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# El Cuarto de Atrás : The Challenge of the Autobiographical Text

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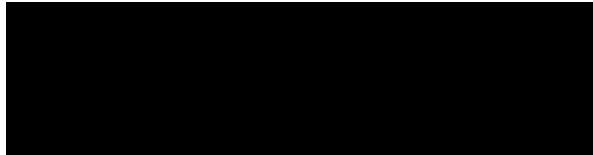
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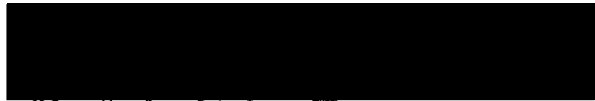
## THESIS APPROVAL

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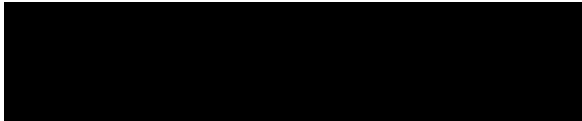
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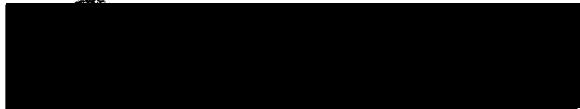


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## ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Linda Kathleen Helton for the Master of Arts in Spanish presented May 3, 2000.

Title: El cuarto de atrás: The Challenge of the Autobiographical Text

This thesis examines the notion of autobiography as presented in Carmen Martín Gaité's novel El cuarto de atrás. I propose that the novel is intended not to be read as a straightforward autobiography, rather, the reader is invited to consider the autobiographical elements that function on various levels within a fictional mode. Although events from the author's childhood and adolescence are included in the novel, they are recounted through the use of a fictional protagonist.

By analyzing the narratological fabric that comprises the text, I show how the framework of the fictional mode provides a background for the various autobiographical themes that are addressed over the course of the novel. Among these themes are reflections on the horrors and of the Spanish Civil War, the implications of the subsequent Franco regime, and society's treatment of women during that era. I also show how the fictional mode also allows the author to address the significance of the human imagination as a vital component of the self, as she uses the imagination as a coping mechanism against the harsh realities she was forced to deal with during her childhood.

In my analysis of this text I will also demonstrate that by incorporating factual events in a fictional mode, the author creates an inherently complex narrative that relies heavily on the dialogue between the narrator and her interlocutors. This dialogue plays a vital role in the development of an internal monologue, as the narrator struggles to order her thoughts and articulate her memories. The narrator's internal development is thus brought to the foreground and is juxtaposed with the external events of Spanish society. Throughout this thesis, it will become apparent that the notion of autobiography helps to bring significance to the text in that it not only serves as the key underpinning of the text, but brings clarity to the ambiguities of the fictional mode as well.

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## **Introduction: Toward a Notion of Autobiography**

With the onslaught of autobiographical works, particularly in the last half of the twentieth century, critics have sought to re-define and even re-categorize the autobiography. As a result of these attempts, it has been determined that autobiography as a genre is an inherently “complex and unstable category” (Lejeune viii) that does not lend itself easily to definition and categorization. In terms of literature, the source A Handbook to Literature identifies the purpose of a “genre” as being “used to designate the types or categories into which literary works are grouped into form, technique, or sometimes, subject matter” (212). A Glossary of Literary Terms elaborates further: “The genres into which works of literature have been classified at different times are very numerous, and the criteria on which the classifications have been based are highly variable” (75-76). This concept appears to be especially true of autobiography when considered as a literary form.

To complicate matters further, the subsequent critical interest in the idea of autobiography as a genre coupled with the emerging popularity of autobiography has been brought about by the emergence of a wide variety of autobiographical styles. The main challenge that critics thus face in terms of autobiography as a genre appears to be, as James Olney observes, that:

literary historians and theorists have come to see

autobiography as a distinct and distinguishable mode of literature with all sorts of complex ties to other, more traditional literary genres with much to teach theorists concerned with both literary genres and literary history (Studies xiv).

Thus Olney views the notion of autobiography as a mode of literature that can be adapted to various literary genres, rather than being a genre independent of others.

In her book Autobiographical Tightropes, Leah Hewitt observes that “modern autobiographers ... have delighted in challenging the structures of fixed generic characterizations” (2). Many critics have therefore resolved to consider the autobiography as more a form of interpretation than a genre. As Jean Starobinski points out, “it is essential to avoid speaking of an autobiographical ‘style’ or even autobiographical ‘form’, because there is not such generic style or form” (73). Liz Stanley echoes both Olney’s and Hewitt’s positions, stating that, “[t]his is not to deny that there are differences between different forms of life writing, but it is to argue that these differences are not *generic*” (3). Critics have therefore concluded that the autobiography should be considered more like a hybrid of many genres, and as a result it often comprises several discourses at once.

In addition to the problems of classification, there is also a recurring dilemma that, for various reasons, autobiography is not taken as seriously as other literary genres. This problem is even more acute when it concerns the

recent variations in autobiographical styling that have been brought about by marginalized groups, particularly women. These female-authored autobiographies have not gained the respect they deserve in the literary field. In the "Foreword" of the book Redefining Autobiography in Twentieth Century Women's Fiction, Molly Hite points out that a narrative written by a female in the first person is somehow automatically considered by the reader to be self-referential, regardless of the intentions of the author. Moreover, because an author is writing herself, the work is somehow considered to be of lesser quality and therefore secondary literature. As an example, she relates an anecdote in which a female author presented a series of readings of one of her works. Her audience's subsequent line of questioning implied the assumption that because the work was written in the first person, it was automatically autobiographical. Hite concludes: "this seems to me to be a story not only about how readers are prone to conflate the narratorial with the authorial "I", but about how readings that identify protagonist with author are nearly inevitable when the reader is a woman" (xiii). It is, therefore, a common assumption that the female author is automatically "writing herself," that she is the subject of a text written in the first person. One can thus conclude that there is certainly no one way to go about self-writing, and that the literary platform upon which autobiography sits is unstable and vague at best.

In this thesis, I address the significance of the autobiographical



discourses that function within the text of Carmen Martín Gaité's novel El cuarto de atrás (1978). Since the publication of this novel, literary critics have focused on the inherent complexity of the text, which is comprised of various threads that in turn are used by the author to create a unique fabric. This thesis examines the interconnectedness of these narratological threads. Given the scope and variability of the notion of autobiography, in this thesis I focus exclusively on the traits that are exemplified in El cuarto de atrás. The autobiographical elements presented in the work can only be approached and identified by removing the formal constraints that mark the limits of the literary product. The novel exists on many levels; it is considered by critics to be a historical narrative, a fantastic story, and an onerous retrospective. The novel not only consists of the story itself, but the story also ultimately becomes the subject of the text as well.

Although it must be noted that the notion of autobiography comprises merely one aspect of the text as a whole, I propose that in terms of both content and form it constitutes a key underpinning of Martín Gaité's work, and is in fact the thread that holds the text together. By doing so, I show how Martín Gaité responds to the challenges of the notions of autobiography that I have mentioned. It is important to recognize that I do not propose that El cuarto de atrás is in and of itself an autobiographical text. As Debra Castillo argues, "[El cuarto de atrás] is a book on memory but definitely not a memoir, a work absolutely faithful to the details of the author's life but not an

autobiography, a recuperation of a lost historical past but not a history or a straightforward historical fiction” (814). Rather, the novel takes into consideration, among other aspects, certain autobiographical elements. As Agustín Boyer points out, Carmen Martín Gaité employs “un discurso de material vivencial autobiográfico, buceando en la memoria y utilizando su pasado e incluso su producción literaria anterior como intertexto referencial” (92). Although critics have debated the significance of the notion of autobiography within El cuarto de atrás, Martín Gaité herself has eluded to its function within the text, saying that: “[t]odo lo que pasa ahí, quitando que el hombre de negro no vino, que a lo mejor vino, es absolutamente autobiográfico” (Fernández 170). The author is thus reiterating that the past events described in the novel are indeed taken from her personal history.

Like many writers of the postwar era, Martín Gaité felt compelled to capture the experiences of her childhood and early adulthood. However, for her, to capture these experiences involved more than just simple facts and dates. As Joan Brown observes, “a new, quintessentially Spanish genre came into being: the uncensored retrospective novel of life in Franco’s Spain. Everyone, it seemed, was rushing to publish his unexpurgated account of the postwar years” (149). To elaborate on the function of autobiography within El cuarto de atrás, one must consider not only its nature, but also its place in literature in light of the recent changes and variations that the autobiography has experienced in the last half of the twentieth century. Martín Gaité’s novel

proves a fine example of the possibilities of variation of a particular literary model. The “traditional” autobiographical model, established prior to the mid-twentieth century, is now challenged by the stylistic changes in literature, which have been emerging since the mid-1950’s. This has forced present-day critics to rethink and even reconsider any possibility of a definitive classification of autobiography.

To gain a further understanding of the autobiographical aspects of the text, it is first necessary to elaborate on the relationship between the author and her narrator. On a surface level, the reader is invited to consider the author and narrator as one in the same. The similarities are noted early on as the narrator establishes that her name begins with the same letter as the author: “Con la C. de mi nombre, [pinto] tres cosas con la C., primero una casa, luego un cuarto y luego una cama” (11). The reader also notes that the author has included her own memories and experiences during the war and the years of Franco’s reign.

