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Historical Constructions, Sexual Memories

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Historical Constructions, Sexual Memories

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An abstract of  
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
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Department of Spanish and Portuguese

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## Abstract

### Historical Constructions, Sexual Memories

By

Matthew Edwards

Historical Constructions, Sexual Memories examines how Latin American marginal and minority subjects defy chronological and temporal order in their artistic works in order to create alternative ways of engaging the past, which creates new ways of looking at culture and society.

In the first chapter, “Hearing Silent Voices: Manuel Puig, Prison Narratives, and El beso de la mujer araña”, Manuel Puig’s decision to express queer sex within nontraditional narrative terms represents the apex of a marginal historical narration that is imprisoned by a political struggle in Argentina’s history founded on heterosexuality. In “Discovering Silent Pasts: Copi’s Archive of the Marginal Subject”, Copi’s cartoon, dramatic and novelistic production is regarded as an archive of marginal discourses. A look into Copi’s most famous comic strip, La femme assise, his play titled Loretta Strong (1974), and his first novel, El baile de las locas (1976) locates marginality in an historical narrative that focuses on the difficulty of locating the queer body in a clear and concise narrative of the past. For Copi, the only historical narrative able to define the queer subject situates meaning itself in the erotic encounter between naked bodies. Finally, the third chapter focuses on El affair Skeffington (1992), by María Moreno. In it, a textual collage of misrepresented, misunderstood and sometimes completely unknown historical documents engages a previously disregarded past that tells of a female erotic network in conjunction with disorderly social conduct.

In these texts, each author sees traditional historical narration as limiting the way marginal subjects define themselves within chronological time. Taken together, they present a memory founded on sex as a means of embracing chaos, confusion and contradiction in their historical endeavor. When sexual intimacy becomes a way of narrating the past, sexual memory leads to a present where nothing is over-looked, not even awkward pleasures or queer passions.

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Historical Constructions, Sexual Memories is a dissertation that embraces confusion and chaos. However, few know and appreciate the extent to which the chaos narrated on its pages has taken over the last years of my life. Few have felt just how I myself have been confused and have, little by little, become more chaotic due to the writing process and to the very fact that I had taken on this project. To all of those who were, and remain close to me, I hope that my own chaotic manner has been contagious. I hope that it has been well received and even appropriated into your own lives. But most of all, I thank you for your help in realizing my own chaos, confusion, and contradiction as integral to who I am. In particular, I thank José Quiroga, whose questions and comments inspire me to think as if someone were listening and to write as if someone were actually reading; thank you Karen Stolley, who assured me on a daily basis that we are all confused; and to the rest of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Emory University, thank you for opening your doors and ears to my questions, comments and concerns. The time we shared together was priceless and the future we have in common is but rich with possibility.

Needless to say, my own disorderly conduct goes hand in hand with my life with two very special people. Together we are fabulously confused on a daily basis as we live life as one. With them, the unpredictable brings joy, the unsaid pleasure and the misunderstood happiness. With them, life becomes a daily process of discovering that everything cannot be explained. Finally, with them, love, passion, and desire become meaningful in the silences we share and the words that are left unsaid, but that are definitely understood.

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Introduction: Hindsight, Blindness and Looking into Latin America's  
Marginal Pasts

“Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.”  
Michel Foucault The History of Sexuality

Historical Constructions, Sexual Memories begins with a question. “How do marginal subjects speak about the past?” What follows this question is not an answer. It is a much longer list of questions. As I attempt to better understand the many *why*'s that such questions present me with, I recognize that at the heart of my original inquiry is an affirmation: “Marginal subjects approach the past in a particular way”. But the questions remain: Why is the way marginal subject engage history specific in form and nature at all? Why would it be any different from traditional methods? What are the traditional methods? And so on and so forth.

Despite the ongoing series of questions, it is obvious what speaking about the past is capable of. First and foremost, speaking about the past and narrating its actions and events allows not only for history to take a fluid shape, but also for it to become the source of all knowledge and understanding. After all, hindsight is 20/20, is it not? At least this idea is what has become ingrained in popular culture and social myths. But what does that really mean anyway? What does it mean to say that “hindsight is 20/20”? Two things come to mind. The first is that this refrain suggests that it is in looking into the past from the present that we are able to *see* everything in a clear and concise manner. It suggests the possibility of *perfect* historical vision. Secondly, if hindsight is 20/20, it is only from the present that the past takes on a complete and coherent nature. It is

impossible to speak about prediction and future happenings in the same manner: not to mention the confusion often associated with the present. Hindsight, therefore, is not so much about actually seeing into the past, but instead much more about speaking, in a particular way, about past events. Speaking about the past, in this case, allows one to regard the present and understand the subjects that populate it with assurance. In this way, it is not the past that gives meaning to the present at all. It is actually the present that defines itself as it steps back in time, giving meaning to the past.<sup>1</sup>

Hayden White makes this point particularly relevant when he suggests that it is the narrative manner used to speak about past events in historical terms that permits understanding itself to occur. In his The Content of Form (1987), White addresses the impact of narrativity and the important role it has in forming the past. He begins this task by defining narrative structures as “a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted” (1). Other critics consider the different manifestations of past events within the present as central to understanding the present itself.<sup>2</sup> For White, the past is unable to produce any meaning at

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<sup>1</sup> The expression “Hindsight is 20/20” is parallel in meaning, but not in form, to other refrains in the Spanish language: “Después de la batalla somos todos generales”, or “Con el diario de mañana todos somos genios”. To an extent these thematic analogies correspond to Benjamin’s Marxist reading of historical narration in Theses on the Philosophy of History (1955) and to a debate that extends past regional limits. Benjamin states that speaking about the past is an act often associated with dominant discourses. In his thesis VII, he explains as follows: “Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures, and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. (...) They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries” (258). According to Benjamin, the present is not only indebted to the past but the past is explained here as a product of the present.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in How Societies Remember (1989), Paul Connerton elaborates the preformative nature of the past. Through his analysis of ceremony, commemoration and habitual actions, Connerton describes present day manifestations of the past as linked directly, if not specifically, to corporal representations. Dominick LaCapra, on the other hand, insists that historical representations in the present are marked by the precise impossibility to be fully reconstructed [Writing History, Writing Trauma (2001)]. However, both for Connerton and LaCapra, there is an attempt made on behalf of the individual in the present to speak about the past, whether it be explicitly or implicitly, in the most complete manner possible.

all without a narrative quality. In this sense, an event placed within a particular story line becomes essential to the intelligibility of history and a necessary antecedent in approaching the present.

For White, the narrative quality of history is essential in defining both the *real* and the *truths* that define our present. However, it must first be asked: what exactly is history? According to White, for an account of past events to be considered historical and for history to take shape, past events must first be elaborated chronologically and according to the way they occurred in time. More importantly, for events to be considered historical and for them to be considered as part of history they must be susceptible to at least two narrations of its occurrence (20). That is to say, to some extent the event in question must pertain to a collective experience. History, then, is something lived and spoken about by many. While memory can be considered as one of many ways of narrating past events in the present, history itself remains the story such narration attempts to tell. History becomes a story that we are all confronted with, and not just the problem of the marginal subject, nor a research topic proposed by a distant “I”. History incorporates us all.

What we consider *real* and *true* within the present, according to White, is then nothing more than the result of the narrative quality given to past events. It is in this sense that White insists that historical narration “wears the mask of meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine, never experience. Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal” (21). White suggests here that the way we understand the present, its social structures and the subjects that occupy

them, is the result of a false epistemology of completeness founded on history's narrative structure.

If hindsight then is 20/20, White's observations imply that this common refrain is but yet another farce that tricks us into accepting narrative history for truth.<sup>3</sup> Implicit in this physical allegory that defines traditional methods of approaching historical narration is a similarly *clear* hierarchy that at once denies and grants access to the past. If hindsight is 20/20, it naturally comes that it could also be 20/80, or 20/200. Much like White's description of historical narration as a "mask of meaning", hindsight can also be reduced to the point of total distortion: to historical blindness, if you will. However, I would like to use this cultural allegory in order to extend White's position. The literal translation of this culturally significant medical ratio implies that seeing the past as a concise and continual whole is a gift attainable by a specific population—the small population that do not need glasses, corrective surgery or who are not more seriously visually impaired. I use this allegory to suggest the possibility of being ousted or simply restricted from accessing history, and as a result, the knowledge pertinent to

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<sup>3</sup> Paul de Man's comments in his book Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (1971) clarify the distinct quality of White's observations. De Man suggests that there exists an innate metaphorical quality to the vocabulary used to express the passing of time and the innumerable changes that result from it. The lack of an objective foundation from which to speak historically makes the historical process problematic in itself. De Man insists that in everyday language there exists an "impossibility of making the actual expression coincide with what has to be expressed, of making the actual sign coincide with what it signifies. It is the distinctive privilege of language to be able to hide meaning behind a misleading sign, as when we hide rage or hatred behind a smile. But it is the distinctive curse of all language, as soon as any kind of interpersonal relation is involved, that it is forced to act this way. The simplest of wishes cannot express itself without hiding behind a screen of language that constitutes a world of intricate intersubjective relationships, all of them potentially inauthentic. In the everyday language of communication, there is no a priori privileged position of sign over meaning or of meaning over sign; the act of interpretation will always again have to establish this relation for the particular case at hand" (11). Language, he concludes, is "a task without end and without progress, for the other is always free to make what he wants differ from what he wants to say" (11). In this sense, even language that speaks and observes of this very happening and intends to uncover and shed light on the foundationless nature of language are themselves speaking from within their own linguistic platform without a definitive origin. When White locates his discussion of history and social interaction on the narrative structure, he points de Man's words in a new direction and towards that which truly assigns meaning to linguistic code.

understanding present social interaction in intelligible terms. With this refrain in mind, there comes the possibility of understanding the past outside of chronology's fluidity and instead as a series of snapshots, a series of fragments surrounded by blackness, trimmed with visual *fuzz* and characterized by discontinuity, chaos and uncertainty. For the marginal subjects that I have termed here as the historically blind, historical narration would not be clear. In fact, history would not be seen at all. It would be felt, smelt, and touched. In other words, historical narration would take on a different shape and the subject that it defined within the present would be likewise transformed. The historically blind, the marginal subjects who do not—by choice or force—have access to the traditional clear and concise ways of speaking about the past would therefore engage history using different methods. They would, as my original inquiry suggests, speak about the past in a particular way.

To speak about the past in a nontraditional fashion means to also see the present in a different light. Michel Foucault foresaw this possibility in his Archeology of Knowledge (1972). Here, he places emphasis on the chronologically ordered, fluid narrative structure of the past in order to raise questions as to the validity of other sorts of non-traditional modes of speaking historically. Foucault states the problem in the following manner:

If the history of thought could remain the locus of uninterrupted continuities, if it could endlessly forge connections that no analysis could undo without abstraction, if it could weave, around everything that men say and do, obscure synthesis that anticipate for him, prepare him, and lead him endlessly towards his future, it would provide a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of consciousness. (12)

In short, if we must look towards the past and understand it in a particular, immutable fashion, so too we must understand the subject it describes. In this case the subject loses all sense of agency and is a mere pawn to notions of a strictly normative identity. While Foucault recognizes that the origins of the subject are indeed founded on historical narration, the questions that he suggests draw attention to what it means in terms of the subject, to speak about the past and about the truths that are often located there in such a way that is not at all continuous, but instead fragmented, and sutured into a totally untraditional narrative (21).<sup>4</sup> According to Foucault, the way the subject is understood depends upon the way history itself is understood. In this way, history and subjectivity become united and become the centre of a debate on the effects of narrative structures on social interaction. It is here where the marginal subject is central not only to questioning the way the past is spoken about, but also in proposing alternative forms of understanding the *real* and the *true* that define the present from within which it lives. Were it not for the *historically* impaired, for those individuals who are forced to look at the past through a different set of social filters, normative culture would essentially remain unquestioned. So, let us then, in the name of historical blindness, make our initial question once more: How do marginal subjects speak about the past? Let us use this question now as a point of departure into understanding marginality itself. After all, if marginal subjects

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<sup>4</sup> In The Content of Form, White extends his analysis of historical narration in order to engage these same notions brought forth by Foucault in his Archeology of Knowledge. White establishes that while Foucault himself is addressing the limitations of traditional historical narrations and their innate and necessary coherence, he too is creating an impenetrable narrative by appropriating a certain amount of rhetorical chaos. According to White, in Foucault's work "[e]ach period is studied 'vertically,' that is, archeologically, rather than 'horizontally' or historically. The strategy [in Archeology of Knowledge] is to work from texts or fragments of texts produced during a given period, without any concern for the biographies of the authors who wrote them, with the sole aim of identifying a distinctive 'discursive mode' shared by all the important texts of an age or epoch" (120). In any case, narrative discourse, whether it be historical or *chaotic*, is regarded by both authors as being central to questioning an established truth and it is to this end that I value the debate in which they engage.

engage the past in a different way, they also create for themselves a different epistemological foundation from which to understand their present. Asking this question then becomes central in recognizing any alternative to dominant discourse.



## I. From Marginality to *Queer Stories* to *Sexual Memories*

In general, subjects have always been forced to constantly negotiate the different systems of social and cultural identification. The fact of the matter is, the way we interact with others is based upon the way we constantly interpret—and modify—normative racial, economic, political and gender constructs. Social interaction becomes synonymous with the constant flux and movement of subjects through a series of power hierarchies that continuously shift through time and space. Marginal subjectivity, therefore, cannot be spoken about in terms of one particular type of person or community. It becomes a state of being that is neither constant nor restrictive where it is precisely the negotiation of dominant identity systems that defines marginality in the moment subjects are articulated or identified as such.

