Unamuno novel (*Niebla*) or a Pirandello play (*Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*). As this scene makes clear, the fairy-tale level of the novel is inseparable from the theme of self-reflexivity. The fairy tale, like the 'novela rosa', is simultaneously used as an escapist space within the text to which the narrator can retreat (the 'back room'), but also fulfills a kitsch function within *El cuarto de atrás*; the narrator adopts an ironizing, metafictional stance towards the Never Never world of fantasy, underlining the fictionality of fiction.

¹⁹ *La novela femenina contemporánea*, p. 111.

The metafictional element is emphasized by the various allusions to Todorov's work; thus the narrator mentions coming across a copy of Todorov's *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (p. 19). She swears that she will write a novel following Todorov's advice; and although the narrator never makes this explicit, it is clear that this is an accurate description of the book we are holding in our hands.²⁰ *El cuarto de atrás*, therefore, is a book which is aware of its own gestation, rather like the French Nouveau Roman in which the creative enterprise is a part of the work's message. The book being written is a concrete praxis of Todorov's theory of mystery enunciated in his *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*. One of the important characteristics of the mystery novel as identified by Todorov is its ambiguity: 'La ambigüedad es la clave de la literatura de misterio' (p. 53). Likewise there are many mysteries in *El cuarto de atrás*: among the more prominent are i) who is the man in black? and ii) how is the novel writing itself?²¹ *El cuarto de atrás*, thus, effectively echoes Todorov's prescription.²²

Throughout the novel, the work is being written mysteriously in the pile of papers which are being typewritten whenever the narrator leaves the room. At one point the narrator almost glimpses the novel being born: 'He bajado los ojos, y en el espacio que separa sus botas negras y deslucidas de los dedos que asoman por mis sandalias, me parece ver alzarse un castillo de paredes de papel, mejor dicho de papeles pegados unos a otros, a modo de ladrillos, y plagados de palabras y tachaduras de mi puño y letra, crece, sube, se va a desmoronar con el menor crujido, y

²⁰ Todorov defines the fantastic as 'that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event'; *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, translated from the French by Richard Howard (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973), p. 25. This definition aptly epitomises the reaction of the protagonist of *El cuarto de atrás* when faced with the stranger dressed in black. Of interest also is the fact that the example Todorov adduces to illustrate his theory of the fantastic, Jan Potocki's *Saragossa Manuscript*, deals, like Martín Gaité's novel, with uncanny events taking place during the night yet leaving a trace of their 'reality' the next morning; see Todorov, pp. 27-31.

²¹ The man in black has been identified, as Debra A. Castillo points out, 'as a Todorovian theorist, the ideal interlocutor, the hero of a *novela rosa*, a character from the imaginary isle of Bergai, a detective, the correspondent of the author's sewing-basket love letter, a (hermeneutic) literary critic, the reader's ideal textual representation, a Jungian alter ego, a Lacanian Other, a figure from the engraver Luther's *Discussion with the Devil* brought to life, a Kafkaesque creature, the narrator's muse, her guide into the underworld (a modern role-reversal Beatrice to the narrator's Dante), a psychopomp, the devil, or simply the interviewer he announces himself to be'; 'Never-ending story: Carmen Martín Gaité's *The Back Room*', *PMLA*, 102:5 (1987), 814-28 (p. 819).

²² For further discussion of the Todorov connection, see Aleida Anselma Rodríguez, 'Todorov en *El cuarto de atrás*', *Prisma/Cabral*, 11 (1983), 76-90.

yo me guarezco en el interior, con la cabeza escondida entre los brazos, no me atrevo a asomar' (p. 57). Their growth is a mystery: 'Pero, bueno, estos setenta y nueve folios, ¿de dónde salen?, ¿a qué se refieren? El montón de los que quedaron debajo del sombrero también parece haber engrosado, aunque no me atrevo a comprobarlo' (p. 101).

Populist fiction and the fairy-tale happy-ending of a romantic liaison are, as we have seen, actively brought to the surface of the text in *El cuarto de atrás*. Both are used as hermeneutic devices to understand and structure feminine experience. However, as the novel makes clear, there is a type of fairy-tale discourse which is actively rejected, and this concerns the discourse of Francoism. At one stage in the novel, the narrator says that she believes in fairy tales but not in Isabel la Católica: 'Que sí creo en el diablo y en San Cristóbal gigante y en Santa Bárbara bendita, en todos los seres misteriosos, vamos. En Isabel la Católica, no' (p. 105). Isabel I was the model which Francoism promoted as the feminine ideal, as the narrator points out: 'Se nos ponía bajo su advocación, se nos hablaba de su voluntad férrea y de su espíritu de sacrificio, había reprimido la ambición y el despotismo de los nobles, había creado la Santa Hermandad, expulsando a los judíos traicioneros, se había desprendido de sus joyas para financiar la empresa más gloriosa de nuestra historia, y aún había quien la difamara por la fidelidad de sus ideales, quien llamara crueldad a su abnegación' (p. 95). Based on Isabel la Católica, the two virtues which were promoted for women were hard work and happiness (p. 94). But the narrator is unconvinced; her rejection of Isabel I is in effect to offer a 'resisting reading' of her (and indeed, Spain's) past, a new feminist version of past events. Instead the narrator turns to traditional fairy-tale figures, such as Tom Thumb and Hansel and Gretel. The latter story, unlike the myth of Isabel I, is recuperated in *El cuarto de atrás*: the trail of breadcrumbs Hansel and Gretel left in the forest becomes a metaphor of white written memories we leave behind in our lives, and which are reconstructed in the novelistic process: 'Cuando dejó un reguero de migas de pan para hallar el camino de vuelta, se las comieron los pájaros. A la vez siguiente, ya resabiado, dejó piedrecitas blancas, y así no se extravió, vamos, es lo que creyó Perrault, que no se extraviaba, pero yo no estoy seguro, ¿me comprende?' (p. 105). Authentic, rather than man-imposed, fairy tales are allowed to function in the text as recuperative devices: the narrator is happy to record without comment the idea suggested to her by the woman who telephones her that the man in black is really Blue Beard (p. 157).