However, as these memories and experiences are placed in a fictional present with a fictional protagonist, Martín Gaité blurs the boundaries between the identities of the author and her narrator. As a result, she also appears to show a desire to create a certain distance from herself and her work. Joan Brown speculates that her possible motivation for creating this distance would be that “[t]he writer is not constrained by the act of having written an explicit and by inference definitive autobiography ... (38). By

relinquishing these constraints, Martín Gaité is able to create a certain separation of “true” author (Martín Gaité) from “implied author” (the narrator). As Kathleen Glenn observes, “... writing a self-referential work represents a re-creation of the author in a process of self discovery and self invention” (25). Thus the result of the “true” author relinquishing authority to a fictional narrator enhances the process of articulation of the self. The relationship between the author and the narrator will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

On the surface, the plot of the novel is very straightforward. The story takes place over the course of a stormy evening in which the protagonist—who the author identifies only as C., and also serves as the narrator—is visited in the middle of the night by a mysterious gentleman, whose name the reader never learns. He is simply referred to as the “man in black”, as he is initially described by his attire: “un hombre vestido de negro sale y se queda mirándome de frente. Es alto y trae la cabeza cubierta con un sombrero de grandes alas, negro también” (29). Over the course of the novel C. and her mysterious visitor embark on a discussion of many topics, from life during the Spanish Civil War and the postwar years of Franco’s reign to the literature and pop culture of that era. Another secondary character introduced in this work is Carola, whose identity is only known to the reader as the girlfriend of the man in black. Her appearance is brief in that she calls for the man in black and ends up speaking to C. instead in the fifth chapter. Her function

proves to be significant in that through her the reader better understands the relationship between C. and the man in black.

Beneath the basic plot of the novel, Martín Gaité has created a more complex structure in which she blends the dialogue with the man in black with the inner dialogue of the narrator. The inner dialogue is “evoked by something seen or mentioned in the present” (Chittenden 78), and is often takes the form of a series of flashbacks that occur in non-linear (or non-chronological) order. Through the process of discourse with the man in black, C. continually struggles with her thought process as she attempts to order and articulate the memories of her childhood and adolescence.

For the purpose of this thesis, the autobiographical discourses in the novel that I will discuss will be identified as follows. In Chapter One, I address the influence and function of factual events within El cuarto de atrás. By doing so, I examine the historical context that suggests the novel to be read as autobiography. I show how the relationship of the protagonist to the historical events of the author’s childhood is the main theme within the text. In light of the realm of the Franco regime, her response toward the propaganda and the version of history created by the dictator is particularly disdainful for her.

In Chapter Two, I discuss how the fictional aspects of the work are woven together with the autobiographical aspects. In doing so, I address the fine line that often exists between autobiography and fiction, and I illustrate

how this fine line in the novel serves to enhance the elements intended to be autobiographical. One of these elements is the author's use of a fictional protagonist as a vital element to the fictional mode. Therefore, a certain ambiguity is established in the relationship between the author and her protagonist. To highlight the fictional mode, I show how the author employs the use of literary models such as Todorov's work, Introduction to Fantastic Literature and elements of the *novela rosa*. These literary models in turn are used to support the narrator's discussions of the fictional locations she created while growing up.

The focus of Chapter Three is on how the author uses autobiography as a model of self-expression and self-exploration. By doing so, I examine the parallels between the author and C. in terms of authority/subjectivity. I also show how Martín Gaité brings the concept of writing the self to the forefront, as she adheres to new theories of autobiography in which "the author creates not only a fictive world, but a fictive self" (Chittenden 83). I am interested in analyzing the unique form of self-figuration that Martín Gaité produces so as to educe the textual strategies, generic attributions, and perceptions of self that inform this text. These strategies are subsequently used to exemplify the significance of imagination, which serve to enhance the narrator's internal exploration of the self.

Finally, Chapter Four focuses on the impact of the notion of autobiography on the narrative by examining the various narrative techniques

employed in the novel. As such, I identify the various discourses that comprise the text, and examine the narrator's relationship to the secondary characters, the man in black and Carola. I show how Martín Gaité has an obvious penchant for dialogue and makes it the central focus of her narration. I also examine the function of language and how it plays a vital role in the narrative.

In summary, the notion of autobiography, although complex, has gained much critical attention in recent years. Upon the death of Franco, autobiography has taken on a greater significance as many Spaniards rushed to publish memoirs of their experiences during the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent years of Franco's reign. Through El cuarto de atrás, Martín Gaité is responding to this call by incorporating certain events of her childhood and adolescence into a fictional text. These events serve as the foundation upon which the novel is written, and become the most significant thread with which the author has woven a unique narrative fabric.

## Chapter One: Historical Background

In order to establish the function of autobiography within El cuarto de atrás, it is first necessary to examine the historical events recounted in the novel and their impact on the narrative. In this chapter, I focus on Carmen Martín Gaité's desire to create a memoir of her childhood and her response to the historical events that are referenced in the text.

The most evident discourse in the novel is that which Martín Gaité recalls the years of her childhood and adolescence. For her, this period is seen as a time in which Franco's reign was absolute, and as a result was seen as a period in which for her time was frozen. As she explains: "no soy capaz de discernir el paso del tiempo a lo largo de ese período, ni diferenciar la guerra de la postguerra, pensé que Franco había paralizado el tiempo" (133). She then speculates that upon Franco's death, time "unfroze": "Se acabó, nunca más, el tiempo se desbloqueaba, había desaparecido el encargado de atarlo y presidirlo" (137). The grip Franco had on Spain during these years was finally released, and she was now at liberty to convey her perspective on her formative years.

However, as I have stated, Martín Gaité sees a challenge in bringing her past experiences to literary form as she has a profound desire to recount more than simple dates and facts. An example of this desire is seen through



the narrator's conversation with the man in black. She explains that: "al principio me pasé varios meses yendo a la hemeroteca a consultar periódicos, luego comprendí que no era eso, que lo que quería rescatar era algo más inaprensible" (138). When the man in black asks her what ultimately became of her plans to write a memoir, she responds:

Se me enfrió, me lo enfriaron las memorias ajenas. Desde la muerte de Franco habrá notado cómo proliferan los libros de memorias, ya es una peste, en el fondo, eso es lo que me ha venido demasiado, pensar que, si a mí me aburren las memorias de los demás, por qué no les van a aburrir a los demás las mías.  
(128)

C. expresses the desire not only to convey these experiences, but also to create a work that is unique from other memoirs of the Franco era. By doing so, Martín Gaité explores her need to come to terms with her past and to examine her connection to the historical events mentioned in the text. She not only includes personal details of her life during that period, but more importantly how certain historical events affected those experiences.

To illustrate the influence of the Franco regime, Martín Gaité offers various examples of the political realm. It is implied in the text that Martín Gaité and her family were not supporters of the Franco regime. As Herzberger observes, "[c]ausal arguments in [this novel] imply a past necessarily divergent from the one trumpeted by the historiography of the state" (36). She states

early on in the novel that: “en mi casa, además, no eran franquistas” (68).

Throughout the text narrator also makes references to an uncle named Joaquín, a Socialist who was assassinated during the Spanish Civil War: “era alto, guapo, y un poco insolente. Lo fusilaron por socialista. Siempre que venía nos traía regalos. Pero eso fue antes” (116). He is thus remembered as a symbol of her family’s political beliefs.

Later, after having mentioned the subject of politics with the man in black, she immediately regrets it, saying that: “Le veo echarse mano al bosillo y suspiro, arrepentida de haber hecho esa alusión política; seguramente va a sacar bloc y bolígrafo para tomar notas sobre la ideología que presidió mi formación” (68). She is, however, relieved that her interviewer has decided not to pursue the topic of politics. As she explains,

[p]odría decirle que la felicidad en los años de guerra y postguerra era inconcebible, que vivíamos rodeados de ignorancia y represión, hablarle de aquellos deficientes libros de texto que bloquearon nuestra enseñanza, de los amigos de mis padres que morían fusilados o se exiliaban, de Unamuno, de la censura militar, superponer la amargura de mis opiniones actuales a las otras sensaciones que esta noche estoy recuperando, como un olor inesperado que irrumpiera en oleadas. Casi nunca las apreso así, desligadas, en su puro y libre surgir, más bien las fuerzo a desviarse para que queden

enfocadas bajo la luz de una interpretación posterior, que enmascara el recuerdo. Y nada más fácil de acudir a este recurso de manipulación, tan habitual se ha vuelto en ese tipo de coloquios. Pero este hombre no se merece respuestas tópicas. (69-70)

The reader senses that she wishes to choose events from her past very carefully, as she prefers not to focus on the negative feelings she harbors for the Franco regime. She later expresses how she instead prefers to recall the more positive aspects of her upbringing: “La verdad es que yo mi infancia y mi adolescencia las recuerdo, a pesar de todo, como una época muy feliz” (70).