In the context of gay men, Didier Eribon explains in his book Insult and the Making of the Gay Self (2004), the moment when a subject becomes marginal. In particular, he suggests that the marginal position attributed to him as homosexual is developed when “I discover that I am a person about whom something can be said, to whom something can be said, someone who can be looked at or talked about in a certain way and who is stigmatized by that gaze and those words” (16). Social interaction, or interpellation to be more precise, identifies one as *other* or marginal via the significance given to the name itself that is spoken or called out. Eribon insists that this name, in the case of the gay man, is often an insult that over time has come to represent, refer to, and define homosexuality. Eribon continues to note that “The insult preexisted me. It was there before I was, and it has *always-already* (as Althusser puts it so well) subjugated me

to the social and sexual order that it simply expresses and recalls” (58). That which names and gives meaning to the subject is therefore history itself, or at least, the “historical” story behind a specific linguistic act. Eribon continues:

The social and sexual order that language carries within it, and of which insult is one of the most pointed symptoms, produces the subject simultaneously as subjectivity and as subjection-subjection—that is to say, as a person adapted to all of the socially instituted rules and hierarchies. Gay subjectivity is thus an ‘inferiorized’ subjectivity, not only because of the inferior social position in which gay people find themselves in society, but also because that very society produces those subjects: it is not a question of, on the one hand, a preexisting subjectivity, and, on the other, a social imprint that comes along later to deform it. The subjectivity and the social imprint are one and the same: the individual ‘subject’ is produced by the interpellation, that is to say, by the cognitive (and therefore social) structures of which it is the vector. (58-9)

What interests me about the process described above is the important place normative historical narratives hold within it. Interpellation, as Eribon describes it, understands the subject as a product of the past. In this case, the *insult*, when used, evokes a dominant historical narrative. And, as Eribon himself recognizes, this particular history is told from and activated within the present via the dominant discourses that position homosexuality and the gay man, for example, within marginality itself. Marginal subjectivity then depends not only upon the name calling process, but also on this name’s meaning as it has been established according to dominant epistemologies. How we speak

about the past is suddenly essential to creating marginal subjects and forms the foundation upon which the limitations that restrict his/her social movement are created.

The insult, in general, is understood as a mechanism for establishing and distinguishing power hierarchies. However, what happens if we alter the context of the insult's use? What happens if we understand it outside of this historical narrative of power relations? If Eribon's insult were used in a different context, to express a moment of passion or as part of the codified language of affection, "dirty language" in the bedroom for example, would it not be assuming a totally different significance and be founded upon a totally different historical narrative—one that tells of physical and emotional ecstasies as opposed to mechanisms of inferiority? Could we not understand this same insult to express a *different* relationship to the past and to subjectivity itself? After all, words, much like the subjects they are meant to describe, are also always in constant flux; their meaning, together with the subjects that articulate them, change according to the particularity of their enunciation. The different meaning that can be attached to the insult suggests, then, that subjects can speak differently about themselves depending upon the historical narrative from where meaning is drawn. That is to say, while the past is essential in understanding meaning itself, the way we articulate this past can be negotiated in order to create different, multiple epistemological systems. We must recognize then, that to speak about marginality cannot be separated from the naturally codified character of language that allows meaning itself to change and be tampered with. To speak about marginal subjects must include a discussion of just how language and narrative structures both give form and deform the subject as they create meaning: a sort

of epistemology of the margins, to coin Eve Sedgwick's famed essay Epistemology of the Closet (1990).

Judith Halberstam furthers this proposal as she considers marginal subjects' use of both space and time in terms of a reflection of their social alterity. In her book, In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives (2005), Halberstam critically approaches the temporal and geographical spaces in which social interaction occurs in late-capitalism, and suggests that we look at these venues as likewise affected by power relations that define subjects according to their productivity and in relation to the private/public binary. In a ground breaking way, Halberstam situates her discussion of marginality within Queer Studies and introduces sexuality as a trope that allows one to engage an acute critique of the dominant political role of socioeconomic narratives.<sup>5</sup> She argues that people can be productively considered queer according to the way they live their lives as different from the traditional notions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction that dominate and structure modern capitalist society. She suggests that "ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed" are people who fall outside of these normative categories and can be called *queer* "in terms of the ways they live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned, and in terms of the

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<sup>5</sup> In a special double issue of Social Text, published in 2005, editors David Eng, José Esteban Muñoz together with Judith Halberstam collectively define the marginal subject's critical approach to social antagonism as part of being marginal, as part of looking at social interaction from the periphery, and particular with a *queer* eye. Queerness, they suggest, implies a "broad critique of multiple social antagonisms, including race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, in addition to sexuality" (Eng 1). Included in this "state of queerness" in North American academia are interventions into pop culture, punk rock, film studies and capitalist politics, just to name a few. The texts as a group respond to the editors' introductory question—What's queer about Queer Studies now?—with a resounding "difference is queer". This issue of Social Text illustrates time and again that queerness *per se* has become a political metaphor for social difference that extends throughout all sociopolitical avenues, art forms and linguistic tendencies.

ways they might work in the domains that other people assign to privacy and family”

(10). In general, her analysis reads contemporary socioeconomic and cultural structures as a reflection of dominant heterosexual life patterns. The idea of a queer time and space draws attention to all that falls outside of this normative category. Here, sexuality itself becomes a critical filter that is able to recognize the stories of both dominant and marginal subjects.

I mention Halberstam’s notions of a queer time and space for two reasons. First of all, her work allows us to see the possibility of engaging social interaction from alternative narrative structures. Her study demonstrates that we can speak about social interaction outside dominant social narratives, and outside of the one-way street that Eribon speaks of: where the insult is only an insult in the sense that it establishes an imbalanced set of power relations. In this sense, Halberstam recognizes that what happens outside normative structures is not illegible, inaccessible or condemned. What happens on the margins, in the time and space left relatively untouched, or at least left on the wayside by dominant culture, is instead read through the queer subject. I mention Halberstam’s work for this reason, but also for another. The different ways gay, lesbian, bi and transsexuality counteract, contradict and distort the notion of a dominant sexuality become the critical tools that allow Halberstam to approach marginality from within. Sexuality, be it normative or not, is precisely what permits this critical analysis to take place and for the mechanisms and modes of alternative social interaction to become visible. In this regard, the varying nature of sexuality, the complex nature of erotic pleasure, the hidden spaces where sex actually occurs, all are revealed in Halberstam’s extrapolation of queerness as essential to “defining” the marginal subject. Narrating

marginal subjectivity and engaging marginal pasts becomes, as a result, an attempt at a new historiography. The marginal subject's story becomes a queer story that cannot necessarily be told from within normative structures. It is a story that requires a certain *erotohistoriography*—a term introduced by Elizabeth Freeman.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, speaking historically about sex requires a narrative that, like the sex act itself, is erratic and unpredictable. It is in this sense that the marginal subject's story becomes a queer story that cannot necessarily be told from within normative structures, but instead through a story where language itself is stretched, manipulated and tainted with the passion of the moment. Sex, sexuality and the sexual become tropes that regard the different ways the marginal subject interacts, disguises and marks time and space as a path to a likewise queer epistemology that also understands *things* differently.

Speaking about the past in sexual terms requires us to rethink how we understand historical narration itself. We must let go of the order and clarity that authors like Hayden White associated with historical narration, and instead embrace the chaos of the misunderstood, and that which is confused and categoryless. We must approach the past through our own *sexual memory* and through a narrative that creates meaning and captures the moment in the exactness of its disorder. In this way, dominant narratives

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<sup>6</sup> In an article titled "Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography," Elizabeth Freeman continues the line of critical thinking suggested here by Halberstam as she questions traditional methods that understand the passing of time as a progressive move towards the future that can be, and is often registered via the official recordings of births, marriages, deaths. Here, she notices, certain acts are essentially left unspoken from within the present and future due to the simple fact that they are unable to be recorded according to these strict terms. Much in the same way that Halberstam proposes the *queering* of both time and space, Freeman introduced *erotohistoriography* as a means of speaking historically about sex and "insists that various queer social practices, especially those involving enjoyable bodily sensations, produce form(s) of time consciousness, even historical consciousness, that can intervene upon the material damage done in the name of development. Against pain and loss, erotohistoriography posits the value of surprise, of pleasurable interruptions and momentary fulfillments from elsewhere, other times" (59). Here, queerness is a term used to speak about actions left out, and unsaid within social history. The author anchors her discussion of a *historical pleasure* in a reading of melancholia that is bound to the subject's mania. Mania is read by Freeman as an inappropriate sexual response from the past that therefore allows her to express the presence, at least symbolically, of a queer historical narrative.

that uphold national histories and that justify and account for the present social order as a *natural* progression through time fall under a new critical eye. Sexual memory essentially gives historical vision back to the marginalized subject as it understands what one sees to be purely subjective. In a sense, sexual memory provides a lens that allows hindsight to see, and speak about, a past that is hidden behind the myopic nature of dominant culture's approach to the passing of time.

## II. Queer Histories, Sexual Memories: Speaking about Argentina's Marginal Past

Sexuality has provided a framework for understanding, or misunderstanding, social relations. It has been an integral part of sociopolitical discourse and has been a means of defining power hierarchies. As Foucault describes in The History of Sexuality (1976), sexuality must be considered in tandem with economic struggles and political difference as a way of completely appreciating the complexity of the modern capitalist society (5). For Foucault, the 17<sup>th</sup> century becomes a reference point for this comment as it marks both the advent of capitalist politics of repression as well as the discursive explosion of sex (17). Foucault recognizes in this historical moment the beginnings of a particular way of defining the subject itself that extends through to our present in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. He states that “[i]n the space of a few centuries, a certain inclination has led us to direct the question of what we are, to sex. Not so much to sex as representing nature, but to sex as history, as signification and discourse. We have placed ourselves under the sign of sex, but in the form of a *Logic of Sex*, rather than a *Physics*” (78). For Foucault, sex has become not only a way of establishing intimate relations, but it has also become an undeniable way of approaching the public sphere.

Foucault suggests that sex was placed at the forefront of social relations along with notions of modern capitalism sometime during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In Latin America, however, it could be argued that sexuality has provided a way of understanding subjectivity ever since Columbus' arrival in the Caribbean in 1492.<sup>7</sup> The impact sex and sexuality has had on the formation of Latin American subjectivities is due to colonialism

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<sup>7</sup> Osvaldo Bazán, for example, begins his Historia de la homosexualidad en la Argentina (2004) in 1492. Octavio Paz, in his classic El laberinto de la soledad (1950), also elaborates the historical foundation of the Mexican subject to Cortes' union with La Malinche and to the way the consummation of this relationship has forever defined the subject in negative terms through the verb *chingar*.



and the power relations it sustained—power relations understood in terms of sexual force. In Argentina, in particular, sex and sexuality can be regarded as having been inscribed onto power relations and subject formation together along with the nation's Independence in 1810.<sup>8</sup> Although any starting point to any story can be put to debate, what I wish to highlight in the Argentine context is that there exists an historical tradition that has paired the narration of passing time with discourses surrounding hetero and queer sexualities.

In Latin America as a whole, lesbian and homosexual subjects have historically presented a source of agency and rich opposition to the traditional patriarch. The performative nature inherent to sexuality has come to the forefront and become a political statement when queer subjects offer a different way of understanding social reality by simply presenting alternative representations of otherwise fixed notions of masculinity and femininity. In this sense, the presence of queer sexualities has historically cast doubt on the monolithic structural foundation created by a social tradition founded on heteronormativity. Within Latin America, sexualities have provided a model for critically thinking about power relations as Francine Masiello suggests. For Masiello, marginal sexualities have become a tool that has been appropriated by contemporary intellectuals in order to express the complexity of alternative subjectivities in the neoliberal marketplace. In The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberal

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<sup>8</sup> In particular, Jorge Salessi, in his Médicos maleantes y maricas: Higiene, criminología y homosexualidades en la construcción de la nación argentina. (Buenos Aires: 1871-1914) (1995), points to the integration of a discourse surrounding national hygiene as important in synthesizing Argentina's modernization project with the arrival of different medical, military and social discourses: "En el discurso literaria y en el discurso de las nuevas ciencias psicológicas y sociales, distintas construcciones y formas de representación de las desviaciones sexuales sirvieron a distintos propósitos. En primer lugar fueron utilizadas para tratar de controlar, estigmatizar y criminalizar una visible y compleja cultura de homosexuales y travestis extendida en todas las clases sociales del Buenos Aires del período. Pero lo más significativo fue el uso de la construcción de la homosexualidad que también fue inventada, imaginada exageradamente como el mal acechando los espacios claves—escuelas y cuarteles del ejército—en los que se realizaba la formación e instrucción del nuevo sujeto argentino. En esos casos la construcción de la homosexualidad fue utilizada en Argentina para definir y regular nuevas nociones de nacionalidad y clase social..." (179-80).

Crisis (2001), Masiello explores how gender and sexuality hide and disguise—cultural, social, political—meaning, while at the same time providing a means of bridging the gaps that refute communication through difference. Other critics insist that queerness within Latin America allows for particularities to be integrated into traditional forms of social identification that dissociate the subject from normativity without negating dominant cultural trends.<sup>9</sup> In a sense, queer subjects, while representing forms of alternative culture, also recognize the necessity for movement and for a strategic performance of social identity that constantly negotiates the power relations of each social encounter. Marginal sexualities and the queer subjects that embody them therefore engage social interaction in such a way that recognizes the capacity of a codified, often invisible and silent, yet always implied set of communicative forms where both social and historical context are essential in their deciphering.<sup>10</sup> Marginal sexuality, then, presents a way of understanding not only marginal subjects but also marginal discourses that are often defined in official terms as chaotic, disorderly and unintelligible.

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<sup>9</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, in his book titled Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics (1999), explains the particular way in which the queer subject engages with dominant discourses as a process of “disidentification”. This, he explains “is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics of positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (31).