The rationale behind the narrator's rejection of man-made fairy tales becomes clear in her references to Franco's daughter who, by chance, has the same name as the narrator (Carmen): 'pensaba en la niña de

Franco como en un ser prisionero y sujeto a maleficio, y me inspiraba tanta compasión que hasta hubiera querido conocerla para poderla consolar, se me venían a la mente los versos de Rubén Darío que aprendí de memoria: "La princesa está triste, / ¿qué tendrá la princesa?"' (p. 64). The narrator's allusion to Darío's poem 'Sonatina', *Prosas profanas* (1896), is apposite. Though she lives in a world of romantic, exotic dreams the princess of Darío's poem is caged in luxury ('Está presa en sus oros, está presa en sus tules, / en la jaula de mármol del palacio real'), which establishes a telling parallel with the *trappings* of Francoism.²³ Carmencita is thus an emblem of femininity trapped within the paternalist cage of Franco's regime and, by extension, a concrete emblem of the disempowerment of women when they are subsumed within the narrative of the patriarchal fairy tale. Given Franco's ruling of Spain virtually as a monarch for 35 years, his daughter becomes a proverbial princess, but she is no more than a male-created princess: 'allí sola, sin hermanos, entre los tapices de su jaula de oro' (p. 65).

A distinction is thus clearly made in the novel between the femiocentric fairy tale and its populist adult version, the 'novela rosa', and the patrocetric discourse focussing on figures such as the chaste, industrious Isabel I or the obedient princess. The metafictional element in the novel tends to draw attention not only to the fictionality of the fiction, but also that of patrocetric fairy tales. Feminism also operates within *El cuarto de atrás* as a site of knowledge from which patriarchal narratives are criticised. Halfway through the novel, for example, we find a discussion of feminism, and, in particular, how Franco turned the clock back on the changes brought about by the Second Republic (1931-1936): 'La retórica de la postguerra se aplicaba a desprestigiar los conatos de feminismo que tomaron auge en los años de la República y volvía a poner el acento en el heroísmo abnegado de madres y esposas, en la importancia de su silenciosa y oscura labor como pilares del hogar cristiano' (p. 93). Franco's rhetoric was geared towards the domestication of women: 'a que aceptásemos con alegría y orgullo, con una constancia a prueba de desalientos, mediante una conducta sobria que ni la más mínima sombra de maldicencia fuera capaz de enturbiar, nuestra condición de mujeres fuertes, complemento y espejo del varón' (p. 94). The mirror metaphor the narrator employs here is crucial: according to the discourse of Francoism, women become the mirror which complements the identity of men; mirrors on their own have no identity, and simply reflect the identity of others (like women, according to

²³ Rubén Darío, *Poesías completas*, ed. Alfonso Méndez Plancarte (Madrid: Aguilar, 1968), p. 557.

patriarchy). But at the same time, men need women in order to constitute their identity, by projecting a reflection of their identity in the Other.

El cuarto de atrás sets out to cloud over that mirror and send back a *distorted* image to mankind, thereby initiating a two-way channelling of images which disrupts the transmitter-receiver situation. Martín Gaité's use of motifs derived from the 'novela rosa', therefore, has the specific purpose of overturning the patrocetric fallacy. *El cuarto de atrás*, like the discourse of feminism, refuses simply to reflect passively the patriarchal myth and thereby produces a text which is at once metafictional and feminist. *El cuarto de atrás*, thus, narrates the history of a 'psychic growth' characteristic of the first type of fairy tales as identified by Sara Gilead (see above). When the novel concludes, as Ruth El Saffar notes, the reader is reassured that the association between dreaming and 'madness and danger' has been dispelled; the narrator 'has transformed her tossing and turning, through the recording of a mysterious dialogue born out of insomnia, into a virtue'.²⁴ Metatextuality, the 'novela rosa' and the fairy tale have, thus, been triumphantly woven into a new syntax designed to liberate womanhood from the law of the patriarchal *master* text and produce a new *mater* text.

ESTHER TUSQUETS: *EL MISMO MAR DE TODOS LOS VERANOS*

El mismo mar de todos los veranos (1978), the first novel of Esther Tusquets (1936: Spain) is, as Mirella d'Ambrosio Servodidio has suggested, 'the progenitor of all her works to come', since her subsequent novels proved to be 'no more than the diverse intonations of an artistic universe that is already developed and in place'.²⁵ Tusquets's first novel has a narrative which is, indeed, echoed by her later novels, *El amor es un juego solitario* (1979) and *Varada tras el último naufragio* (1980); it traces the life experience of a middle-aged female university professor called E., beginning with her lonely childhood, the suicide of her lover, her meaningless marriage and inability to find emotional fulfilment through children, followed by her intense, but short-lived, lesbian relationship with a student, Clara. In the following discussion, I shall be concentrating on the role played by fairy tales in *El mismo mar de todos los veranos*, and the ways in which they are used by the female characters to shun and/or subvert the laws of patriarchy. But, before

²⁴ 'Redeeming Loss: Reflections on Carmen Martín Gaité's *The Back Room*', *REH*, 20 (1986), 1-14 (p. 11).

²⁵ 'Esther Tusquets's Fiction: The Spinning of a Narrative Web', in *Women Writers of Contemporary Spain*, pp. 159-78 (p. 161).