The narrator further expresses that she finds the political aspect of her upbringing difficult to address, as she explains how the notion of history itself has been altered as a result of these experiences. An example of this altered perspective is made apparent as she discusses her impressions of the history that was altered by the Franco regime:

pero yo entonces aborrecía la historia y además no me la creía, nada de lo que venía en los libros de la historia ni en los periódicos me lo creía, la culpa la tenían los que se lo creían, estaba harta de oír la palabra fusilado, la palabra víctima, la palabra tirano, la palabra militares, la palabra patria, la palabra historia. (54)

Her difficulty to believe in the notion of history eventually becomes a recurring

theme of disbelief. The narrator also shows her disdain for politics as she recalls the time she heard the news of an attempt on Hitler's life. Her reaction to this news is also met with disbelief and a sense of unreality:

Hitler acababa de ser víctima de un atentado del que había salido milagrosamente ileso, a los militares organizadores del complot los habían fusilado a todos; me quedé un rato allí sin abrir la boca ni que me volvieran a hacer caso, leyendo aquella noticia tan lejana e irreal que todos ... comentaban con aplomo, como si la considerasen indiscutible. (54)

The manner in which this event was casually mentioned further exemplifies not only her apathy toward the events that were shaping the course of history, but for those around her as well. C. also makes mention later of other political figures and also considers them with a sense of unreality. :

Lo que quería decir es que yo, antes de la guerra, cuando oía hablar de Azaña, de Gil Robles, de Lerroux o del Rey Alfonso XIII, que estaba en el exilio, cuando los veía retratados en los periódicos, me parecían tan fantásticos como Wilfredo el Velloso o la sota de bastos, personajes de una baraja con la que se podían hacer libremente toda clase de combinaciones, no me creía que existieran de verdad ni mandarían en nadie, y mucho menos consideraba que pudieran tener que ver conmigo o me pudieran prohibir algo. (132)

Although these are political figures from before the war, the undue influence of the Franco regime cause these figures to appear as unreal to her as the figures of Franco or Hitler.

Martín Gaité also includes ruminations on the society and the propaganda perpetuated by the Franco regime. As David Herzberger points out, “[h]istoriography during the first two decades of the Franco Era was largely intended to affirm the regime’s morally correct role within Spanish history” (35). In her text, Martín Gaité examines this idea as it applies to the role of women in Spanish postwar society. As C. presents her point of view on the images of women portrayed in this era, she recounts how she did not conform to the ideals promoted by the Franco regime. The first ideal that she rebukes is the image of the ‘strong woman’ (*mujer fuerte*). The definition of a *mujer fuerte* was one who, as the narrator describes as a “complemento y espejo del varón ... sus heroínas eran activas y prácticas, se sorbían las lágrimas, afrontaban cualquier calamidad sin una queja” (94). The idea of acceptance of their role in society was intended to ultimately bring happiness to women: “La alegría era un premio al deber cumplido y se oponía, fundamentalmente, a la duda” (96). By attaining happiness in the role of wife and mother, a woman would then discount any of the feminist stirrings from the era of the Republic, before the Civil War.

The image of Queen Isabel is specifically identified in the text as having been used by the Franco regime to represent the ideal woman. Through the

image of the Queen, the ideal woman of this era was strongly encouraged to be a dutiful wife and mother with an inherent spirit of sacrifice who places her family first:

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, expulsado a los judíos traicioneros, se había desprendido de sus joyas para financiar la impresa más gloriosa de nuestra historia, y aún había quien difamara por la fidelidad a sus ideales, quien llamara crueldad a su abnegación. Yo miraba aquel rostro severo, aprisionado por el casquete, que venía en los libros de texto, y lo que no entendía era lo de la alegría, tal vez es que hubiera salido mal en aquel retrato, pero, desde luego, no daban muchas ganas de monitoras que nos instaban a imitarla también tenían aquel rictus seco en la boca y aquella luz fría en los ojos. (95)

For her, the image of the queen has been distorted by the Franco regime and is relegated to mere propaganda. Although the image of Queen Isabel served as a symbol of patriotism during this era, as a symbol of the Francoist woman this symbol appears rather ironic considering her duties consisted of ruling a country over being a wife and mother. She is, in fact, considered by many to be more than the reflection of her husband, Fernando. Rather, she drew her

strength more from her position of authority, and can be seen as a strong, independent figure in her own right.

As she later answers a question the man in black poses regarding her beliefs, she states: “¿Sabe lo que le digo? Que sí creo en el diablo y en San Cristobal gigante y en Santa Bárbara bendita, en todos los seres misteriosos, vamos. En Isabel la Católica, no” (105). To her, the images of fantastic or fictional figures seem more are perceived to be more real to her than an actual historical figure.

Martín Gaité takes this notion one step further in the novel by demonstrating how in postwar Spanish society women were often repressed and expected to behave a certain way. The author’s upbringing, however, was unique in that she was raised to question and challenge the norms of society. Her mother in particular is also recognized as a strong role model and a symbol of admiration to her. Although her mother’s own life exemplified the ideal postwar era housewife, she always encouraged her daughter to follow a different path and supported her inclination to prepare for a career outside of the home: “[l]e encantaba, desde pequeña, leer y jugar a juegos de chicos, y hubiera querido estudiar una carrera, como sus dos hermanos varones, pero entonces no era de costumbre, ni siquiera se le pasó por la cabeza pedirlo” (92). She explains further: “Mi madre no era casamentera, ni me enseñó tampoco nunca a coser ni a guisar ... en cambio siempre me alentó en mis estudios ... ” (93). Martín Gaité shows throughout the text how this was quite

contrary to the common attitude of society: “[l]a 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 ... ” (93). The idea that a woman would discount her role as wife and mother and instead prepare for a career was thus looked down upon during the Franco era. Martín Gaité relates an incident in which a lady once remarked, upon seeing her study: “[m]ujer que sabe latín no puede tener buen fin” (93). Her mother came to her defense, replying: “Hasta a coser un botón aprende mejor una persona lista que una tonta” (93). The idea of the *buen fin* described here signified a certain lack of decency and integrity, which was constantly in question during Franco’s reign.

Not only does Martín Gaité use the text as a vehicle through which she responds to historical events, she also responds in the text to the influences of various notable figures, literature and popular culture during the Franco era. In exploring parallels to certain notable figures, C. cites Franco’s daughter, Carmencita. She expresses a certain connection to her primarily because she is her namesake and they are also roughly the same age. On one particular occasion, when she sees her in person, she describes her reaction to the young girl:

Carmencita Franco miraba alrededor con unos ojos  
absolutamente tediosos y tristes, se cruzaron nuestras miradas,  
llevaba unos calcetines de perlé calados y unos zapatos de



charcolcon tabilla, pensé que a que jugaría y con quién, se me quedó grabada su imagen para siempre, era más o menos de mi edad, decían que se parecía algo a mí. (63)

She continues to mention that she goes so far as to feel pity for her, as she is “como un ser prisionero y sujeto a maleficio” (64), seemingly trapped in her role as the daughter of the dictator of Spain.

The narrator also traces the author’s literary development throughout the text by making reference to several of her prior works, such as her first work titled El balneario and Usos amorosos de la postguerra. She also expresses fond recollections of popular culture figures such as Deana Durbin, Claudette Colbert, Gary Cooper, among others, and even includes references to the fashion and art that was popular at the time.

In summary, by addressing the historical elements that comprise the text, Martín Gaité provides a window through which she brings her past experiences to literary form. Her opposition to the Franco regime is apparent, as she is hesitant to openly acknowledge his influence. Her opposition is also evident as she considers certain historical events with a sense of un-reality and fear. The undeniable influence of the Franco regime is also seen as she reflects on the role of women in postwar Spanish society and the subsequent propaganda, which called for women to seek happiness in their duties as wives and mothers rather than outside of the home and outside of their defined roles.

## Chapter Two: Fictional Elements in Autobiography

Critics often debate the generic classification of autobiography as they come to terms with the distinction between autobiography—normally considered non-fiction—and fiction. This debate generally stems from the fine line that exists between these two concepts, as authors tend to blend and overlap these forms to create a certain gray area. In an attempt to make a distinction between autobiography and fiction, Paul de Man echoes many critics, observing that “[a]utobiography seems to depend on actual and potentially verifiable events in a less ambivalent way than fiction does” (920). However, in terms of the novels written post-Civil War Spain, Estrella Cibreiro points out,

La exploración del mundo histórico conduce en la obra a la reevaluación de los mitos políticos de la postguerra, mientras que el empleo de elementos fantásticos desafía el orden tradicional (tanto en la esfera política como literaria) que la autora pretende combatir por medio de su novela. (29)

This chapter examines how El cuarto de atrás functions within this gray area and addresses the impact of autobiography on a novel generally considered by critics to be a work of fiction. Critics often take the position that El cuarto de atrás should be read as a fictional text of the self with autobiographical

elements as opposed to an autobiography with fictional aspects. As Debra Castillo notes, "it is essential to this novel that both history and fiction be revealed as fantasy" (822). In this sense, critics also argue that the fictional mode of El cuarto de atrás carries such significance that the work cannot be considered in and of itself autobiography.

Although many critics argue that El cuarto de atrás is first and foremost a fictional work with strong autobiographical overtones, I maintain that instead there are two parallel structures in the novel, one autobiographical and the other fictional. The topic of this duality is even present within the story itself. For example, the narrator explains this notion while discussing the topic of her next novel with her interlocutor, her next novel being, ironically, the text we are reading. As she develops the idea of bringing her memories of the war and postwar years to paper, she mentions the desire also to create a fantastic text a la Todorov: "[P]ienso que eso mismo le prometí a Todorov en enero. Claro que entonces se trataba de una novela fantástica. Se me acaba de ocurrir una idea. *¿Y si mezclara las dos promesas en una?*" (128, emphasis added). This passage leads the reader to consider the text as a recounting of the author's personal experiences during her childhood and adolescence, which happens to be placed in a fictional setting.

The fictional mode of the novel indeed functions on many levels within the text. I have already mentioned that the model the author employs in her

work is that of placing factual events from the author's past into a fictional, or fantastic, narrative that functions in the present. On a deeper level, Martín Gaité demonstrates the fictional mode by experimenting with different literary styles. The ruminations on literature that are incited by the man in black turn this aspect into one of the main themes of the novel. As Elizabeth Ordóñez observes, "[the novel] draws its inspiration from an experience of texts as much as, or even more than, a life unmediated by literature" ("Reading" 174). Indeed, Martín Gaité demonstrates her fascination with literature by experimenting with various literary styles.