<sup>10</sup> In Tropics of Desire: Interventions from Queer Latino America (2000), José Quiroga looks at the social invisibility of marginality (particularly homosexuality) as a way of approaching the implications of queer relationships and expression within Latin America. Here, Quiroga pushes towards a situational form of understanding queer subjectivity where performance allows queer subjects to mold themselves according to the varying limitations presented by social norms in each particular instance. Accordingly, he states that “[t]he question of the homosexual voice here is not necessarily a question of the closet. The public that knows and can read the code will know exactly what to read...” (25). Important to Quiroga is what is said between the lines: code, then, presents a narrative that is not necessarily seen, nor heard—but does, nonetheless, exist.

During the last quarter of the Twentieth Century, speaking about the past in Argentina has become synonymous with actively calling into question notions of sociopolitical tradition, of power relations and of subjectivity itself. With the memory of years of human rights violations that culminated in Argentina's Dirty War and General Videla's military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, history and the way past events are spoken about in the present have become recognizable tools for misrepresentation and misinformation. As a result, marginal subjects who, in the past, were silenced are now protagonists in a search for the truth that has questioned traditional and official ways of engaging and speaking about the past. The stories of past experiences of marginal subjects and the way subjects engage certain moments in the past become a subversive measure that disrupts power relations within the present by destabilizing a historical narrative dating back to Argentina's founding fathers.

In her important study of the memory of political repression in post-dictatorship Argentina titled State Repression and the Labors of Memory (2003), Elizabeth Jelin explains that "[b]ecause the master national narrative tends to be the story of the victors, there will be others who—whether in the form of private oral stories or as practices of resistance to power—will offer alternative narratives and meanings of the past, threatening the national consensus that is being imposed" (27-8). In this study Jelin addresses the ways that the memory of political violence has been used in Argentina during processes of judicial and social mourning. Jelin parts by elaborating a particular notion of collective memory that is at the same time politicized. According to this author, memory is that which forms groups and communities and it is through shared memory that one facilitates a certain sense of political agency and self worth (2). The

collective aspect of memory narratives allows for the development of antihegemonic discourses and also reflects the power relations that limit social communication and expression. According to Jelin; “The process of constructing and conveying narrative memories involves complex negotiations about what is acceptable and what is to be silenced, what can and cannot be said, in the disjunctions between private narratives and public discourses” (16-7). Understood in this way, narrative memory becomes work—or labor as Jelin codes it. It is a struggle to express the private memory of a silenced past while this same struggle *works* against historical narration only in so far as it reflects what is otherwise silenced by normative discourses and public opinion.

In Argentina, the world of private memories provide a refuge for narrative history that tells of political repression that extended throughout the two decades that span from the early 1960s to the mid ‘80s. The individual memory of the politically repressed provides examples of a narrative history that literally embraces the uncertainties associated with memory itself. Jelin recognizes this and notes that dealing with memory, “entails paying attention to remembrance and forgetting, to narratives and acts, to silences and gestures. Knowledge and information are at play, but so too are emotions, lapses, voids, and fractures” (8). Jelin also insists that speaking about the past through memory distinguishes narrations of Argentina’s ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s from other historical moments where collective versions of the past are synonymous with official history. For Jelin, memories of this particular moment in Argentina’s history are representations of a trauma felt on a collective level. She explains that “[o]ne of the characteristics of traumatic events is the massive character of their impact, creating a gap in the capacity “to be spoken” or told about. This provokes a hole in the ability to represent symbolically

the event. There are no words, and therefore there cannot be memories. Memory remains disarticulated, and only painful traces, pathologies, and silences come to the surface” (23). In this case, the unverifiable, sometimes incongruent and incomplete nature of a traumatic experience becomes the very means that allows marginal historical narration to break with the overarching sociopolitical versions of the past and provide a different truth to explain the present.<sup>11</sup> The memory of social and political marginality particular to Argentina’s Dirty War, as well as the years that surround it, must be understood then as being essential elements that allow for the questioning of traditional historical narration as well as the epistemological order that is derived from it.

Within this particular Argentine context, the silenced memory of the prisoners of the dictatorship is contrasted with the post-dictatorial “search for truth” as seen in the 1985 trial of former military commanders where the traumatized voices of the prisoners protagonize the construction of historical truth. Such a rise to the forefront of dominant discourse of once-marginalized and hidden events calls into question the purpose of this very project. Is there a need to look at the past through sexual memory, when the codified history of the marginal subject seems to already be discovered and spoken about through testimony and private memory? Flavio Rapisardi and Alejandro Modarelli even use testimony and personal memory as a means of engaging the Dirty

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<sup>11</sup> Beatriz Sarlo critically addresses the issue of testimony in the context of Argentina’s post-dictatorship in her *Tiempo pasado* (2005). In this text, Sarlo traces what she deems to be a recent shift in the way marginal subjects are treated. While she recognizes that these subjects remain marginal in nature, they have quickly become the centre of intellectual investigation. The marginal being is now exceptional, she attests, because “se distinguen por una anomalía (el loco, el criminal, la ilusa, la posesa, la bruja), porque presentan una refutación a las imposiciones del poder material o simbólico” (17-8). It is only in this sense that she recognizes the validity of the marginal subject’s memory; that is to say, it is only recognized through its own objectification and as the subject of intellectual research. In this gesture, Sarlo negates the voice of the political margins and at once calls attention to the presence of another form of marginality that itself utilizes the very same tactics to engage stagnant social traditions and the history in which they are founded: the intellectual.

War via a queer, homosexual history in their groundbreaking study of tearoom culture in Buenos Aires, titled Fiestas , baños y exilios: Los gays porteños en la última dictadura (2001). Here, it is the memory of a select group of queer subjects that allows the authors to probe the gay communities' undocumented past before and during the Dirty War. However, as the title of their book suggests, any history of homosexuals must be divided into two parts: one that addresses the parties, the tearooms, the exile; and another that speaks directly to the historical narration of Argentina's last dictatorship. The authors' job is now to mediate this dichotomy in order to speak historically about marginal subjects. This labor is present from the beginning of Fiestas... and evident in the moments Rapisardi and Moradelli insert their own voices into the text. In the middle of the first chapter, for example, we are presented with a discussion of the variety of socioerotic activities of homosexuals and how these interactions have modified leading up to and coming out of Argentina's last dictatorship. This traditional sequence ends with a semicolon followed by an empty line and then several italicized paragraphs lasting just over a page. Just as soon as it began, the italics are closed, a line is left blank and the authors take to the page once more. The result is a thematic and textual fragmentation that reads as follows:

El *dark-room* argentino, el cuarto oscuro de esos comercios donde se trenzan los cuerpos, o lo que los gays porteños llamaban hasta hace poco, en una megadisco, "el túnel", sustituye la orgía gratuita y pública de los baños de la dictadura, haciéndola de ese modo menos radical pero civilizadamente rentable. Su apertura al cliente—su promesa mesiánica de apertura—, por la que los chicos fogosos pagan y esperan en la pista de baile, llega tarde en la madrugada, una vez que se

han vaciado como en libaciones rituales miles de impacientes botellas. Bacanal organizada, pues cuyo precio y supervivencia se pacta aún por lo bajo con las comisarías:

*Cada vez se hace más chico el ghetto, a pesar de que se abren locales nuevos todos los días. Digo ghetto en un sentido diferente, como de un espacio cambiante donde circulamos las 'locas' en busca de aventura, no como zona de exclusión o de encierro, como el de los judíos de Varsovia. Para mí, antes toda la ciudad era un escenario para armar sexo, a pesar de la policía, de los militares. Era cuestión de saber dónde había peligro y entonces evitarlo. Si iba a un lugar de pique y no había nadie, era que había pasado algo o estaba por pasar. Hoy, en cambio, todo queda reducido a los cines pornos, los saunas, los boliches y los taxi-boys. (...)*

La Richard—de su testimonio se trata—habla con gracia y a veces como docente. El *piercing* en el pecho, los complicados tatuajes, la cabeza rapada, el nombre de juego que los amigos le han elegido y que él adopta, son algunas de las transformaciones que, a los cuarenta y tres años, lo alejan de lo que el escritor chileno Pedro Lemebel llama “rasgos del registro civil”. Hay toda una poética del sobrenombre gay, una estrategia que busca ocultar ‘el rostro bautismal’ como marca de fuego del padre. La praxis del apodo absorbe el apellido (paterno), y así Ricardo G. será la Richard o, para otros, la señorita Ricaella. Si se conserva el apellido es sólo para anteponerle el artículo femenino, y travestir y teatralizar una nueva identidad. Así, nuestros ‘atípicos’ ironizan sobre la cultura que los

identifica y estigmatiza, pero también construyen un anonimato que les sirve en las ‘trayectorias infames’ para su supervivencia. (23-5)

The memory of marginal, homosexual subjects and the authors’ analytical commentary appear respectively in italics and normal fonts. This in turn creates a unique textual hybrid that at once separates and unites each voice within the text. Just as the historical narratives addressed in Fiestas... are deemed complicated or confusing enough for them to be engaged by and understood alongside the mediating voices of the authors, so too are the authors’ voices necessarily complimented and activated by the queer memories. Apparently, something may be lost, mistaken, misinterpreted in either section if they are read by themselves, and if we read by ourselves.

In a sense, Rapisardi and Modarelli’s textual presence bridges the gap that separates the memory of social marginality and of queer subjectivity from traditional means of narrating the past. The separation noted here is reflected superficially in the distance between italics and normal script but is confirmed in the thematics of each font. For example, in the italicized historical narratives, queerness is addressed through explicit personal experience. However, Rapisardi and Modarelli separate themselves from this past not just textually with the use of “straight” fonts, but also with a third person narrative that addresses marginality from the outside. In doing so, Rapisardi and Modarelli wedge themselves in between reader and memory narrative and explain to the reading public that they are to be introduced to the nuances of a past defined in queer terms. Fiestas... suggests the complications of speaking historically about marginal subjects as possible, in this case at least, only when mediated by a likewise unique authorial voice.



The complex relationship between historical narration and marginal subjectivity is also put to the test in Osvaldo Bazán's book, Historía de la homosexualidad en la Argentina: De la Conquista de América al siglo XXI (2004). Here, testimony is intertwined with myth, legend and popular culture, in encyclopedic blurbs that focus on particular individuals, communities, themes and significant days, months or years in order to tell a segmented story of homosexualities' journey through time. Although not specifically called an encyclopedia, Bazán's entries provide a textual structure that is essential to its thematic focus. In this way, Bazán presents the history of homosexuality as one that is told through the untold acts of sodomy but also through its persecution. It is a collective history that is told via the personal biography of transvestites, of effeminate male performers, and glimpses into certain political persona. For Bazán, Argentina's queer history must be divided into sections so as to place the nation's Independence in 1810 and the *Revolución Libertadora* of 1955 alongside and on the same level as Freud, AIDS and Argentina's homosexual icons like Manuel Puig. The result is a narrative hybrid that speaks historically about queer subjects in an untraditional fashion and one that embraces its episodic structure as essential to composing the story it wishes to tell.

So, if marginal subjects are speaking and engaging the past through testimony, and through such historical narratives as presented in Fiestas... and Historica de la homosexualidad, does the original question that initiated this discussion—"How do marginal subjects engage the past?"—*really* need to be asked? In the light of the truth commissions and researchers that search to hear the testimony of the repressed and silenced subjects, why question how the marginal subjects engage with the past? Why

propose to look and complicate the situation at all with notions of sexual memory? Let us begin to address these questions by taking a step back to Jelin's text. Here, the author speaks about the relationship between memory, trauma and marginal versions of the past. In this discussion, Jelin addresses sexuality as an important aspect of historical discourse. Gender, she suggests, forces the individual to experience the past, and, in particular, political repression in a certain way.<sup>12</sup> For Jelin, then, it is essential to recognize that the pain and suffering inflicted by repressive mechanisms had distinct gender lines that corresponded to the traditional sociopolitical roles played by both men and women. "Sexual violence was part of torture, and genitals became an unvarying point of reference—the mark of circumcision among Jewish victims became the justification for increased exposure to torture, and the references to penis size and the application of electricity to the testicles became regular practices" (79). Torture and pain were aspects of political repression that were embedded in the gendered body and reflected traditional ways of understanding the ideological predominance of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. Jelin insists that memory and historical narration work in the same way. For example, she signals towards the important role women have played in the fight for human rights and for the telling of the otherwise silenced stories of the "disappeared".

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<sup>12</sup> While for Jelin, sex and gender are different ways of engaging the past, Paul Connerton, author of How Societies Remember (1989), describes sex and gender in and of themselves as memory practices. For Connerton the body is a place where the habitual memory of gender roles and sexual stereotyping are remembered. Connerton explains that individuals "preserve the past deliberately without explicitly representing it in words and images" (72). He specifies that in the case of gender, sex and sexuality, "[t]he memorization of culturally specific postures may be taken as an example of incorporating practices" (73). "In a culture where the characteristic postures of men and women are nearly identical, there may be very little teaching of posture and very little conscious learning of posture. But whenever postural differences are introduced, for example, between the postures appropriate for ceremonial occasions and for everyday activities or between the modes of sitting appropriate for males and females, some awareness of postural appropriateness is involved" (73).