The use of explicit references to the work Introduction to Fantastic Literature by Tzevetan Todorov serves as a primary literary device in the novel. References to this study are made in the first chapter of the novel, as the book catches her attention:

Ahí está el libro que me hizo perder pie; Introducción a la literatura fantástica de Todorov, vaya, a buenas horas, lo estuve buscando antes no sé cuanto rato, habla de los desdoblamientos de personalidad, de la ruptura de límites entre tiempo y espacio, de la ambigüedad y la incertidumbre.  
(19)

Further references to this work are subsequently woven into the rest of the text, providing a vital connection between the autobiographical and fantastical elements of the novel. As Manuel Durán points out, "en su

Introduction a la littérature fantastique Tvetzan Todorov sostiene que el texto fantástico debe obligar al lector a vacilar entre una explicación natural y una explicación sobrenatural de los acontecimientos descritos” (235). Indeed, references to this work serve as a fantastic thread that is woven together with the autobiographical thread to enhance the narratological fabric of the text.

Another example of the use of literary devices is the use of the *novela rosa*. The *novela rosa* is described in the text as being a popular style of novel during the Franco era. The plots of these works were often melodramatic and often included some sort of romance between a man and woman. One of the aspects of this literary style that seems to impress the narrator the most is the use of exotic names for the characters, such as “Esperanza” and “Raimundo”. Over the course of the novel, C. even goes so far as to imagine that she is a character in one of these novels, and the man in black is her male counterpart in the intrigue. In doing so, a dimension is added to the relationship between C. and the man in black. The reader first makes note of this genre during the second chapter as C. notices a storm brewing. The stage is set for a scene from one of these novels, as the man in black helps her light her cigarette:

Delante del sofá hay tabaco en una mesita; cojo un pitillo, los dedos me tiemblan un poco. El brazo del desconocido me alarga fuego en un encendedor antiguo, de esos de mecha amarilla. Sopla la braza, me inclino y nuestras cabezas quedan

cerca ...

—Espere, se va a chamuscar el pelo—dice, apartándome un mechón que se me venía a la cara (36).

This scene foreshadows what happens later in the chapter, as the man in black attempts to comfort to her the storm outside begins to cause her certain anxiety:

Cierro los ojos, invadida por una repentina languidez ...

Sonrí con los ojos cerrados. <<Oh, Raimundo—exclamó Esperanza, mientras brotaban las lágrimas de sus párpados cerrados—, contigo nunca tengo miedo. No te vuelvas a ir nunca>>. (38)

The imaginary characters of Esperanza and Raimundo appear yet again as the concept of the *novela rosa* is then summed up in the fourth chapter:

Hay un silencio demasiado intenso, tal vez mis ojos brillen tanto como los suyos. Mi última pregunta ha quedado resonando en el aire de la habitación, ¿por qué? <<Esperanza y Raimundo se miraban con melancólico asombro.>> ¿Por qué me mira así? En las novelas rosa, cuando se llegaba a una escena de clima parecido a ésta, se podía apostar doble contra sencillo a que el desconocido iba a revelar su identidad. Todas las descripciones anteriores—tormentas, cumbres, playas solitarias—estaban al servicio de realizar el momento clave en

que el hombre y la mujer iban a pasar de ser desconocidos a conocerse o, en otras versiones más emocionante, a reconocerse, aquel momento en que estaba a punto de ser pronunciado el famoso <<¿te acuerdas?>>, eran esquemas invariables, así ocurría también en la primera novela por entregas que escribí con mi amiga del Instituto que no llegamos a terminar. (140-41)

The use of the *novela rosa* thus enhances the man in black's mysterious persona and serves to support the implications of the relationship between him and the narrator, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

The opening of the sixth chapter also exemplifies the author's fascination with literature as C. returns from her conversation with Carola. As the narrator is preparing to enter the room where the man in black is waiting, she begins to feel as if she is an actor in a play:

Me acerco a la puerta, sin hacer ruido, y asomo un poquito la cabeza, amparándome en la cortina, como si observara, entre bastidores, el escenario donde me va a tocar actuar en seguida. Y lo conozco, es el de antes, veo la mesa con el montón de folios debajo del sombrero—evidentemente el tramoyista ha añadido algunos más—y al fondo, a través del hueco del lateral derecha (suponiendo que el patio de butacas

estuviera emplazado en la terraza), vislumbro las baldosas blancas y negras del pasillo que conduce al interior de la casa.  
(175)

Not only does the scene remind her of being in a play, she continues to imagine she is part of a play up until the time she finally makes her entrance. She also imagines that there is a stage hand there ready to prepare her for her entrance: “Por detrás de mí, se acerca con pasos rápidos una chica menuda, vestida de hidalga del siglo xvi. <<¿Pero qué haces?, te estamos buscando, vamos, Agustín ya está en escena>>” (176). Upon her entrance, these images become part of the background as she continues her conversation with the man in black as she had before she left to take the phone call.

Martín Gaité not only avails herself of literary forms such as fantastic stories, the *novela rosa*, and the theatre to highlight the fictional aspect of the novel, she also recognizes the impact her imagination and creativity have on her reality. The focus on imagination and creativity is indeed a main component of the text, as there are various motifs within the text that keep references to the imagination in the forefront of the narrative. As a result, there is a focus on “the author’s [own] consciousness where the experiences and reactions to the past are stored” (Chittenden 81). The primary device Martín Gaité employs is the “back room”, the place for which the novel is named. The back room serves as the original space that allowed the C’s



creativity free reign. As she describes,

[El cuarto de atrás] era muy grande y en él reinaban el desorden y la libertad, se permitía cantar a voz en cuello, cambiar de sitio de muebles, saltar encima de un sofá desvencijado y con los muelles rotos al que llamábamos el pobre sofá, tumbarse en la alfombra, mancharla de tinta, era un reino donde nada estaba prohibido. Hasta la guerra, habíamos estudiado y jugado allí totalmente a nuestras anchas, había holgura de sobra. Pero aquella holgura no nos la había discutido nadie ni estaba sometida a unas leyes determinadas de aprovechamiento: el cuarto era nuestro y se acabó. (187)

The reader thus recognizes this space as one in which C. emphasizes how her imagination and creativity served as an important component of what defined her reality, particularly during her childhood before the war. The references to the back room serve to maintain references to the imagination in the forefront of the narrative. The back room also serves as the foundation for other motifs that support the references to creativity and imagination.

The narrator builds on her imagination that began out of the back room and creates "Bergai", an imaginary island that she and her school friend invented during the war. The name was created by combining her last name with that of her friend, and was invented by them out of the necessity

to escape from the realities of the war:

... habíamos inventado una isla desierta que se llamaba Bergai. En esos diarios hay un plano de la isla y se cuentan las aventuras que nos ocurrieron allí, también debe haber trozos de una novela rosa que fuimos escribiendo entre las dos ... , 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 ... . (58)

C's creation of the island of Bergai is significant in that not only is the ability to create an important part of our reality, for her it has become a necessity to escape from reality. References to the island also support the references to the *novela rosa* in that we see the origins of the character of Esmeralda, one of the names used when references to that literary genre are mentioned.

A third motif used to support references to the fictional mode appears in the third chapter, as C. recalls a fictional location called "Cúnigan":

De Cúnigan, a decir verdad, yo tenía una idea muy imprecisa, los únicos datos sobre aquel lugar, que no llegué a saber nunca siquiera si existía realmente, me los había suministrado una breve canción ... Evidentemente Cúnigan era un lugar mágico y único ... que se pudiera encontrar, con un poco de suerte, entre el laberinto de calles y letreros que componían el mapa de Madrid: a mí no me importaba carecer de pistas

concretas ... (79)

The narrator relates this fictional place to the time when she was young and was not allowed to roam the streets of Madrid by herself. She was therefore left to use her imagination as to what places might exist in the city. She enjoyed the idea of having the freedom of being able to create her own scenario of a magical place in the city and embark on an adventure to locate the place on her own.

Critics have argued that the use of a fictional present on a factual past deems the text itself unreliable. This unreliability is more than simply a result of the fictional mode, it is also intentional and serves to enhance the fictional mode itself. As a result of this unreliability, the reader is thereby shrouded in ambiguity and left guessing whether the events happening in the present are real or simply an extension of the narrator's reverie. As Elide Pittarello points out:

Descartado el canon verídico de un transparente relato del yo, la autora elige un modelo de narración fantástica que vuelve dudosos hasta los hechos más consabidos de su vida. Los trucos, sin embargo, son evidentes. Permanecer en la ambigüedad de la ilusión no sirve para despistar, sino para desengañar. (103)

Pittarello is thus arguing that in spite of confusing the reader, the fantastic elements incorporated in the novel are nevertheless obvious to her. The first

clue of an unreliable narrative comes in the first chapter, when the narrator notices a dresser across the room:

hace mucho que lo tengo frente a mi cama, y a lo largo de alguna noche en vela, *cuando lo real y lo ficticio se confunden*, he creído que era un espejito donde se reflejaba, sufriendo una leve transformación, la situación misma que me llevaba a posar sobre él los ojos. (17, emphasis added)

This passage emphasizes the confusion on the part of the narrator that continues to the beginning of the second chapter when the man in black arrives. After a while, the course of the conversation eventually turns to the topic of literature. This discussion also offers a clue to the ambiguity of the text. As the man in black says, "La ambigüedad es la clave de la literatura de misterio ... no saber si aquello que se ha visto es verdad o mentira, no saberlo nunca. Por esa cuerda floja tendría haberse atrevido a avanzar hasta el final del relato" (53). He is thus affirming his own ambiguity and thereby compounding the narrator's confusion.