Here, the stereotype of the loving and caring mother, of the woman's *natural* maternal instinct dominate and dictate just how she decides to engage the past. Jelin explains:

Given the gender system prevalent in family relations, besides becoming many of the direct victims of repression, women were predominantly and essentially 'indirect' victims. This is the role with which they are most commonly associated—as relatives of victims: mothers, grandmothers, and to a lesser extent, wives, sisters, daughters, and girlfriends. When kidnapping men, the repressive system affected women in their family and kinship roles, that is, in the core of their traditional identities as mothers and wives. From these social locations, and as a way to survive and meet their expected 'familial obligations,' women had to mobilize other kinds of energy, those based on their 'traditional' roles within the family, anchored in feelings, love, and an ethic of caring and nurturing—a logic that is quite distant from the realm of the political. Two 'typically feminine' kinds of response emerged in this context: in the public sphere, the creation and participation in human rights organizations based on direct kinship with the victims; and in the private sphere, the struggle for family subsistence and the adjustments and changes precipitated by the new circumstances. It is not by simple coincidence or chance that human rights organizations have had familial identifications (*Mothers, Grandmothers, Children, Widows, or Other Kin*). (80)

In this sense, Jelin relates the way the individual engages with the past with the gender relations that defined that particular historical moment. In these terms, memory does nothing but reflect the present. However, the possibility of looking at memory through gender becomes a positive agent in activating new voices that otherwise would not be

heard in normal circumstances—the so-called *maternal instinct* has been attributed for making the woman's voice heard in a society where men often dominate sociopolitical discourse, for example, in the case of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

Jelin's *engendered* memory, as she terms it, provides the marginal subject with a means of looking at the past in a different manner. For her, one must recognize the implications of engaging the past as a woman or man—or any combination thereof—before one actually speaks in a historical narrative. However, sexual memory, as I propose it, extends Jelin's initial and important recognition and at once incorporates the efforts made by Rapisardi, Moradelli and Bazán. Implicit in the notion of sexual memory is the recognition that the way, for example, that the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the testimony of both political prisoners and Rapisardi and Modarelli's queer subjects engage the past is distinctly unorthodox.<sup>13</sup> While order and clarity are without a doubt part and parcel of dominant discourse and its historical narratives, for these marginal subjects coherent narrativity is not a necessity, nor a prerequisite: meaning is derived through and not impeded by the fragmented, chaotic nature of their distinct memory narratives. Here, queerness itself incorporates the codified language that speaks through the pressures of normativity when speaking from the margins involves innovation, creativity and sheer slyness: after all, marginal subjects never stop speaking. Marginal

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<sup>13</sup> Other examples of marginal ways of engaging the memory of Argentina's '60s, '70s and '80s can be seen in the contemporary youth movement that uses graffiti as a means of maintaining the memory of human rights violations alive across generations, called *los escraches* (Vezzetti, Sarlo). The Memory Park and other sites of commemoration in Buenos Aires and throughout the nation can also be thought of in this sense and as a different, unofficial way of engaging a past that avoids chronology and narrative order. Andreas Huyssen suggests that "cities remain the main battleground on which societies articulate their sense of time past and time present. Once embodied in memorial sites as active parts within an urban fabric, remembrance of traumatic events seems less susceptible to the vagaries of memory. Memory thus has a chance to inscribe itself into history, to be codified into national consciousness. Cities, after all, are palimpsests of history, incarnations of time in stone, sites of memory extending both in time and space" (101).

histories are only recognized as a natural act of defiance when their silence becomes heard and their voice becomes an ironic parody and sign of chaos amongst the heterosexual order. As we see in Fiestas... and Historia de la homosexualidad..., textual mediation and the search for familiar narrative structures is the only way to make visible a sexual memory hidden within dominant historical narratives.

The chaos that defines the marginal subject in reference to normativity now becomes that which creates a codified system of communication and of living that is distinctly subversive. It is here that I propose that sex and sexuality not only define the marginal subjects as a product of a sexual hierarchy that separates queer from heterosexual desire, but also provide a way of understanding communication systems. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault insists that sexuality defines social interaction in a push that pairs knowledge with passion. What I propose then, is that sexuality permeates the very communicative structures that narrate social interaction. In this sense, the way in which the marginal subject engages the past becomes a process strictly tied to their subjects' queerness—as defined by official discourse and not so much as a reflection of sexual orientation—and to sexuality itself. The historical narratives of marginal subjects present for us a way of questioning the limitations implicit in traditional forms of approaching and speaking about the past that search for cohesion, clarity and order. In what follows I would like to look at the past and the historical constructions that narrate it via what I am terming sexual memory. A historical narrative that focuses on sex, and in particular, on queer sex becomes a way of distinguishing Argentina's traditional historical narratives from the otherwise silenced stories that tell of their queer subject's past. In this context, engaging a non-normative past involves a narrative that strays from

the clarity and order associated with traditional historical narratives in an attempt to recognize in its very structure the chaos associated with its protagonists.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Judith Butler has suggested in numerous places [Bodies that Matter (1993), Gender Trouble (1999)] the importance of memory systems in the construction of sexual identity. For her, the performative nature of sexuality is only ever able to be a copy of an inexistent original (“Imitation” 310). It is only after having repeated or imitated (im)properly the heterosexual model, producing with it a distinct version of normative sexuality, that the particular sexual identity can be assumed by the individual and recognized or criticized by the onlooker (311). For Butler, then, memory is implicit in the essential acting out of sexuality on a public level.

### III. The State of My Question: (Sexual) Memories of Puig, Copi and Moreno

Post-dictatorship Argentina provides a historical context for the open discussion of marginal pasts. Whether it be in the courts and guiding a Truth Commission, within the university seminar room and the topic of graduate debates, or within the very public fora of television, radio and internet, marginal pasts have come to occupy normative spaces and have cast doubt on just what marginality is. In recent years the history of Argentina's marginal subjects has been a popular object of study. I say this because I was part of this atmosphere: I discussed these marginal stories—and I still do. In fact, the story of marginality in Argentina actually brought me to Buenos Aires during our summer, their winter, of 2007. Marginal memories were not only strong enough to have me create a project worthy of funding, but they drew me to their point of dissemination. In other words, the marginal subject made me move.

I arrived in Buenos Aires on the morning of the first snowfall in over 80 years. I knew from that moment on that my hopes of discovering a thesis topic and of accomplishing the goals of my trip—outlined in my project proposal in five clean, clear and concise bullet points—would soon be put under fire. I had justified my trip with a project that attempted to delve into *gay* Buenos Aires and the up and coming world of gay-tourism as a reflection of a cultural shift that defied the negative foundation attributed to gay men. I had organized interviews, made hostel reservations and had made an itinerary for the necessary sight-seeing. Mid-week and well into the tourism aspect of my trip, I eagerly ran to meet with Daniel Molina, a Professor of Literature at the University of Buenos Aires and Director of the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas. Once in his apartment I asked a few questions and he told me briefly of his days as a militant in

the PRT (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores). He stopped abruptly, however, and turned the conversation quickly to his encounter with Manuel Puig, with the special edition of a journal focusing on Puig where an article of his appears describing this encounter and of an archive of Puig's correspondence with his family that had recently been made public and had been compiled and edited by Graciela Goldchluk. As often is the case, a discussion of the past was drawn directly to and anchored in the present. I was searching—or at least I thought—for an explanation to the political repression felt by the gay community during the Dirty War. What I got instead was an urge to read Puig's letters and the sense that this author of Latin America's boom was being (re)discovered for the first time in his native Buenos Aires.

I left Daniel's apartment and headed to a library that he recommended: one that he said would have the two volume edition I was now looking for. Shortly thereafter I stumbled upon La Internacional Argentina, a quaint hallway turned bookstore and editorial in Buenos Aires' beautiful suburban Palermo. I introduced myself to the owner/editor—as Daniel had directed, and I willingly obeyed—and explained that I was a graduate student working on my thesis project and that I was interested in looking at Puig's letters. Just as soon as I finished, I had 4 books in my hands—none of them by Manuel Puig. Instead, the bookstore's owner, Francisco handed me two books—El Affair Skeffington (1992) and Banco a la sombra (2007)—both by María Moreno, a famed journalist, television personality and colleague of Daniel's at the Cultural Center Ricardo Rojas, and two more—a comic book of approximately one hundred pages featuring simplistic characters and short narratives, and a novel titled El baile de las locas (1977)—by a relatively unknown Argentine author, cartoonist and dramaturge who lived



the majority of his life in Paris, named Copi. At this point I still didn't have Puig's letters in my hands. Francisco told me that Copi was his favorite, that he was César Aira's precursor and a lost gem in Argentina's canon. He told me that María Moreno was a friend of his and that her work was the best Argentina had to offer at the moment, that no one could touch her. As he passed me yet another book, Francisco assured me that both Moreno and Copi were related to Puig. I looked down at what he was handing me and saw, at last, the two volume collection of Puig's letters titled Querida familia (2005). But why was he suggesting that I read these other books? What was it that made these books by Copi and Moreno the first in a much larger stack of others that he wished to sell this needy graduate student? Was Manuel Puig to be seen as the *only* link between them or just the first of many steps of this journey I call my doctoral thesis?

In the opening pages of Elizabeth Jelin's book, the author begins by stating that we live in a culture of memory. In no other place can this statement be better proven than in contemporary Argentina. Take my encounter with Daniel Molina, Francisco Garamona and my bag full of books by Manuel Puig, Copi and Maria Moreno: together they reflect a move for cultural recuperation and innovation that involves uncovering the hidden and questioning that which is already known. It is a process that Garamona forms a part of and that Moreno and Molina are its protagonists. The three together exemplify a community made up of academics, intellectuals, editors and artists—although either one of these individuals engages all and none of these classifiers at one time—whose motivation is to speak from within and about the margins and principally activate a collective experience that was silenced within Argentina during the 1960s, '70s and '80s. In a sense, they provide an explanation and justification for the pages that follow that is

nevertheless incomplete and unsatisfactory in any traditional sense. In fact, my own memory of the relationship between Manuel Puig, Copi, Maria Moreno and the others, and particularly the way that I have been integrated into this story proves just as unlikely a way of prefacing a discussion of a series of texts. After all, the story it tells does seem too good to be true, a little too perfect, and a little too much of a coincidence to be true in any sense. But, that is the way I remember this particular moment in my life. Or at least, this is the way I have chosen to remember it.

If this historical narrative is to be of any worth, however, it is to provoke a desire to read between the lines and through the clarity of its order to see a story—of a graduate student in Buenos Aires—that is definitely located on the periphery. In this story it becomes clear that one must see the past a little less clearly and as a little less complete in order to come to understand anything at all. The fact of the matter is, time really does fly by. It is not so much what happens that forms the stories we tell, but what we see and how we record it. Speaking historically then becomes much more a visual process that we would first imagine. We can say that historical narration becomes a visual process in the sense that “*hindsight is 20/20*”. As we recall, it is only within the present that we can perfectly regard the past or, on the contrary, have the past blocked from us by our own historical blindness. Attributing history with a visual quality also forces us to see the structure of our stories and literally the way they look as being equally important to the pasts’ they narrate. Only then can historical narration refer to what is both on and in between the lines on the page. Only then can we read history through the perfect clarity of 20/20 vision and the blind darkness of the socially unknown and misunderstood.

To be able to answer the question that guides this dissertation one must first part from traditional historical formations in order to see that significant relations can be made that are inexplicable. This study will approach Puig's narrative silences, Copi's archive of the margins and read into Moreno's historical parody not only as a means of witnessing different ways marginal subjects engage the past, but also to speak historically itself. After all, I too am telling the story of my own past and of a past that I have yet to see. This story told in three chapters is one that speaks of a relationship that is essential to understanding contemporary notions of marginality in Argentina. While this story may focus on literary texts written by Puig, Copi and Moreno, it ultimately articulates just why I was given this group of authors in the first place. What follows speaks directly to just why Puig, Copi and Moreno were deemed as representative of a particular historical moment in Argentina's ever changing past. In fact, what follows is a historical narrative told in different terms. It is my own sexual memory.

Chapter 1. Hearing Silent Voices: Manuel Puig, Prison Narratives, and El beso de la mujer araña

“He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection.”

Michel Foucault Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison

Manuel Puig occupies a special place in the memory of contemporary Latin American literary and cultural criticism. In the Argentine context, in particular, his name is synonymous with political exile, literary censorship and sexual discrimination. Puig and his work are now part of a historical moment being discovered again for the first time.<sup>15</sup> Beatriz Sarlo is one of many who have recently mentioned Puig as part of a revisionist history that attempts to come to terms with historical absences. She makes reference to Puig in a recently anthologized series of her own essays under the title Escritos sobre literatura argentina (2007). In it, she organizes a variety of different themes in four parts—“Ser escritor, ser argentino, ser porteño,” “Siglo XX: Primeras décadas,” “Clásicos del siglo XX,” and “Leer en presente”. Sarlo claims these four chapters to contain everything that she deems relevant, in her own work at least, regarding Argentine literature.

Amongst the pages that make up the third section, “Clásicos del siglo XX,” we find numerous essays on Victoria Ocampo, Jorge Luis Borges, Roberto Arlt, Julio

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<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that 1997 can be regarded as the initial intent to remember Manuel Puig. At this time, at the Universidad Nacional de la Plata, José Amícola and Graciela Speranza organized the Encuentro Internacional Manuel Puig with the sole purpose of “llevar a cabo una acción colectiva que aglutinara los esfuerzos individuales (originados en muy distintos centros de investigación académica) con el propósito de recolocar a Manuel Puig dentro del campo de las letras argentinas” (Amícola Encuentro 7). What followed was a series of significant attempts at activating a memory—the memory of Puig—within Argentina itself and within the academic world that studies it. The first significant move towards this was the publication of the Colección Archivos edition of El beso de la mujer araña in 2002. Other important works related to this re-memory are the literary biography by Susan Jill Levine, titled Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman: His Life and Fictions (2000) as well as Graciela Speranza’s Manuel Puig: Después del fin de la literatura (2000), whose title anticipates the tone of the authors commented on in this section.

Cortázar, and, with the most entries of all, Juan José Saer. At the end of a list of eight authors and their corresponding pieces by Sarlo, is the shortest section, with the fewest number of entries: a single one and a half page blurb about Manuel Puig. Titled “El brillo, la parodia, Hollywood y la modestia,” this short piece describes Puig’s work in counterculture terms and as having rejected Argentina’s long sought-after literary traditions. In it Sarlo draws particular attention to the importance of understanding Puig in terms of Argentina’s other authors. According to Sarlo, Puig

actuaba como si la literatura del siglo XX ya no tuviera nada que decir: había que des-aprenderla y, al mismo tiempo, el des-aprendizaje suponía reconocer los textos des-aprendidos. No había que escribir como Borges, ni como Kafka, ni como Faulkner. Prefirió, fuera de la literatura (o dentro de ella pero bien marginalmente), otras historias que valían la pena. Como pocos, Puig mostró una distancia desinteresada respecto de las vanguardias clásicas. (323)

Sarlo’s comments become noteworthy when they recognize Puig and his novels in terms of difference. Even before she actually speaks about him, we know from his very position within her index, that Puig is considered here to be a marginal figure among Argentina’s literary elite. According to Sarlo’s description, Puig tells the stories of *others*. Sarlo goes on to explain that, in Puig’s case, speaking about *others* goes hand in hand with his innovative role as author. In his novels, Puig hides his role as author and distinguishes himself and his texts from his contemporaries and from literary history itself. “Puig practica el estilo liso, que se esconde,” Sarlo suggests. “Pero, al esconderse de este modo, la ausencia de estilo se señala a sí misma espectacularmente” (323). In a sense, Puig’s textual absence is exactly what wins him a spot within Sarlo’s list of the

“most relevant” authors in Argentina’s Twentieth Century. However, it is Puig’s different way of approaching authorship that makes his place within literary history difficult for Sarlo to assess.

Sarlo’s short essay posits Puig, and the marginal stories he tells, (inadvertently) on the margins of Argentina’s literary history. After all, what place does an author-less text have in a history of authorship? How can you situate in time an author’s greatness, or even the authority to greatness, if the author, and its authority, is not present in any recognizable terms? Sarlo’s position on Puig is further reflected when we take a closer look at the structural appearance of this anthology and the location of this one and a half page essay within it. On the one hand, Sarlo locates her comments on Puig at the end of her own list of so-called “Twentieth Century classics”. In this sense, Sarlo recognizes the difficulty of establishing generational lines in accordance with chronology when she places Puig at the end of Argentina’s traditional literary history. Instead of insisting on creating a place for him in between Arlt and Saer, Sarlo locates Puig by himself and at the end of a chronological time line. For Sarlo, Puig’s texts are not only author-less, but also difficult to situate in traditional time lines. However, understood in a different light, Puig’s awkward place at the end of the third section and at the end of Argentina’s classic literary history makes him an entry point to the timeless history of reading and a new way of thinking temporally about literary traditions. After all, it can’t be a coincidence that the next and final section of Sarlo’s anthology is titled “Reading in the Present” and that it is here where we read thematic commentary that loses touch with and separates itself from traditional chronological and generational ways of speaking about literary history.

Sarlo is not the only critic in recent years to have remembered Puig on the border and in between two very different historical periods. In Sexualidades en disputa: Homosexualidades. literatura y medios de comunicación en América Latina (2005), Daniel Balderston and José Quiroga refer to Puig in similar terms when they use his El beso de la mujer araña (1976) as a platform to engaging an intertextual discussion of Latin American homosexualities and marginal discourses. For these authors, Puig's novel serves as a necessary entry point to notions of social and political difference. While this in itself is a significant statement and a compliment of the highest nature to Puig's literary project, what draws me to this particular critical discussion of Puig is the way in which Puig's novel El beso... is presented initially to the reader. In fact, the first sentence of these authors' text takes us directly to El beso... as it makes it the marker of cultural difference. For Balderston and Quiroga, Puig's novel "separa un tiempo de otro, que marca un antes y un después en la representación homosexual" (Balderston 13). In this opening observation, Balderston and Quiroga do two things. First and foremost, they mark Puig's novel, and not dominant discourses, as a necessary point of departure to a discussion on marginal sexuality within Argentina and Latin America in general. Political discourse and historical narrations that give precedence to medical, psychological and military traditions have no place. It is Puig's novel that provides us a way into marginality.

However, these opening words do something else that is of equal or more importance. In their attempt to highlight the nuances of Puig's text, Balderston and Quiroga signal a necessary relationship between representing marginality and breaking with chronological time that pushes us to consider the simultaneity of being both "before

and after” as characteristic of marginal subjects, or at least, a necessary transgression for expressing social alterity. Balderston and Quiroga suggest in this opening passage that the story told is no longer the only aspect in representing social interaction. What Puig’s text does, then, is not only address the complexity of marginal subjectivity, but also question the effects traditional notions of time have on considering the social subject. In this light, the comments made by Beatriz Sarlo, Daniel Balderston and José Quiroga together suggest that behind discussions of literary canons, national history and marginal subjectivity are a careful negotiation of historical narration largely lost to the critical eye.

It is in this sense that for these authors, Manuel Puig becomes much more than just an author of *author-less* stories, and El beso... becomes much more than a text that marks a moment in Argentina’s literary and national history when sexuality and political liberation are considered on the same level. These authors suggest that Puig himself, and El beso..., in particular, together represent a way of thinking historically about socially and politically marginalized subjects. Speaking about Puig then becomes a move towards remembering in a different way and in a way that steps outside traditional literary histories and evades the restrictions implicit in chronological time. In what follows, I intend to further pursue the implicit suggestions made by Sarlo, Balderston and Quiroga and delve into the way Puig himself remembers and the way the protagonists of El beso... engage the story of their own marginal subjectivity in a historical narrative that lies on the outside of tradition itself. Here, the normative confines of social persecution and punishment prove to be no match for a history that takes shape without reference to time, context and narrative traditions.



## I. Puig's Prison Narrative, Part One: Paraphrasing Pasts, Narrating Difference.

El beso de la mujer araña by Manuel Puig takes place within the intimate confines of a prison cell and tells the story of two men, Valentin and Molina, who are condemned for their respective political and sexual dissidences.<sup>16</sup> In this novel, the jail cell is much more than the four walls that confine its prisoners: it is representative of a historical tradition of political repression and social stereotyping that has systematically punished political opposition and male homosexuality. Puig's decision to locate his story in the prison cell, rather than simply on the *outside* and on the limits of the socially acceptable, becomes a strategic way of questioning a historical foundation that lies at the heart of marginality itself. In El beso..., the prison cell represents a depository for the historically abject and for a part of social history that is hidden by the overpowering dominant discourses. Puig enters the prison cell in order to listen to their story and uncover just one of the narrative histories of marginality, told from the most marginal of spaces.

In El beso..., the prison cell proves to be social exclusion *par excellence* and a place where the protagonists speak, act and live in the face of the historical tradition that has placed them there. From the outside the prisoners' voices are silent. From the inside, however, the murmur of social marginality comes to life as we come closer to the doors of the cells that house and define political, legal and even sexual difference. It is here where Puig's text places us. Here we are within ears shot distance of the stories prisoners tell. In a sense, El beso... brings us safely inside the modern Latin American penitentiary system much in the same way Michel Foucault does in the European context with Discipline and Punish: The Birth of The Prison (1975). In Foucault's text we are

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<sup>16</sup> Throughout my analysis of El beso... I will be citing the Random House edition published in Spanish in 1994. I have used the *Archivos* edition, by José Amícola and Jorge Panesi as a reference guide and a point of comparison.

invited to observe the nuances of the penitentiary system from within Bentham's Panopticon and from the model upon which the modern jail is built and from which comes the pressures of dominant society itself. Alongside Foucault's words, we witness the effects of dominant discourse and the usefulness of "the backlighting" to see social mishaps. It is in this way that we are situated and "observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery" (200). In Discipline and Punish, Bentham's Panoticon takes central stage as we realize that power relations are evident and are closely tied to the vigilant eye. For Foucault, the penitentiary is an allegory for social interaction. In both cases he considers visibility to be a trap (200). The prisoner—and marginal subject alike— "is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (200). In this sense, it is no surprise that Foucault's text decides to observe, and not listen to or represent, the words of the prisoner. It is in this that Foucault and Puig differ.

In El beso..., Puig takes us out of Bentham's central tower and sits us down in front of the prisoner's cell in order to tell us the story of the prisoner. Here, Puig shows himself different from Foucault's fascination with penitentiary discourse's ability to perforate all aspects of society. After all, Puig's story literally comes from the margins of what Foucault discusses. While Foucault discusses disciplinary apparatus and institutional mechanisms of vigilance, Puig goes right to the cell, and right to the heart, or story, of the punished and watched over. He seems to ask with irony, "What harm is there in hearing the prisoners speak anyway? The worst that could happen is that we understand how their voices perforate the dominant discourses that confine and define them." In this sense, Puig responds to the foucaultian "prison-master-that-sees-all" when

he joins the prisoner's voice together with a way of life and a way of interacting with normative guidelines, restrictions and impositions. In fact, in Puig's novel, listening allows us to *see* much more than what is explicitly visible. In it we hear, and, more importantly, witness marginality as it works through normativity and a historical tradition that refuses to hear its voice. Here we witness the prisoners narrate their story and their history in their own terms despite their place within the discursive darkness.

In the opening page of Puig's novel we are essentially presented with nothing more than voices. The voices of the prisoners are the only thing that we have access to as they are the only thing capable of permeating the limits of the prison cell walls. However we, as readers, never seem to be able to completely understand their context nor meaning. The first lines read as follows: “—A ella se le ve que algo raro tiene, que no es una mujer como otras. Parece muy jovén, de unas veinticinco años cuanto más, una cara un poco de gata, la nariz chica, respingada, el corte de cara es... más redondo que ovalado, la frente ancha” etcétera, etcétera (9). The narration continues for two more lines and then seems to switch voices: “--¿Y los ojos?” With this curious introduction, Puig presents us with the voices of his protagonists and directs us to a series of questions: What is going on? Where are we? Who is talking? Or better still, where are the protagonists telling their story from and what are they talking about? The text itself becomes a dialogue between the narrative voice and ourselves, the reader, that creates more questions than answers. From the beginning we feel like we are left on the outside of this prison cell dialogue. We do not seem able to understand it at all and while we eagerly listen, our voices are never heard, our questions are never answered and we are never able to see or be seen by the protagonists we are tacitly engaging with. We are the odd man out. We realize very

quickly that this is precisely our place in Puig's text and within a story that allows marginal subjects to speak. We are here to listen.<sup>17</sup>

The initial dialogue that Puig provides between the narrative voice on the page and us, the reader, becomes a strategic means of establishing that this will be a story that can only be heard, but not modified, mediated, or messed with by an outside authority. This becomes more evident when we take into account that the text itself, and the words on the page, have no origin: that is, the voice that comes from the page has no name or person that speaks them. Unlike other textual dialogues found, for example, in the theatre, or in mass communications, the voice that comes from the prison cell has no name preceding the words spoken. Instead, the words fall within their natural, unmediated context and a context that we do not have access to. After all, the words that are spoken come from lips that we don't see. They are in the cell and they are separated from us. Without names to classify the words and without a place for us to voice our own opinions, Puig's text essentially becomes an inner-dialogue coming from within marginality itself. But we, as readers, are not even able to see that. Sitting on the other side of the prison cell doors, we see nothing at all: from this perspective there are no

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<sup>17</sup> Eric Iversen refutes any notion that Puig's text is representative of syntactical anarchy when he sees in Puig's protagonists and the narrative they tell a repetition of Realist aesthetics and symbolic account of modern prison reform. For him, "Valentín and Molina can be seen to represent the old and new philosophies of prison sentences, and the text, in aligning these different philosophies at the level of form or discourse rather than content or story, ultimately conforms to the ethos of realist narrative that Bender associates with the penitentiary idea. The old prisons, as Bender explains, were basically holding cells, not correctional houses, where prisoners awaited judgment, usually in the form of death or exile. Valentin is just such a prisoner. He is, as his court record says, 'awaiting judgment,' and for his crime of political subversion he is likely to pay with his life. Prison for him [Valentin] is a liminal realm between life and death and includes the experiences that Victor Turner has delineated as central to the liminal state in his book *The Forest of Symbols*. In a liminal state, the ordinary rules of social interaction do not apply to the subject, who becomes the target of random and often debasing treatment representing symbolic death and rebirth, which can, however, also result in real death" (76).

prisoners, there is no condemnation, nor punishment, for these are details that are kept from us and only revealed after we are well into the story.

As Puig begins his novel and as we are slowly immersed into narrative difference, it becomes clear that marginality goes hand in hand with how a story is told and how events are expressed and revealed within it. In this sense, Puig's unmediating authorial role reveals itself to be much more akin to that of scribe to the voice of the powerless.<sup>18</sup> After all, there is a lot of information Puig as scribe to the prisoners' tale doesn't reveal and simply can't give us: his novel is not an all access pass to social alterity as we once may have thought. In it, Puig does not narrate the actions that accompany his protagonists' words. He does not tell us of the conditions within which they live, nor does he narrate the nature of their arrival in the cell. The author is not enough to give us a clear picture of the action taking place. Instead Puig's text forces us to listen to this story and hear what the prisoners want us to hear.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, traditional notions of

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<sup>18</sup> In the Argentine context, authority has gone hand in hand with authorship. According to Doris Sommer, narrative was conceived as a temporal building block to Argentina's subjective foundation where "writers were encouraged both by the need to fill in a history that would help to establish the legitimacy of the emerging nation and by the opportunity to direct that history toward a future ideal" (7). Intellectuals such as Bernardino Rivadavia, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Bartolomé Mitre presented examples of a true intellectual presence at the highest of national positions. Nevertheless, intellectuals that were not directly linked to the formal leadership of the country assumed an equally influential role in the nation's formation. Juan Bautista Alberdi, Esteban Echevarria, and José Mármol, formed part of the intellectual Generation of 1837 together with Sarmiento, and, as a group, represented the lettered struggle to mold their idealizing words around the concept of a true, modern Argentine nation. Here the author and politician, united in one figure, populated this empty sociopolitical space by naming and identifying a new community via a symbolic system that they themselves were able to create.