Another manifestation of the unreliability of the present events in the text is the reference to a print entitled *el mundo al revés*:

... consta de cuarenta y ocho rectángulos grabados en negro sobre amarillo, donde se representan escenas absurdas, como por ejemplo un hombre con guadaña en la mano amenazando a la muerte que huye asustada, peces por el aire sobre un mar

donde nadan caballos y leones, una oveja con sombrero y cayado pastoreando a dos granasen, un niño a cuatro patas con una silla encima y el sol y la luna encrustados en la tierra bajo un cielo plagado de edificios. (30)

This print reflects the ambiguity of the fictional present in that it serves to enhance the implication that the visit from the man in black could possibly be part of the narrator's dream.

As the interview with the man in black progresses, the conversation turns to the topic of dreams. C. mentions that she often has strange dreams, to which the man inquires:

¿Y le pide explicación lógica a las cosas que ve en sueños?  
 ¿Por ejemplo, a que un lugar se convierta en otro, o una persona en otra? ... Le vale todo lo que ha visto, ¿no?, lo admite con la misma certeza que la visión de este vaso. (103)

C. responds to him, stating that:

—Con la misma certeza, sí, o mayor todavía. Y es una sensación que me dura bastante rato; precisamente lo que me resulta sospechoso es lo que veo tan claro cuando abro los ojos. Echo de menos los bultos de sombra que se han ido.  
 (103)

The man in black appears to challenge and provoke the narrator to determine whether or not he himself is real or simply a manifestation of her

imagination. Her response further exemplifies her inability to distinguish between the things she dreams as opposed to what occurs on a conscious level.

The final manifestation of the ambiguity of the text that results from the fictional mode appears at the end of the novel, when C. comes across a copy of The Thin Man by Dashiell Hammett. She notices on the back cover of the book, " ... indicios contradictorios, pistas falsas, sorpresa final ... " (210). The ambiguity of the novel continues through the final chapter when C. awakens upon her daughter's return home from a night out. At this point, she is uncertain whether she is waking up from having fallen asleep at the end of the sixth chapter or from her dream, which began in the first chapter. In spite of the fact that the daughter points out the empty glasses in the living room, indicating that the protagonist did indeed have a visitor, the reader is still left questioning even after the last page is read whether the events that occurred in the present of the novel were real or simply an extension of the author's dream that opened the novel.

On yet another level, the fictional element is also made evident within both the internal and external discourse of the text. These discourses which comprise the text are most easily seen and clarified for the reader through the various references to the creation of the text itself. As a result, not only is a fictional mode created, there also exists a *metafictional* mode. In this mode, explicit references are made to the creation of the text. The concept of the

metafictional mode and its relation to the narrative strategies employed in the novel will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four. Robert Spires makes careful observation of the relationship between the fictional and metafictional mode, stating that,

[a]s a result of the almost exclusive focus on how and what to write, the illusion is created that the written work remains an unfulfilled potential, a product yet, or perhaps never, to come into existence. Until it does come into existence, it is as if no fictional mode exists in El cuarto de atrás. In fact, only when the protagonist picks up the manuscript do the three worlds of the fictional mode fall into focus ... The product that up to this point was relegated to an obscure corner now inserts itself into the forefront. And when the protagonist reads the first paragraph of the manuscript and it turns out to be the same as the same as the paragraph with which the novel began, the fictional mode becomes clearly defined. (122)

Spires is thus indicating that the ambiguity of the fictional mode of the novel suddenly becomes clear to the reader as C. picks up the manuscript that has been growing all evening and begins to read what is the first page of the very novel itself.

Through the use of metafiction, Martín Gaité appears to recognize the role of the reader in her novels. Engaging the reader is part of the creative

process and is “vital to the transformation of life experience into language or narrative” (Buck 55). Her goal is not simply to convey past experiences, but also to engage the reader in the process of the creation of these experiences. Because the events of the past are expressed through the vehicle of a fictional present, critics point out that the fictional element complements the autobiographical aspect of the novel and subsequently makes it more entertaining to the reader. As C. herself explains: “Ya, ahí está la cuestión, estoy esperando a ver si se me ocurre una forma divertida de enhebrar los recuerdos” (128). Indeed, the fictional mode of the novel supports the intention of challenging and entertaining the reader. As Joan Brown explains in Secrets From the Back Room, “By approaching the past events of her own life through technique of a fantastic work of literature, Martín Gaité instills an aura of ambiguity which both propitiates her memories and enriches their telling” (163). Indeed, Martín Gaité plays with the reader, keeping the reader guessing in their attempt to separate fiction and history.

In conclusion, the fictional mode of El cuarto de atrás can be seen on many levels. On the surface, Martín Gaité has chosen to place the novel in a fictional present with a fictional protagonist. It is also utilized by the author through her use of various literary references, such as Todorov’s work and the *novela rosa*. She also includes references to fictional places she remembers, such as “Cúnigan” as well as ones she has created, such as “Bergai”, whose origins stem from the back room, from which the novel gets



its title. Finally, Martín Gaité employs various clues that offer a fantastic reading of the novel, thus creating a certain ambiguity as the autobiographical and fictional modes are blended. This ambiguity thus serves to both challenge and entertain the reader.

### **Chapter Three: Autobiography and the Articulation of the Self**

Carmen Martín Gaité's literary style in El cuarto de atrás reflects the recent changes in the theory and practice of autobiography. In doing so, she demonstrates the juxtaposition of various narratological strategies to create a unique construction of the self through autobiography. Through these strategies, it is evident that the author deems the aspect of self-exploration as an important element in autobiography and brings it to the forefront. As Paul Jay notes, Martín Gaité is participating in the "changing ideas about ... the literary subject on the forms of literary self-representation" (Jay 13). The text shows that Martín Gaité is also using autobiographical elements to challenge certain notions of selfhood, thereby by presenting a unique version of the self. She accomplishes this by demonstrating the introspective and retrospective aspect of autobiography that focuses on the narrator's exploration of the self. In this chapter, I establish how the author utilizes the narrative strategies in the novel to establish her self-representation. By doing so, I show how the author uses this model of self-representation for the purpose of self-exploration.

In order to elaborate on the introspective aspect of autobiography as demonstrated in the text, it is first important to establish the version of the self that Martín Gaité has created. Recent critical theories on autobiography

and subject position seek to explore the articulation of the self within a text. Of particular interest is the concept of the “I” and how it manifests itself within a text is of particular interest. The notion of self-writing generally implies that the author herself is posing as protagonist and narrator. Therefore, the “I” essentially “speaks” from the same place.

However, in El cuarto de atrás, Martín Gaité presents a version of the self that is highlighted not only by the distance she has created between herself and her protagonist, but the de-centralization of the subject as well. It has been established that the voice of the author is replaced in the text by a fictional protagonist. Because the protagonist replaces the role of the author, the “I” is speaking from a different place, and her authority is thus de-centralized.

The de-centralization of the subject, or the “I” as seen in the novel exemplifies what critics have referred to as a “crisis of authority.” This crisis is made evident in El cuarto de atrás, as it stems from the concept that “a person is always several people when [she] is writing” (Lejeune xvii). Martín Gaité echoes Lejeune in her novel, stating that “no somos un ser, sino muchos” (167). As the role of the author is diminished and focus is shifted to the text (or to the narrative) itself, the voice of the author now becomes defined in terms of the narrator. In exploring the rationale behind the diminished focus of the author on her own work, Linda E. Chown in her study speculates that

Martín Gaité can make important changes in understanding, literally change moral position with respect to important issues, just as they can transform the standard, dominant transitive understanding of action, dependent on 'us and 'them', subject and object duality, into what is becoming for them a richer, intransitive model in which they as authors are subject and center. (7)

Chown points out in this passage that even though Martín Gaité maintains her authority within her text, she has nevertheless shifted the focus away from her subjectivity. This shift from author to narrator in the text thus allows a greater understanding of the intricate relations between the author and her narrator that have developed in much of the literature of the twentieth century.

The focus on the diminished subject also shows the idea that representation of the self can be achieved on several levels within a text. This representation of the self and the other is primarily seen through C's struggles with her own internal dialogue as well as the external discourse with the secondary characters of the novel. As the "I" speaks from more than one place, other voices in the text are thereby allowed to be heard. These other voices take on the form of the secondary characters, which serve as a reflection of the narrator. Through them, the discourse presented in the novel delves into the exploration of the internal life of the narrator. However, due to

the inherent ambiguity as to whether or not either of these characters really exist, they could be considered as a further de-centralization of the subject. Relating the ambiguity of the secondary characters to the aforementioned crisis of authority, this ambiguity thus blurs the distinction between the author and her protagonist as well as the secondary characters. A discussion of the loss of some letters that C. has apparently written lends a clue to the ambiguity of identity within the text as well as the author's impression of identity:

[C.]—Sí, siempre se idealiza lo que se pierde ... Por otra parte si no perdiera nada, la literatura no tendría razón de ser ... No me diga usted que no ha escrito en su vida cartas sentimentales.

[Man in black]— ... Es un juego que depende de que aparezca otro jugador y te sepa dar pie.

[C.]—usted sabe que el otro jugador es un pretexto.

—Bueno, pretexto o no, tiene que existir...

—Usted no necesita que exista, usted si no existe, lo inventa ... (195-196)

This appears to be ironic in that the man in black himself suggests that he is an invention of the narrator.

Representing her own subjectivity in a different way, "Martin Gaité's theoretical discussion of genre and gender in The Back Room cannot be

separated from (and actually arises from) her own struggle to be able to represent her subjectivity” (Ortiz, Autobiography 46). In spite of the tendency by critics to conflate the author and her protagonist when she is writing in the first person, ironically, female authors in particular have also shown to challenge the concept that in autobiography the author and narrator are understood to be one and the same. Not only are works written in first person by women automatically considered to be autobiographical, critics sometimes take that notion one step further by suggesting an apparent inevitability that the creation of an identity by a female author be automatically a female identity. That is to say, a female author is responding to her marginalization through literature and, more specifically, through autobiography.

Jacqueline Cruz contrasts the narrative styles between male and female authors by pointing out differences in how their authority is expressed. In what she considers to be the ‘male’ narrative, she explains that: “La narración viene a ser, por tanto, una forma de *autoría* de la propia vida y sobre ellas—la narración y la vida—el hombre posee la *autoridad*” (125). In other words, within a narrative written by a male, there appears to be a more direct connection between the author and his autobiographical subject. She explains further that: “Utilizo el masculino *hombre* intencionadamente, pues a la mujer no le resulta tan fácil ni la *autoría* de su destino ni, menos aún, la *autoridad* sobre la narración, oral o escrita que formula” (125). She thus recognizes that in male texts, the distinction

between author and subject are clearer than in female texts. As a result, a reader is less likely to confuse the relationship of the author and his narrator when a male is writing in the first person.

Although the man in black's presence is more prevalent, the role of Carola also plays a vital role as the other. Whereas the man in black represents a male perspective of identity, Carola appears to represent the reflection of the female identity of the narrator. Through what is learned of her relationship with the man in black, she represents the idea of being a prisoner of convention imposed by society. C's encounter with Carola also appears to lessen the man in black's mysterious nature, for through her the man in black is given a name, Alejandro. Carola also offers to both the narrator and the reader a clue to his identity. Alejandro is a cold individual who is often abusive toward her. It is also revealed through their phone conversation that Carola thinks he is having an affair with C., as she has found some mysterious letters written by someone who also has the same initial. Agustín Boyer elaborates further by emphasizing the significance of the authority expressed in a feminine text:

Por supuesto, ese ente femenino que [crea] es un constructo literario que no debe tomarse como referente de la realidad biográfica, sino como un ente de ficción que la crítica semiótica prefiere denominar [el] enunciador o sujeto de la enunciación. El enunciador femenino—actuante presupuesto por el

enunciado—se inscribe en el texto; producto y productor se generan así al mismo tiempo que se van haciendo expresión.

(92)

In this passage, Boyer is arguing that the female identity as expressed in a text should be considered a fictional entity that dominates the position of the author. This version of the self is thus presented by a fictionalized version of the author's self.

As critics examine the pull between autobiography and fiction, it is determined that autobiography often lends itself to a fictionalized "reconstruction of the self" (Brown, "Autobiography" 38). This reconstruction coincides with the changing beliefs of the nature of selfhood and identity. Martín Gaité's use of the themes of memory and imagination allows her more creative freedoms in her text, as she "is not bound by facts, and at the same time [can] use real memories" (Brown, "Autobiography" 38). Thus, the use of creative imagination in the idea of self-discovery and self-creation (self-invention) leads to what is considered to be the "inevitability of fiction" (Egan 14). In other words, the influence of memory and imagination as discussed in the previous chapter also leads to the fictionalization of a text. As Paul John Eakin observes,

If the premise of autobiographical referentiality is that we can move from knowledge of the text to knowledge of the self proves to be a fiction, the text becomes paradoxically not less



precious but more: in making the text the autobiographer constructs a self that would not otherwise exist. (On Autobiography xxiii)

Eakin recognizes in this passage that self-exploration through memories proves to be a vital component in the construction of the self. However, the subjectivity of memories that relegates them to a fictional status should nonetheless be considered as fact. As Eakin elaborates further, the reader should be called “ ... to concede to the fictive status of the self and then to proceed with its functioning as experiential fact” (On Autobiography xiv). In doing so, the reader is better able to fully understand the position of self within a text.

The function of memory becomes even more significant in the articulation of the self when one considers the notion of escapism. Through her use of the motifs of imagination and escapism, Martin Gaité places a strong focus on the internal life of the self. For example, in the second chapter, C. begins to describe her need to escape the horrible realities of the years of the Civil War. Throughout the text she shows how fantasy and the ability to create were used to escape from the unbearable realities of her childhood even after the war. These realities are tied to events in history, as C. first mentions her tendencies toward escapism in terms of her relation to the notion of history:

Sitio de Montjuic—1706 ... recuerdo que la escribí en el

archivo de Simancas ... cuando había empezado a refugiarme en la historia, en las fechas .... El cielo de papel se ha caído y me ha pillado debajo, los soldados del Archiduque Carlos corren por encima de mí, me van a aplastar, me enredo en los estandartes desgarrados, me asfixio, tengo que salir a buscar otro refugio, ninguno es seguro. (59)

For her, facts and dates associated with history are especially difficult as they are associated with horrific events of her past. She is thus forced to find another refuge, which is within herself and her imagination.

The man in black also takes note early in the interview of the narrator's need to take refuge. She openly acknowledges her need to escape, from the fear of the past that reality had imposed as well as the fear of coming to terms with her past:

—¿A qué edad empezó a escribir? —me pregunta el hombre de negro.

—¿Quiere decir que a qué edad empecé a refugiarme?

—Sí, eso he querido decir.

—Hace mucho tiempo, durante la guerra, en Salamanca.

—¿Y de qué se refugiaba?

—Supongo que del frío. O de los bombardeos. (58-59)

Out of the deprivation of the war emerged the inherent necessity to avoid reality. C. describes how she relied heavily on her creative abilities to escape

her fears and find the happiness that reality cannot provide:

Yo pensaba que también podía ser heroico escaparse por gusto, sin más por amor a la libertad y a la alegría—no a la alegría impuesta oficial y medida, sino a la carcajada y a la canción que brotan de una fuente cuyas aguas nadie canaliza—, lo pensaba a solas y a escondidas y suponía una furtiva tentación imaginación imaginar cómo se transformarían, libres del alcance de las miradas ajenas, las voces, los rostros y los cuerpos de aquellos enamorados audaces que habían provocado, con su fuga, la condena unánime de toda la sociedad, los imaginaba en mis sueños, aunque no me atrevía a confesárselo a nadie. (125-26)

In this passage, she expresses her desire for freedom on her own terms rather than how society would define it. Much of her happiness, therefore, is dependent on the ability to escape from the norms of society and all of the rules it imposes.

The inherent need for escape is demonstrated through one of the main themes of the novel that is explored, which is the undercurrent of fear that existed during the war as well as under the rule of Franco. As a child, the concept of war is especially terrifying and difficult to understand. As Catherine Bellver notes, “Martín Gaité presents war as a horrific experience that confounds and distresses a young person who is ill-equipped to

understand or confront circumstances of which she knows little and over which she has no control” (71). Although her personal circumstances were difficult, she was able to cope as she considers another close childhood friend, whose parents were incarcerated during the war. In spite of the intense hardships her friend faced, “nunca tenía miedo ni tenía frío, que son para mi las dos sensaciones más envolventes de aquellos años—<<no habléis de esto>>, <<tened cuidado con aquello>> ... <<no contéis que han matado al tío Joaquín>> ... todos tenían miedo” (57). Her friend’s courage thus served as an inspiration to her as she learned to face her own fears.

One of the first and most impressive memories that is expressed in the novel is when the narrator recounts the many bombings in Salamanca during the war. To her, these bombings were seen as unreal, and the act of taking refuge in the bomb shelter seemed like a game to her: “Yo entonces tampoco [tenía miedo], porque no entendía nada, todo lo que estaba ocurriendo me parecía tan irreal” (60). She even remembers one particular bombing in which a neighborhood shop owner and his family did not survive the bombing, because he refused to play the ‘game’. That event, among others, also exemplifies the hardship and deprivation of war.

Martín Gaité shows various examples of the need to take refuge during her childhood and adolescence. In the third chapter, as C. is in the kitchen reflecting on the interview that has just begun with the man in black, she is reminded of the back room. The back room is not only a motif used to

exemplify the need for creativity and imagination, as explained in the previous chapter, it also served as a space where she took refuge and was a place where she was free to do and imagine whatever she pleased.

However, once the war began, she noticed that her special place was being invaded by the realities of war:

Hay como una línea divisoria, que empezó a marcarse en el año treinta y seis, entre la infancia y el crecimiento. La amortización del cuarto de atrás y su progresiva transformación en dispensa fue uno de los primeros cambios que se produjeron en la parte de acá de aquella raya. (187-88)

As a result of this intrusion, the author shows how her childhood slowly dissolved as her play place was invaded. She explains further that: "El juego y la subsistencia coexistieron en una convivencia agria" (189). The dissolution of the beloved back room is also symbolic when one considers her personal rite of passage from childhood into adulthood. In this sense, the transformation of the back room is thus symbolic of C's internal transformation as she is thrust into adulthood and therefore the harsh realities of the outside world.

The theme of refuge also takes on another significance as C. describes the idea of the scarcity during her childhood. She mentions early on that "a lo poco que se tenía, se le sacaba mucho sabor" (70). This idea is brought up again later on as she is describing the theme of her next work.

The man in black suggests “que debe partir del tema de la escasez” (178). This conversation invariably shifts back to the imagination, which grew out of the scarcity that existed. The island of Bergai serves as a primary example of the narrator’s use of imagination that was created out of this scarcity. “Bergai ... se inventó partiendo precisamente de la escasez .... Pues Bergai era mi primer refugio.” (181, 183). As the narrator describes it, “[a] Bergai se llegaba por el aire. Bastaba por mirar a la ventana, invocar el lugar con los ojos cerrados y se producía la levitación. <<Siempre que notes que no te quieren mucho ... o que no entiendes algo, te vienes a Bergai>>” (180). As a result, Bergai came to replace the function the back room once had when she was younger.