<sup>19</sup> Puig's text can be understood as responding to a national tradition of contrasting *civilization* with *barbarism*, making the act of writing itself a defining feature of the powerful. As Julio Ramos observes in the context of Argentina's 19th century: "*Escribir*, en ese mundo, era dar forma al sueño modernizador; era 'civilizar': ordenar el sinsentido de la 'barbarie' americana" (19). The intellectual's goal never did include the recognition or acceptance of cultural diversity: their goal was to instead establish social difference as part of Argentina's promising future. For example, Alberdi believed the writer "should persist in his mission of addressing the crowd anyway; it was the duty of the moment, the contribution of the present to the future" (Prieto 260). Accordingly, Alberdi believed that the intellectual elite should write for the lower classes, "without paying any attention to what they may say. They have no voice in the matter. They are the masses" (260). Recalling the words spoken by Angel Rama in his The Lettered City, with his pen at his side, the intellectual gave a spirit to the nation.

authorship give way to the contemporary *testimonio*. Paraphrasing John Beverly's comments on Twentieth Century Latin American testimony found in this book titled Against Literature (1993), Puig provides a medium with which the marginal subject can reveal its sociopolitical hardships (Beverley 70-4).<sup>20</sup> In this sense, Puig is literally left out of the story much the same way we are.<sup>21</sup>

The prisoners' discussions are complicated by this very narrative structure. Speaking from behind the closed doors of their prison cell, and from a space hidden from our view, the prisoner's voice evades physical confinement itself and is able to free the social subject from normative classification. In fact, we are only able to deduce that there are two voices and that these belong to two different prisoners by organizing their words and voices in time, working back from their moment of enunciation so as to place them with respect to the initial speech act. It is only after we deduce *who* speaks *when* that we can approach this text with any certainty at all. But narrative clarity and precision do not come naturally to us. They are instead elements only accessible to those that speak.

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<sup>20</sup> *Testimonio* here provides a particular way of speaking about social interaction that contrasts with a literary tradition that associates power with autobiography. Such a tradition can be dated back to Argentina's founding fathers and the writings of Sarmiento in particular. Ricardo Piglia explains: "during the entire nineteenth century, in order to speak of oneself, to tell about one's group or one's class, autobiography is used. Learned men account for themselves in the form of true tales; they account for others with fiction" (133). In this case, the intellectual elite inscribed their own voice thematically into the development of a national story that told of *true* progress and change. Here, reading into Piglia's comments, it was the intellectual's narrative style and the strategic way he spoke about his particular past, more than the content of his tale, that allowed him to be written into Argentina's historical annals. At the same time, the *other*, as Piglia puts it, or the marginal subject's place within narrative fiction not only excluded him from being considered within the realm of the *real*, but also relegated marginality to the dusty stacks of the library—the fiction section, we must not forget—and far from the forefront of Argentina's modernizing ideals. More insight on Sarmiento's place within Argentina's modernist project, such as the parallel he as author makes between his personal development and that of the nation (Halperín Donghi) can be found in Sarmiento: Author of a Nation, Eds. Tulio Halperín Donghi, Iván Jaksic, Gwen Kirkpatrick, and Francine Masiello. U. of California P.: Berkeley, 1994. Benedict Anderson also locates political power, historical *realness* and writing in Argentina's 19<sup>th</sup> century in his book titled, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (1993).

<sup>21</sup> Jorgelina Corbatta considers Puig's intentional absence from his text as both a move away from traditional notions of 19<sup>th</sup> century authorship to that of a more contemporary, Freudian absence. In this case, the most important aspect is not so much what the author/authority says, but how it organizes the textual *montage* (182).

Confusion, ambiguity and the imagination are now the ways in which we engage *their* story and the way we perceive *their* marginality. The very voices that we have just identified, in fact, remain ambiguous and indefinite when they are presented on the page without any identification. In this sense, they are reduced automatically to one single voice and we are reduced, once again, to confusion. Right from the beginning, our own way of approaching the text is in direct conflict with the way it is presented to us. We naturally associate clarity and order with meaning and understanding. Puig's characters do nothing of the sort.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, our situation as passive listener of this story and as Puig's own personal invitee into the penitentiary system is magnified when our presence goes unnoticed by the protagonists of this tale. When the novel begins, Molina and Valentín are already engaged in a discussion that we enter midstride. The opening line losses us immediately in a context that is unsaid, unexplained and apparently unimportant. We approach the first line with no avail: “—A ella se le ve que algo raro tiene” (Puig 9). Above and beyond the oral quality of the text that we read, the details spoken say nothing to appease the series of natural questions of *who*, *what*, *when*, *why* and *where*, that result from our initial approach to the text. The answers we are given as the conversation continues refuse to calm our momentary confusion, and instead tell the personal story of the two cellmates in a delayed fashion and according only to their own desire to reveal such information and to the appropriateness of the situation in which they find themselves.

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<sup>22</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, in *Tiempo pasado*, speaks of the authority attributed to the testimonial narratives of political prisoners. While she tends towards a more critical evaluation of human rights abuses that are addressed in contemporary *testimonio*, she also proposes a critical distance in speaking about the past. Understood in this way, Molina and Valentín do just that: they construct a narrative past through debate and a reached common ground. Although the memory that they reconstruct is of a past that anticipates Argentina's 1976 military coup, memory narratives nonetheless represent a means of coping in the midst of a violent present.

Here, the questions that we ask seem to fall on deaf ears when the prisoners tell us their story, in their own terms.

Our position outside the cell is that of official discourse. From this position we try to make sense of the marginal subjects as we place them in our epistemological systems. In order to understand Puig's novel we must insist on organizing the information it gives us. We open Puig's novel and enter the cellmates' dialogue with these words: "—A ella se le ve que algo raro tiene, que no es una mujer como otras. Parece muy joven, de unas veinticinco años cuanto más, una cara un poco de gata, la nariz chica, respingada, el corte de cara es... más redondo que ovalado, la frente ancha, los cachetes también grandes pero que después se van para abajo en punta, como los gatos" (9). However, it is not until we read well past these lines that we are actually able to understand them. It is then that we realize that they form part of a conversation between two men and that they are within a jail cell. However, it is not until we read these first lines for the second time that we realize that they come from Molina, and not Valentín, the other prisoner within this cell, and that the story he is telling pertains to a memory narrative of a movie he once saw.<sup>23</sup> Until we are given and then able to organize the information that we need to understand Puig's text, we, essentially, are forced to read and experience the confusion of the blind when all we see are words before us. Until we have the whole picture, we only hear uncertainty. Clarity and understanding come as an aftereffect and as a product of our

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<sup>23</sup> In her book length study of Puig's work, titled Manuel Puig: del pop a la extrañeza, Roxana Páez speaks of the *monstrous* textual and narrative quality of Puig's work. In her discussion of El beso de la mujer araña she outlines, in detail, the six movies that Molina narrates in the cell. The first is Cat People (1942) by Jacques Tourneur; the second, Destino: a nazi propaganda film that Puig invented himself and based loosely on Die grobe Liebe (1942); the third, a rewriting of The Enchanted Cottage (1946) by John Crommwell; the fourth is a movie invented completely by Puig himself and tells of a racecar driver; the fifth, a movie based on I Walked with a Zombie (1943), also by Jacques Tourneur; and the last is in the tradition of the Mexican Cabaret films with Agustín Lara, María Félix and María Antonieta Pons, but does not follow any one in particular (Páez 92-3).



own doing. The text we have before us does not mean to be understood by us. After all, our following the prisoners' discussion is the least of their worries.<sup>24</sup>

The stories Molina and Valentín share are easily understandable when they are considered from within the prison cell itself. However, this is never the case and the structure, content and reception of this prison narrative as we perceive it from the outside continues to demand decodification on our behalf in order to understand the events in a clear, orderly fashion. In this sense, their story and the dialogue itself confronts traditional power relations as soon as we engage the text. Despite the fact that there isn't sufficient information for us to completely understand the context of what is going on, of where it is taking place and of what it is talking about, the dialogue itself keeps going without us. The prisoners keep speaking and Molina's story and movie recreation continue to be told. However, in this process, it becomes evident that this is not just any memory narrative and that this is not just any movie being told. Molina's memory narrative of the movie is in fact the only way that he is able to speak about the prison he is in, and the reason he is in it. The story he recollects is the only way he is able to engage the outside world through the confining walls of his prison cell. In a sense, the movie and its memory narrative are the only way Molina is able to escape from the confinement of traditional power relations and speak about himself. That is, as he

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<sup>24</sup> Of course, the silence to which I refer is in relation to the prisoners influence on social activity and influence outside of the prison walls. One must recognize the realness and unique quality of the *noise* (in every sense of the word) that is present within these boundaries. The particular *noise* within this prison cell is a *noise* that is made from other prisoners and not from those located outside the cell. This unique quality of prison narratives is further described in Emilio de Ípola's La bamba: acerca del rumor carcelario y otros ensayos (2005), where the fragmented nature of jailhouse conversations becomes a threat to the prison's authorities. In Puig's case, and in his El beso..., such a noise can appear false, or constructed. Mario Goloboff suggests this when he states that "Puig pone palabras, exclusivamente palabras, al dolor de sus personajes, pero no las palabras nacidas en ellos sino las que en ellos han impuesto los medios, haciéndolos creer que son de ellos. Y nos muestra algo que en otros tiempos habríamos llamado "alienación", es decir, hasta qué punto esas hablas, y los seres que por ellas se hablan, no se pertenecen" (76). Goloboff considers the fact that Molina and Valentín represent particular stereotypes a negative aspect of Puig's text since it provides for his protagonists a way to speak that is separate from themselves.

reconstructs the movie, he too reconstructs and reveals how he considers himself in social terms.

Right from the first paragraph we notice this dual quality about the movie narrative Molina is reconstructing. In it he is speaking about a woman and describing her physically. However, his first comment—at least the first that we read—is to direct attention to the fact that she is “not like other women” (9). At the same time we realize that *this* woman is not like others, we realize that Molina must understand *how* these *other* women are. In this sense, as Molina narrates the movie, he also narrates certain details that define him as a person. Here, as he describes the woman, he also describes himself. Here, Molina becomes a self declared expert on all that is *womanly* and a stickler for aesthetic and physical detail. After all, how would Molina be able to distinguish *this* woman from *that* if they all were the same to him. In any case, it is the memory narrative and Molina’s personal touch to a history that is not at all his own that allows us to see, even momentarily, into his own person and into his own past.<sup>25</sup> It is essentially this piece of himself told through the movie narrative that is the first thing that we hear. Essentially, it is the first thing to perforate the walls of the prison cell and the walls of dominant discourse itself. Here, Molina’s affinity for feminine aesthetics and a

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<sup>25</sup> The movies narrated by Molina have been regarded by contemporary literary criticism as representing a counter discourse to the sociopolitical authorities that place Molina and Valentín in jail (O’Conner, Rosenkratz). In El discurso utópico de la sexualidad en Manuel Puig, Muñoz draws attention towards the content of the cultural references mentioned in Puig’s novel and the effect it has on Puig’s protagonists: “En contra de lo que ocurre en las películas, en la novela el personaje que alcanza un triunfo (simbólico) es él que ha desafiado el discurso de los medios masivos, poniendo en tela de juicio la “naturalidad” del mundo que éstos proyectan” (Muñoz 66). What Muñoz suggests here is that Molina and Valentín’s actions within the prison cell are considered as antagonistic to any notion of normativity, whether it be within pop culture or official discourse. Guillermina Rosenkrantz furthers such a perspective when she notes a connection between Molina’s filmic narrations and the autobiography that is unraveled in the cell by both prison mates. She observes: “La ficción de los textos narrativos de las películas prefigura, anticipa y articula lo que se presenta a nivel de la ficción del texto. Es decir, los relatos fílmicos tematizan las cuestiones que Puig desarrolla en la novela” (36). However, it is in recognizing the movies as both a part of and different from both prisoners’ pasts that we can extent already established critical moves regarding their narration.

narrative style that attempts to reconstruct a movie are the first things to confront us as readers on the outside and the first things to demand we organize the information we receive. The first line of Puig's text, and the first words that we hear Molina speak present us with the template for how to read and listen to marginal stories. With them we are told that marginal subjects engage social history through different narrative paths and through paths that require a different set of codes to decipher.

Valentín's role in this prison dialogue is likewise significant. His role as recipient of Molina's memory narrative and movie reconstructions is essential in him being able to voice his own past in narrative terms. During Molina's descriptive memory narrative, Valentín's voice is revealed to be much like our own: silent and full of question marks. For the first two pages, he, like us, doesn't stop asking questions: "—¿Y los ojos? (...) —¿El animal no la puede oler antes? (...) —¿No hay gente en el zoológico ese día? (...) —¿Y ella no tiene frío?" (9-10). In this initial series of interrogations, Valentín shows himself to be an active listener to Molina's tale. However, different from ourselves, he is inside the prison cell where his voice can be heard. Here, Valentín speaks only in order to draw attention to the narrative voids that, in his opinion, must be filled and clarified. He is, in this sense, a critical check to an otherwise unverifiable story, and representative of a counterculture that opposes traditional notions of authorship and authority. While we are forced to stay quiet, or better still unheard from the other side of the prison cell's walls, Valentín does not allow his inquiries to be left on the wayside. He insists on questioning Molina's voice and makes Molina a narrator, and author to this original movie narrative and authority to a past experienced in singular terms, a target for a critical perspective. In one fair swoop, Valentín rids Molina of any hierarchal position he

may have had and at once draws attention to just how storytelling, the movie's reconstruction, and the narration of past events come about. Only in this way are we able to see Valentín as representative of a critical opposition to any authority.