The narrator provides yet another example of the author’s need for escape when she describes how in early adulthood she was able to defer her obligation of *Servicio Social* by accepting a scholarship to a study abroad program in Coimbra, Portugal. For her the idea of committing herself to the government was to be avoided at all costs. As she recounts to the man in black: “si supiera lo horrible que se me hacía cumplir el Servicio Social, entendería mejor la significación que tuvo para mí llevar a cabo aquellos papeleos” (43). For her it was well worth it to pay the fine for leaving the country without having first completed her civic duties.

In conclusion, the significance of the subject position within El cuarto de atrás is exemplified on various levels within the text. The distance that

Martin Gaité creates through the use of a fictional protagonist allows her to place a distance between herself and her autobiographical subject. Through this distance, she is able to exemplify the notion that a person is several people when he is writing, thereby presenting a unique version of the self. By creating greater possibilities of selfhood, the author challenges the notion that in a female text the author and her protagonist are identical. The notion of selfhood is also shown through the narrator's need for escape and to take refuge within herself. This need for escape during her childhood and adolescence is seen as parallel to certain rites of passage, as events in history are reflected by the narrator's loss of innocence at the hands of the realities of the Civil War.

## **Chapter Four: Autobiography and Narrative Patterns**

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the impact of the narrative structure on the notion of autobiography in El cuarto de atrás. By doing so, I show how the text focuses explicitly on the act of narration itself by identifying and discussing the significance of the primary elements that provide the narrative framework for the novel. I also examine the various narrative techniques Carmen Martín Gaité employs, which are composed of the external dialogue and internal monologue. These discourses are exemplified by the analysis of the relationship between the narrator and the secondary characters that serve as her interlocutors. This chapter ultimately illustrates how Martín Gaité is committed to and is fascinated by the challenges of writing a life as narrative.

In order to establish the narrative framework of the text, it is necessary to outline the discursive elements of each chapter. The first chapter of the novel describes a dream sequence that lacks any chronological framework, and the thoughts that the narrator attempts to describe lack any connection to order and logic. In this oneiric state, the narrator blends dream like images of things such as: “un desfile de estrellas con cara de payasos que ascienden a tumbos de globo escapado y se ríen con mueca fija, en zigzag, una detrás de otra, como volutas de humo que se hace progresivamente más espeso ... ”



(9) with past concrete memories of events of her past. This marks the beginning of C's struggle to put her thoughts in order. She later laments that "pretender al mismo tiempo entender y soñar: ahí está la condena de mis noches" (10). The narrator's dream state is interrupted at the end of the first chapter as she finds herself saying "quiero verte, quiero verte" (25).

The reader learns at the beginning of the second chapter that it is not the voice of C. that is saying those words; rather, she discovers that her dream state has been interrupted by the sound of the telephone ringing. It is the appearance of the mysterious man in black, who has come for an interview that was scheduled for the middle of the night. This chapter begins their discourse in which the man in black elicits the narrator's recollections of her life during the Spanish Civil War and the following years during the reign of Franco.

In the opening of the third chapter, the reader finds C. alone in the kitchen, reflecting on the conversation that has just begun with her mysterious interlocutor. This scene essentially takes place in the narrator's conscience, as she ruminates further on various topics from the status of women during the post-war years to her creative literary processes. In this way the reader is allowed a more intimate view of the interior world of the protagonist.

The narrator then rejoins the man in black in the fourth chapter. Their conversation continues, and she is somehow better able to verbalize to her visitor her struggles to order her own thoughts. The end of the chapter finds

her interrupted once again by the phone ringing. As the man in black has predicted, the phone call is for him.

The fifth chapter of the novel opens as C. receives a phone call from Carola, the girlfriend of the man in black. Although Carola has called for him, the two women subsequently end up in a conversation instead. The narrator then returns to the interview with the man in black in the sixth chapter, which closes as she finds herself overcome with sleep.

The narrator wakes up at the beginning of the sixth chapter upon her daughter's return home. Although she remembers having fallen asleep on the sofa, she wakes up fully clothed in her bed. She does not recall at what point in time she moved from one location to the other. Because she has awoken in the bed, she suspects that her encounter with the man in black was an extension of her oneiric state. However, her daughter makes note of two empty glasses in the living room, implying that C. did in fact have a visitor. It therefore becomes evident to the reader that it is unclear whether or not the events that had occurred actually happened, or if they were simply an extension of the dream that opened the novel.

The interaction between the narrator and the secondary characters serve as a vital discursive element of the text, as they each represent the narrator's search for the ideal interlocutor. Susan Snaider Lanser relates in her book Fictions of Authority that "the ways in which the narrators represent themselves, the relationships they construct with narratees [i.e. the man in

black and Carola], and affective positions they take are dynamic and interdependent elements” (13). As her interlocutor, the man in black not only is a dominant force of the discourse, but he also serves to guide, challenge, and even evoke the narrator to communication. As Joan Brown and Elaine Smith indicate, “the man in black was primarily intended to afford an opportunity for communication” (66). The arrival of the man in black in the second chapter allows the fragments of the first chapter to be threaded together for the benefit of both the reader and the narrator. The visitor affords her the opportunity to regain what she refers to several times over the course of the novel as *el hilo*, or the thread of her thought processes. As Elizabeth Ordoñez points out, “[h]is arrival makes possible the continuation and further development of the text, and what is more, his collaboration in its genesis makes it appear spontaneous and potentially infinite” (174-75). Jean Chittenden appears to agree, stating that:

This visitor, who serves as the interlocutor so sought after by Martín Gaité enables her to ... make the autobiographical journey or quest into her past in order to elucidate and explicate the relationship between the past and her literary production.

(81)

The man in black thus serves as a vital connection between the narrator’s memories and her ability to articulate them into literary form. Throughout the entire text the man in black proves to be the ideal interlocutor to the narrator.

As Robert Spires observes:

Her mind is responding to free associations triggered by the stranger's questions. Each fragment from the past is traversed by a network of inter-textual associations placing her memory in constant conflict with an orderly presentation of historical facts; her attempts to write a book of memories as a factual account are opposed by the subjective essence of personal experience, by the unrelenting force of intertextuality. ("Product" 116-17)

The man in black therefore also provides the narrator the opportunity to order the thoughts the reader initially observes in the first chapter and attempt to articulate them as memories.

The man in black not only serves as an interlocutor for the narrator, but his presence functions on a deeper level as well. Although Martín Gaité herself does not offer a specific reason that the interlocutor is male, the fact that he is male does have certain implications. Upon entering her apartment, his dominance becomes apparent, as he immediately makes himself at home by sitting down without being invited to do so. "—¿Por qué no viene a sentarse? —[él] me pregunta ... señalándome un sitio a su lado en el sofá, como si fuera él el dueño de la casa y yo la visitante" (33). His actions begin to make her uncomfortable, as he notices a stack of papers by her typewriter and begins to question her about what she has been writing. The narrator is visibly annoyed and possibly feels threatened by him, responding, "Por favor déjelo, le digo

que no sé ... Lo he dicho en un tono impaciente ... Su instancia me provoca una irritación desproporcionada” (34-35). Her discomfort around him comes back over the course of the novel, as she later muses: “Me sostiene la mirada, sonriendo. Lo nota, claro que lo nota, lo sabe todo” (58).

The uneasiness the narrator feels toward the man in black is symbolic of and even parallels the difficulty she experiences with the notion of the Civil War and postwar era of Spain. The first parallel is that her visitor is dressed in black, which symbolic of the dark period of the Franco era. The man in black’s undue influence on her is also symbolic of the undue influence of the Franco regime discussed in Chapter One. His influence on her continues as he proceeds to be the one who guides the topics of conversation, and she becomes the willing participant. She thus becomes inherently dependent on him as her primary interlocutor.

The general structure of this text appears to support certain critic’s arguments that the concept of the first person narrative synonymous with female or feminist writings. Jean Chittenden observes that the discourse found in El cuarto de atrás reflects “ ... the repetitive, cumulative, cyclical nature of women’s lives ... as opposed to the more linear, goal-oriented pattern of men’s lives” (80). Critics have referred to the idea of “dailiness” as a structuring principle for women’s lives. In the text, the narrator discusses a wide variety of topics that have impacted women in particular, from society’s expectations of women as discussed in Chapter One to ruminations on the

role of dress makers, and beauty parlors.

The character of Carola represents the narrator's female persona, one seemingly less sophisticated than her male counterpart. Elizabeth Ordóñez, in her article, "Reading Telling and the Text of Carmen Martín Gaité's El cuarto de atrás," presents certain theories on the appearance of Carola in the fifth chapter. She considers this character to be a "lightweight" and "naïve, less taken by the pleasures and the complexities of texts, often unconscious of their effects on ... discourse (180). As a result, she could be seen as someone who has "[interrupted] the interlocution of the narrator and the man [in black]", and "represents the conventions of ... the average female reader" (180). The reader notes right away that C's conversation with Carola is more awkward than with her male interlocutor. Both of them struggle to keep the conversation going, as there are many long pauses where C. is left to contemplate the situation. Moreover, the conversation does not seem to go much deeper than the topic of their respective relationships to the man in black.

To illustrate this point, in comparing Carola's literary tastes with her male counterpart, the man in black appears to reflect the author's literary side. The narrator declares "Entiende usted mucho la literatura, efectivamente" (198). He also declares of himself, "entiendo de literatura y sé leer entre líneas" (196). On the other hand, Carola appears to be less interested in the realm of literature, as she explains "a él siempre le han gustado mucho los libros que se entienden mal, tenemos gustos muy distintos en eso ..." (161).

Her opinions also reflect on the narrator as well, as Carola begins to realize that C. is possibly the author of some letters that she has found in Alejandro's possession. "[D]esde luego escribe usted en plan follón, se saca poco en limpio" (164). Their conversation ends abruptly when Carola is unsuccessful in fulfilling C's request to find the letters she mentions and read passages from them to her.

Not only does Martín Gaité place an emphasis on discourse, more importantly, she places significance on the role of language in the creation of the text. Within the realm of discourse lies the author's fascination with the function of language, both spoken and written. As Servodidio points out, "language remains an imperfect instrument of mediation between the writer's inner voice and the outside world" (131). The author expresses her awareness of the limitations of language through the narrator's struggles with *el hilo* not only in terms of memory, but language as well. Martín Gaité thus demonstrates how language is the primary vehicle through which the narrator struggles to express herself. As C. struggles with her thought processes and how to articulate them, she recognizes that language is inherently flawed. As Molloy points out, "The self so understood is both pre-linguistic and extra-linguistic. Constituted neither in nor by language, it exists prior to and independent of language, which is conceived as transparent and mimetic" (17). Therefore, it can be concluded that through the medium of language, man is thereby limited in the formulation of his being (Weintraub xii). These

limitations have connection to the struggles C. faces with memory and creation.

The narrator's struggle begins early on as she attempts to bring meaning to the images and memories that are floating through her conscience:

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. Pretender al mismo tiempo entender y soñar; ahí está la condena de mis noches (10).

The narrator's attempts to organize her memories continues to plague her in her oneiric state, as she not only is limited by language to articulate her memories, she also struggles to organize the mental images that are forming in her head:

zapatos por el suelo, un almohadón caído, periódicos, y desde todos los estantes y superficies al acecho, como animales disecados esa caterva de objetos cuya historia, inherente a silueta, resuena apagadamente en el recuerdo y araña estratos insospechados del alma, arrancando fechas, frutos podridos.

(16)

This passage also foreshadows her subsequent struggle to order her thoughts and articulate them through language to the man in black. As she begins to recount her memories to him, she expresses this concern, saying that, “[q]uizá



todo consista en perder el hilo y que reaparezca cuando le dé la gana, yo siempre he tenido demasiado miedo a perder el hilo” (33). She is therefore not only concerned with articulating her memories, but concerned as well that she will be able to organize them, or thread them together.

Throughout the text C. loses track of the things she discussed verbally with the man in black and the things she remembered but did not verbalize. For example, while by herself, she recalls an episode in which her father’s car was requisitioned for the war effort, and when it was destroyed, her father invited her to travel to Burgos to retrieve it. While looking for a notebook to write down this episode, she explains to the man in black that she needs it

para apuntar lo de Burgos. Es que, hablando con usted, me salen a relucir tantas cosas ... y todas revueltas ...

—¿Qué era lo de Burgos?—pregunta el hombre ...

—¿Cómo? ¿Lo del hotel de Burgos? ... Se lo he contado hace un momento, ¿no? Se encoge los hombros y pliega los labios en un gesto de incomprensión. (117-18)

This passage exemplifies the lack of distinction between the internal monologue and external discourse of the text, and further serves to compound the unreliability of the narrator.

However, the metafictional mode of the novel helps bring clarity to the challenges she faces. As Spires explains,

The fantastic mode, therefore, merely underscores the essence

of all literature: a fantasy world composed of language. By thus freeing language from the illusion that it is what it represents, the fantastic mode foregrounds the transformation of the static markers on the page into a plethora of interconnecting texts in dynamic discourse with one or another. (121)

This passage appears to exemplify the struggle with the use of language to express memories the narrator experiences throughout the text. This is seen from the opening dream sequence of the novel to the last chapter, when her daughter wakes her up.

Martín Gaité appears to echo Kathleen Glenn's view of language that language serves as the fundamental means of human expression, and is compared to an instrument that requires constant sharpening and polishing and is blunted only by careless usage (279). Through her interlocutors, C. is able to realize that "both speech and writing originate in the desire to break out of our solitude and find an audience for our words" (Glenn 279). For without an interlocutor, discourse in this could not exist, and the internal monologue would be meaningless. If the reader is to also consider the appearance of the man in black as well as the phone call from Carola as a part of the oneiric state of C., then s/he could also assume that the discourse that occurs between them represents an inner conflict of the narrator to break out of her own solitude and invent an interlocutor with which to recall and organize her memories.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Martín Gaité makes further use of the self-reflective impulse of autobiography by integrating references to the creation of the text itself, thereby creating a metafictional mode in the novel. During the course of the novel, the reader makes note of the mention of a stack of papers that mysteriously continues to grow. The narrator first makes note of this in the second chapter. "Por la parte superior de la máquina asoma un folio empezado, leo de refilón: << ... al hombre descalzo ya no se le ve>>. ¿Cuándo he escrito esto? (31) At the end of the last chapter, C. picks up what has now become the final product and begins to read, word for word, the opening passage that appears at the beginning of the novel. As a result of the process of the creation of the text itself, " ... a novel emerges in which Martín Gaité's own views about literature are not only discussed overtly, but also are very evidently put into practice (Brown, "Metafiction" 63). This passage provides the final thread that completes the narratological fabric that Martín Gaité has created.

In conclusion, by analyzing the discursive function of the man in black and Carola, the narrator is afforded the opportunity for discourse, and the reader is able to fit the pieces of the narrator's thought processes together. The function of language is also apparent, as it assumes a vital role in the narrative as well. Martín Gaité exemplifies her awareness of the limitations of language through the narrator's struggles to order and articulate her thoughts.

## Conclusion

Throughout the discussion of this text, I have shown how El cuarto de atrás is a narratively rich and complex text in which Martín Gaité has woven a discursive fabric consisting of both notions of autobiography as well as fiction. The two notions work together, creating a novel that is not considered to be a straightforward autobiography. Instead, autobiographical elements are placed in a fictional setting as the foundation of a unique memoir that is both challenging as well as entertaining to the reader. Carmen Martín Gaité rises to this challenge by creating a text that addresses the ever-changing concept of autobiography.

In this thesis I have examined how El cuarto de atrás is primarily the end product of the author's reflections on her childhood and the historical events that affected it. Utilizing the man in black as an interlocutor to her narrator, Martín Gaité also reflects on the role the Franco regime played in the shaping of historical events. Her narrator discusses with the man in black various notable historical figures and also explores the far-reaching influence that Franco had on society as well. Her sentiments are especially strong as she reflects on the role women played in society as she was growing up, and how through the influence of her parents, was able to reject these norms.

The fictional mode of the novel is exemplified through both references to literary genres and places created out of the author's imagination. The

influences of the work by Todorov serve as the foundation of the fictional mode, as it serves to exemplify the fantastic implications of the text. The fictional mode is further highlighted by the inclusion of certain literary styles, such as the *novela rosa*, which was popular during the postwar era.

Through recollections of the horrors of war and dictatorship and the subsequent rejection of the Franco regime, Martín Gaité demonstrates the significance of her ability to create and utilize her imagination to escape reality. More importantly, she recognizes the role of the imagination as a vital component of identity and human experience. The product of her imagination is understood to have been cultivated during her childhood in the back room. These experiences serve as the foundation for her later years, as she incorporates her imaginative abilities to create such fictional places as “Bergai” and “Cúnigan”.

The notion of autobiography within the text reveals itself not only through the description of the historical events, but within the narrative as well. This is demonstrated through the internal and external dialogue of the narrator. This dialogue is heavily dependent on the man in black, who serves as her primary interlocutor. To clarify the relationship of the man in black to the narrator, the author employs the secondary character of Carola. Not only are these interlocutors vital to the perpetuation of the text, they serve as a vehicle for self-exploration as well.

The fantastic style demonstrated in the text deems it unreliable in that

the reader is never sure whether or not the events being recounted in the present are actually happening to the narrator, or if they are merely an extension of her oneiric state. Due to the unreliability of the narrator's perceptions, the reader is left to question the described events, and ultimately becomes a willing participant in the production of the text. The use of a fictional protagonist brings to light the challenge of subject position within the text. Martín Gaité plays with subject position in this novel on various levels. As Christopher Ortiz points out, "By investigating the ideological basis of the discourses that have shaped her subjectivity, Martín Gaité challenges the private-public split that our modes of reading (genres) would have us accept" (Autobiography 49). As the "I" is shifted from author to narrator, Martín Gaité is able to make further use of the secondary characters of the novel. Not only does she relegate her authority to a fictional protagonist, this protagonist participates in a pull between self and other with her interlocutors.

Finally, through the metafictional mode, the reader is able to experience the text at the level of creation, bringing the relationship between the author, narrator and reader full circle back to a focus on the text itself. The focus on the text also exemplifies Martín Gaité's fascination with the function of both spoken and written language, and is therefore brought to the forefront. The author is therefore able to place a greater significance on the narrator's struggles to order her thoughts and articulate them as memories, rather than the memories themselves. As the narrator picks up the manuscript that has

been growing over the course of the evening and begins to read, word for word, the very novel the reader has just read, these memories are ultimately tied together for her by text itself. It is at this point that the narratological threads of the text that were once lost come together and are finally made apparent, and the reader is thus left to draw her own conclusions on the outcome of the story.

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