However, Valentín's status within the dialogue is quickly modified when Molina addresses his concerns. This takes place as early as the first question asked by Valentín and initiates a narrative technique that continues throughout the prison cell dialogues. By the second page of the novel Molina's response turns into a dialogue that questions and alters the movie he is reconstructing. By this point, Molina is well under way telling his oral version of a movie titled Cat People (1942) directed by Jacques Tourneur. Molina's story tells of a woman's obsession and strange attraction to a black panther she observes at a local zoo. Molina presents the scene at the zoo as follows: "Hace frío, es invierno. Los árboles del parquet están pelados. Corre un aire frío. La chica es casi la única, ahí sentada en el banquito plegadizo que se trae ella misma, y el atril para apoyar la hoja del dibujo. Un poco más lejos, cerca de la jaula de las jirafas hay unos chicos con la maestra, pero se van rápido, no aguantan el frío" (9-10). At this point, Valentín chimes in, in order to clear up a doubt that is obviously bothering him. "—¿Y ella no tiene frío?" Valentín asks. "—No, no se acuerda del frío," Molina responds, "está como en otro mundo, ensimismada dibujando a la pantera" (10). However, Valentín's comments don't stop here. He continues to demand that Molina's story correspond with his own way of understanding it when he continues to question his cellmate's narrative style: "—Si está ensimismada no está en otro mundo. Ésa es una contradicción" (10). The exchange between the two continues when Molina agrees:

--Si, es cierto, ella está ensimismada, metida en el mundo que tiene adentro de ella misma, y que apenas si lo está empezando a descubrir. Las piernas las tiene entrelazadas, los zapatos son negros, de taco alto y grueso, sin puntera, se asoman las uñas pintadas de oscuro. Las medias son brillosas, ese tipo de malla cristal de seda, no se sabe si es rosada la carne o la media.

--Perdón pero acordate de lo que te dije, no hagas descripciones eróticas. Sabés que no conviene.

--Como quieras. Bueno, sigo. (10)

Molina's refined version is definitely clearer, more concise and in this sense, told according to Valentín's critical eye. However, although Molina's new narrative is now a composite, and made with his cellmate's input—and the input of someone who has never seen the movie in question—it nevertheless maintains a narrative middle ground that favors neither its narrator nor its interlocutor. The end result is a narrative accord agreed upon between Molina and Valentín and a movie narrative, or to be more precise, a memory narrative of a movie that attempts to join marginality itself in its text. Puig's prison narrative literally becomes a space for marginality to be told, recognized and described in its totality. Here, the fictional world of Molina's movie becomes a space where the voices of the two prisoners unite literally to tell a single story.<sup>26</sup>

Molina's capacity to tell the story "as he sees it" reveals a way of engaging subjectivity and social difference outside any fixed, definitive structure when it becomes the object of discussion. The plot of the movie itself describes a romance between a kind,

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<sup>26</sup> Patricia Santoro, in her study of maternal discourse in Puig's novel, argues that the movie narratives uphold stereotypes and are in tune with official patriarchal discourse. For this critic, Puig's revolutionary move is in making Molina the voice of the female stereotype and situating the woman—a position that later develops into the *mother* in Molina's relationship with Valentín—in a prison for men, made by men.

New York architect and a mysterious woman with a distant past linked to the mythic forests of Transylvania and a colony of cat-women. The story advances with periodic question and answer sessions, moments of doubt and reconciliation, and, at times, disaccord between the two cellmates. However, with each interjection and each exchange, Molina and Valentín continue to include parts of themselves in the movie that is being told. Their piecemeal autobiographies reach a climax as Molina attempts to describe the relationship between the two characters and the tentative nature of the cat-woman towards the New Yorker. At this point Valentín asks him: “—Vos te das cuenta de lo que pasa, ¿no?” (21). This question interrupts the movie and prefaces a tangential discussion regarding how to narrate a story from two different perspectives. Valentín follows his initial question with the following justification for his interruption: “—No, me gusta la película, pero es que vos te divertís contándola y por ahí también yo quiero intervenir un poco, ¿te das cuenta? No soy un tipo que sepa escuchar demasiado, ¿sabés, no?, y de golpe me tengo que estarte escuchando callado horas” (21). For the first time, Valentín expresses his interest in participating in the movie’s narration in explicit terms. He wants an active role in this memory narrative. For him, speaking about the past, even when it isn’t his own, is an activity that is of interest and directly linked to his own personal character: he is “not the kind of guy who knows how to listen”. He must speak. He must be heard. Valentín’s insistence on participation and with the formation of this memory narrative then goes hand and hand with who he is. His desire to participate is exactly that, a desire and a character trait that now defines him. In this sense, Molina’s movie narrative now becomes a means for another marginalized, silenced voice to be heard and understood.

Molina's response to Valentín's inquiry and sought-after participation is likewise revealing. With it, we not only are able to understand the explicit function of the memory narrative, but we also witness an essential piece of his own person as it is brought forth. To Valentín's request to participate in the movie's narration, Molina responds, "—Yo creí que te servía para entretenerte, y agarrar el sueño" (22). The memory narrative, the story of the movie, as well as the interaction between the two cellmates, are regarded here as an escape from their very imprisonment. Much more than the mere penetration of the jail house walls, the story told suggests a space for happiness and rest from the confines of the prison cell, and implies that without the movie narrative, neither is possible. However, Molina's response to Valentín also reveals his own part within such an evasion of normative limitations. In this statement, Molina considers himself to be an access point to a different world, and a world where pleasure and relaxation counter the effects of legal punishment. He also considers himself to provide this space for his cellmate: here, pleasure and relaxation become dependent upon accommodation and servitude and Molina's willingness to adhere to such a role. The fact of the matter is, he chooses this role for himself. While Valentín wants to speak, Molina wants to serve, to help and to accommodate his cellmate. In this way, the memory narrative of the movie, Cat People, becomes a narrative path from which each cellmate creates his own story, and in effect, his own way of engaging and understanding their past. Here the movie that is being told and is the focus of each of their attentions presents a drastic counter to their own *real* memory narratives and a history that is made of events they themselves participated in. Personal history becomes here an essential way of engaging fiction, and fiction an essential way of engaging each prisoners' personal history.

Valentín's desire to participate in the narration and Molina's desire to accommodate his interlocutor lead to and inspire a discussion that goes far beyond the capabilities of any movie reconstruction or autobiography. This discussion develops simultaneously when Valentín attempts to participate in the reconstruction of the movie, Cat People. "Por ejemplo:" he begins, "a mí me gustaría preguntarte cómo te la imaginás a la madre del tipo" (22). The result is a discussion that, while inspired in the movie itself, strays from the content of Molina's memory of it and well into a personal history that is tied, much more, to each prisoner's own experience. The conversation develops with Molina attempt to describe how he envisions the protagonist's mother:

--A ver...no sé, una mujer muy buena. Un encanto de persona, que ha hecho muy feliz a su marido y a sus hijos, muy bien arreglada siempre.

--¿Te la imaginás fregando la casa?

--No, la veo impecable, con un vestido de cuello alto, la puntilla le disimula las arrugas del cuello. Tiene esa cosa tan linda de algunas mujeres grandes, que es ese poquito de coquetería, dentro de la seriedad, por la edad, pero que se les nota que siguen siendo mujeres y quieren gustar.

--Sí, está siempre impecable. Perfecto. Tiene sirvientes, explota a gente que no tiene más remedio que servirla, por unas monedas. Y claro, fue muy feliz con su marido, que la explotó a su vez a ella, le hizo hacer todo lo que él quiso, que estuviera encerrada en su casa como una esclava, para esperarlo...

--Oíme...

--...para esperarlo todas las noches a él, de vuelta de su estudio de abogado, o de su consultorio de médico. Y ella estuvo perfectamente de acuerdo con ese



sistema, y no se rebeló, y le inculcó al hijo toda esa basura y el hijo ahora se topa con la mujer pantera. Que se la aguante. (22-3)

The collective memory narrative of the movie opens the doors of the prison cell and allows the cellmates to loose themselves in a captive story that tells not only of the mysterious romance between a New Yorker and a mythic cat-woman, but also of each of their personal histories. First of all, Molina describes the male protagonist's mother according to his own set of ideals. The woman he describes is neither a part of the movie narrative nor his own past, but instead a reflection of what he deems to be the perfect elderly woman.

Valentín, likewise, reveals his true character when his comments stray from the movie narrative. In this case, the ironic tone attached to his words attacks Molina and initiates a social hierarchy based on his own leftist politics. Here the happiness and relaxation associated with the movie narrative are fleeting memories when Valentín attempts to explain the errors of Molina's ways. "--Veo que tengo que hacerte un planteo más claro, porque por señas no entendés" (23). With this, images of the movie dissolve and the two are brought back to the cell that holds them. Valentín no longer wishes to engage with Molina, but instead wants to enlighten his seemingly confused social perspective. Molina, on the other hand, takes the light/dark, knowledge/confusion metaphor characteristic of Puig's prison narrative one step further when he snaps back in response to his cellmate's impulses: "—Aquí en la oscuridad me hacés señas, me parece perfecto" (23). The irony in Molina's words laugh in the face of enlightenment. Here, Molina reiterates that within the prison cell, normativity has no place. Darkness replaces enlightenment and shows itself to provide a parallel way of understanding social

interaction. It is once again Molina's voice that insists that within the jail cell nothing is clear-cut and evident. What Valentín assumes to be a simple fact, in the jail cell becomes a truth that can no longer be seen. In other words, the stories told on the outside have no place within the cell that Puig's protagonists share. Better still, when stories are told in the cell they automatically become a fiction in the face of the very real jail house walls.

This is exactly the case when Valentín attempts to explain Molina's marginal social position. Valentín begins when he insists that he knows everything about his cellmate, even without having been told anything at all (23). “—Bueno, te conté que estoy acá por corrupción de menores,” Molina clarifies, “con eso te dije todo, no la vayas de psicólogo ahora” (23). Both Molina and Valentín understand what “corrupting minors” means. It is part of a social code that they know well and that we must become familiar with in order to follow this discussion. Later on in the text we realize that corrupting minors went hand in hand with the normative classification and condemnation of homosexuality. But until then we accept this to be simply what has placed Molina in jail and what marks him different from Valentín. The movie once again serves as a means of speaking about difference when Valentín inserts Molina into the plot as a means of addressing his homosexuality. “—Vamos, confesá que te gusta porque fuma en pipa” he asserts with regards to the cat-woman's fiancé (23). Molina refuses to respond until the following day, when he wants no part in this movie's narration: “—No, hablame dél de la pipa vos, ya que lo conocés mejor que yo, que vi la película” (23). For Molina, the movie narrative becomes representative of his own life story and about a personal experience and sexual orientation as part of a story that *he* knows best. Valentín persists and goes on to narrate his own version. “—No te conviene el de la pipa,” he begins, “—

Porque vos lo querés con fines no del todo castos, ¿eh?, confesá” (24). With Molina agreeing, Valentín continues his story of the cat-woman and the New Yorker as follows:

--Bueno, a él le gusta Irena porque ella es frígida y no la tiene que atacar, por eso la protege y la lleva a la casa donde está la madre presente; aunque está muerta está presente, en todos los muebles, y cortinas y porquerías, ¿no lo dijiste vos mismo?

(...)

--Él si ha dejado todo lo de la madre en la casa intacto es porque quiere ser siempre un chico, en la casa de la madre, y lo que trae a la casa no es una mujer, sino una nena para jugar. (24)

Valentín’s interpretation of the movie attempts to give reason to the main character’s actions. While Valentín denies being Molina’s psychiatrist, his story definitely tells of a perverted Oedipus complex. Here, the movie narrative parallels the Freudian case study and gives Valentín an example from which to make his own conclusions from.

In this case, however, Molina is quick to reveal the faulty nature of the movie narrative upon which Valentín structures his social analysis. Molina responds to his cellmate’s proposed story line with a mocking tone: “--Pero eso es todo de tu cosecha. Yo qué sé si la casa era de la madre, yo te dije eso porque me gustó mucho ese departamento y como era de decoración antigua dije que podía ser de la madre, pero nada más. A lo mejor él lo alquila amueblado” (24). For Molina, remembering the movie involves imagining a way to fill in the gaps his memory or linguistic capabilities may create. In a sense, Molina relates recollection and his memory narrative to paraphrasing. For him, his purpose is to tell a story. When he does this he doesn’t leave details out, he just explains

them in a different way. Here, paraphrasing is used to express that which is looked over, forgotten or simply unexplainable. Paraphrasing becomes a mechanism for talking about the details of a story that are otherwise left on the wayside, on the margins of a greater picture. It is precisely the paraphrase that allows him to escape the sociopolitical confines associated with being in the prison cell. It allows the story itself to go on, and for a memory narrative filled with holes to be spoken about. Filling in the gaps, then, becomes an explicit and necessary quality of his movie narrative. Memory, imagination and paraphrasing become inseparable from one another and are presented here against Valentín and against narrations that claim completeness and infallibility. Together they create a story that engages a marginal past through its content and narrative structure. With it, Molina is able to speak of himself, of his likes and desires while at the same time representing that which is forgotten, and inexpressible all as part of a movie and a narrative move that is also able to speak of Valentín while still evading the limits of normative gestures.

El beso... is an exercise in the praxis of minority recall—and of the ways in which ex-centric subjects insert themselves in the past and in the present. In fact, the very lapses in Molina's memory narrative are precisely what allow Valentín to speak about his own past from within the movie's story. As Molina reconstructs the story line he is forced every now and again to stop when his memory falters. The movie narrative of Cat People has continued despite these moments of forgetfulness and the New Yorker and the Cat Woman are now married. Their relationship is a strange one and is problematic. Molina describes how the woman is unable to be intimate with her new husband because of her fear of turning into a panther. The mythic story of the Cat

Women from her native Transylvania haunts her and ultimately results in her attending a psychiatrist in hopes of overcoming the inevitable transformation. The movie narrative is just about to describe a scene that is predictably of the New Yorker betraying his wife with a colleague when Molina stops his story: “Y acá me falla la memoria” (38).

Although this isn't the first time Molina's memory has let him down and has caused a pause in the narration, it is precisely here where the breakage of the recollection proves to be a space for Valentín to insert his own personal history. Valentín tries to assure his cellmate that his memory will return with time. But, Molina doesn't seem to agree and instead suggests that he continue anyway: “—No. No te apures. Bueno, toda esta parte final si querés te la cuento deshilvanada, no más lo que me acuerdo” (38). Valentín accepts immediately and eagerly awaits the rest of the movie narrative, even though it may be fragmented. The movie continues on ironically uninterrupted for the following two pages. Molina's lapse in memory, in fact, does nothing to inhibit him from telling his story. Our expectation together with Valentín's of a seriously fragmented story proves to be just that, an expectation. It forces Molina's listener to expect uncertainty, error and paraphrasing and to question more explicitly the content of what he has just narrated.

Molina's warning allows precisely for further paraphrasing, and narrative uncertainty to occur, but this time on behalf of the listener himself. In fact, after having described with strange precision how the woman in the movie discovers her husband's affair and turns into a panther to avenge this wrongdoing, Molina notices that his words seem to fall on deaf ears. “¿Me estás escuchando?” Molina asks (40). In what seems to be a strange coincidence, Valentín responds that for some reason he is unable to keep his attention fully on the movie narrative: “—Bueno, es que yo no quiero hablar nunca de

eso, pero no sé, ahora tenía ganas de comentarte una cosa... que cuando empezaste a contar que la pantera la sigue a la arquitecta, sentí miedo” (40). Here, what Valentín wishes to engage is not the movie at all. His way of participating in Molina’s movie narration now involves him commenting his own past and his own memory. What was once an explicit desire to correct Molina’s contextual errors in hopes of narrative clarity and precision now becomes a desire to paraphrase and use the movie as a stepping stone to his own past. “—Cuando empezaste a hablar de que a la muchacha la seguía la pantera,” Valentín continues,” me la imagine a mi compañera que estaba en peligro. Y me siento tan impotente acá, de avisarle que se cuide, que no se arriesgue demasiado” (41). Here, Molina’s opening in the narrative sequence of the movie and warning to the possibility of further *forgetfulness* leads to Valentín’s confession and to him now speaking about a different tale: his revolutionary past.

However, the effects of Molina’s memory lapses don’t stop here. In fact, they continue and become a narrative bridge that allows their social and political difference to be mediated. When Valentín confesses that he is worried about his woman friend because of her participation in leftist politics, Molina sympathizes and suggests that he too shares such preoccupations with the outside world: “—Yo también, sabes, tengo esa sensación, desde acá, de no poder hacer nada; pero en mi caso no es una mujer, una chica quiero decir, es mi mamá” (41). With this comment, Molina shows himself to be much like his cellmate. Their imprisonment forces them both to feel insufficient and without the power to do what they desire. Neither is able to care for the people they love on the outside. Suddenly, Molina feels the same lack of power as Valentín, and Valentín empathizes with his cellmate’s situation. As the two continue to share the particulars of

their stories, it becomes evident that the story of their pasts becomes a point of commonality. Their history of marginality and of social difference essentially brings them together. Here, Molina's movie narrative unites the two in a historical narrative of the margins. Molina's movie narrative shows itself to be incomplete and inaccurate in its recollection. However, it is precisely in this way that a different story can be told. For the two cellmates, the fragmented, inaccurate paraphrasing that narrates their past no longer is the basis for establishing difference, but instead creates a history on middle ground, and on a space in time sheltered from the certainties of normativity itself. The story told from within Puig's prison cell—Puig's prison narrative—is then a story that gives a voice to marginality by means of a composite historical narrative that combines fiction with truth and memory with imagination.

## II. Puig's Prison Narrative, Part Two: Dominance, Documents and Textual Confinement

The first thing that we, as readers, are presented with as we open El beso de la mujer araña, by Manuel Puig, is a prison narrative. We are immediately presented with the voices of the prisoners and with the nuances of their storytelling process. Here, they speak about their own marginality in a way that takes advantage of their liminal social place. For Molina and Valentín, speaking about themselves and about their place in time and space involves a piecemeal historical narrative intertwined with the telling of a movie and is marked by a seemingly natural confusion between *truth* and *paraphrase*, and personal history and plot summary. However, Puig's text eventually takes us away from the doors where we are able to listen to the prison narrative and into spaces where stories are told according to strict narrative and epistemological guidelines. As we progress through the novel's sixteen chapters, divided equally between two parts, we come upon footnotes, transcriptions of official dialogues and police investigation reports that present us with a way of engaging with Puig's protagonists by means of a historical narrative that gives priority to deductive reasoning, chronological order and to notions of social and developmental progress when speaking about the marginal subject.

Puig takes us away from the prison cell corridor for the first time in the third chapter and after the close of Molina's movie narration of Cat People. In the cell, Molina and Valentín have deviated from the telling of yet another movie in order to speak about themselves and are now discussing a relationship that Molina once had with a married man. Valentín expresses his curiosity about just how a relationship like this is possible. Whether Valentín refers to a relationship between two men or simply a unilateral "love affair" is unclear: what remains unquestionable is his interest in the topic itself. He



explains: “Si estamos en esta celda juntos mejor es que nos comprendamos, y yo de gente de tus inclinaciones sé muy poco \*” (65-6). Valentín’s comments in themselves are suggestive and point towards the prison cell narrative as a space within which heterosexuality and homosexuality can be spoken about on equal terms. After all, they are together in the same cell, why not then in the same narrative? However, what draws our attention here are not the words at all, nor is it what we hear coming from within the prison cell. Instead what is unique about this sentence is that fact that it makes Puig’s presence visible. It is here that the scribe of this dialogue comes out from behind the shadows of the prison narrative and into the light of textual authority with a symbolic “\*”. With this *star* in our text, we are no longer lost within our prison narrative and to a confusing dialogue that we only *hear*. We are now able to literally and metaphorically *see* the light of textual authority when this star brings us back to the text, out of the prison corridors and down to the footnote below. Puig’s presence is jarring after sixty or so pages of dialogue that have together trained us, as readers, to listen to marginality. And with this sentence and the noteworthy “star”, we are suddenly presented to the author, or compiler. This authorial presence instantaneously disrupts the prison narrative and silences the voices of the marginal protagonists as it takes us away from the prison cell doors upon which our ears rested, out of the text that we have entered and back onto the comfortable library chair from within which we read Puig’s novel. We are now forced to look, see, listen and hear the words on the page as authority is mixed with marginality.

The “star” in the dialogue and at the end of Valentín’s inquiry about homosexuality directs us to Puig’s footnote. Here, we find presented for us, a history of the physical origins of homosexuality and with it an ironic response to the original doubts

expressed at the top of the novel's page. In it, Puig *is* author and he does two very different things. First of all, Puig uses the footnote to take time and textual space to cite an English scholar named D. J. West, and go on to summarize what West deems the three principal theories about the physical origins of male-male erotics. In the footnote, Puig reestablishes the power of the traditional author as a mediator of knowledge. It is only via his words that we get a sense of West's argument and a sense of the theoretical basis behind heteronormativity. However, as author of the text we hold in our hands, Puig also insists that authorship, traditional narrative authority and even the content of West's argument fall literally below the voices of marginality. After all, the footnote is but a point amidst the prisoners' words and itself silent and without an audible voice. The voice of authorship, of authority and the content of the footnote is reduced to a light—a "star"—and a paradoxical glimmer in a discussion that takes place in social darkness. For Puig, the little star becomes symbolic of an *enlightenment* that is ironically very easily overlooked. In fact, the star and the footnote itself even become laughable when Puig's ironic tone breaks any attempt at taking these words seriously. Such is the case when we note that the footnote—a genre that is meant to be both short and sweet—extends well over three pages. For Puig, the minor literary genre of the footnote comes to represent much more than authorship, authority and specifically, in this case, heteronormative discourse. In fact, while it describes to us *how* to understand Molina's homosexuality, Valentín's question--the original purpose of the footnote—remains essentially unanswered. We are the only ones who have access to this *new-found-knowledge*. Valentín, on the other hand, remains in the dark and finds the answers to his questions in his conversations with Molina. In a sense, Valentín comes to understand

homosexuality as a prison narrative and in very different terms from the footnote Puig presents us with.

The footnotes themselves go on to inform the reader about different aspects of the prison narrative. They present a counter to Molina's movie narratives with complete replicas of the *original* distribution pamphlets (88-94), and seem to carry on an unsought-after discussion of homosexuality as they further peruse D. J. West's theories on homosexuality (102-3), and compare and contrast them with other theoretical work by Sigmund and Anna Freud (133-5), as well as the "second generation" psychoanalysis of Otto Fenichel (141-3). However, none of the footnotes ever directly address the action at hand and the goings on within the prison itself.<sup>27</sup> In fact, it is only after 151 pages into Puig's text that we actually *see* our protagonists' names written down on paper. Up until now, they have been voices and their names sounds spoken behind closed doors.

Once we arrive at the eighth chapter their names appear, documents are found and their personal histories become legible. It is here, in the eighth chapter of Puig's text that we are taken to the prison warden's office alongside Molina. Outside the prison cell and inside his office we are presented with another document that only we are able to see and in it, we read information that is clear and concise. The chapter begins and presents itself

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<sup>27</sup> In *El deseo, enorme cicatriz luminosa*, Daniel Balderston suggests that we read the footnotes like we do the *main* narrative: in its totality. This allows us to recognize that the story it tells and not just the way it is told, can be linked to the goings on in the cell above. He explains that "Este extenso tratado sobre la liberación sexual [que se llevan a cabo en las notas de pie de pagina] llama la atención, por una parte, por la aparente diversidad de las fuentes; y, por otra, por su fuerte tesis final: la liberación sexual en general, y la gay en particular, son motores esenciales del anhelado cambio social" (76). Puig uses the notes and invents the narrative authority in order to destabilize traditional literary and sexual hierarchies (78). In this sense, Balderston recognizes and draws our attention to a very relevant connection between what is said in the footnotes and the story we read in the *main* narrative.

as if the document were inserted directly into Puig's novel.<sup>28</sup> At this time all voices are silent. This is what we see:

**Ministerio del Interior de la República Argentina**

***Penitenciaría de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires***

*Informe para el señor Director del Sector, preparado por Secretaría Privada*

Procesado 3.018, Luig Alberto Molina.

Sentencia del Juez en la Penal Dr. Justo José Dalpierre, expedida el 20 de julio de 1974, en el Tribunal de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires. Condena 8 años de reclusión por delito de corrupción de menores. Aporsentado en Pabellón B, celda 34, el día 28 de julio de 1974, con procesados amorales Benito Jaramillo, Mario Carlos Bianchi y David Margulies. Transferido el 4 de abril de 1975 al Pabellón D, celda 7 con el preso político Valentín Arregui Paz. Buena conducta.

Detenido 16.115, Valentín Arregui Paz.

Arresto efectuado el 16 de octubre de 1972 en la carretera 5, a la altura de Barrancas, poco después de que la Policía Federal sorprendiera al grupo de activistas que promovía disturbios en ambas plantas de fabricación de automotores donde los obreros se hallaban en huelga y situados sobre esa carretera. Puesto a disposición del Poder Ejecutivo de la Nación y en espera de

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<sup>28</sup> José Amícola suggests that everything in Puig's work is calculated and intentional. In his analysis of Puig's drafts of *El beso...*, Amícola notices that the majority of revisions made are those that deal with textual organization, and not content. This proves significant in terms of the *integration* of outside sources like footnotes, film narratives etc. It is the careful integration of sources and their intentional combination with one another that result in a "democratization of categories" (Amícola 33). Essentially no text is proven above another.

juicio. Aposentado en Pabellón A, celda 10, con preso político Bernardo Giacinti el día 4 de noviembre de 1974. Tomó parte en huelga de hambre por protesta de la muerte del preso político Juan Vicente Aparicio durante interrogatorios policiales. Castigado en calabozo diez días a partir del 25 de marzo de 1975. Transferido el 4 de abril de 1975 al Pabellón D, celda 7, con el procesado por corrupción de menores Luis Alberto Molina. Conducta reprochable por rebeldía, reputado como cabecilla de huelga de hambre citada y otros movimientos de protesta por supuesta falta de higiene de pabellón y violación de correspondencia personal. (151-2)

With this document we are ushered into the warden's office and presented with a narrative that answers our initial questions surrounding the context of the dialogue taking place in the featured prison cell. The document's first words, in fact, tell us Molina's full name and, in doing so, provide us with information that the prison narrative does not. In contrast to the story told from within the prison cell, the document we discover in the warden's office discloses information as if it were an open book. In effect, as we read on we have no problems getting our hands on official information: it actually falls into our possession as we turn from one page to the next. We don't even have problems understanding and deciphering the words that the text provides. Just as the title of the document states, it informs us as to the reasons behind and the nature of Puig's protagonists' imprisonment. With it, we read the *official* story behind Puig's prison narrative and are able to discover exactly *who* Valentín and Molina are, exactly *why* they are in prison and *how* their stay has been as of yet. Official documentation becomes here

an easy-to-understand narrative that defines for us Puig's protagonists according to their role in a precisely defined past.

In this sense, knowing anything about these marginal subjects is directly tied to the narrative style of the document and how it organizes and presents the events that lead up to the moment in which Puig begins his novel. Defining who Molina and Valentín are socially becomes a result of understanding their actions as a progression either towards assimilation and passivity or sociopolitical antagonism and its very textual representation. Molina, for example, is defined by the secretary's report and how it presents his progression towards "good conduct" and away from the "corrupting minors" charge that originally brought him into jail. Valentín, on the other hand, is described in this same document as progressively becoming more and more in disaccord with official standards of conduct and more and more a part of a seemingly well defined sociopolitical antagonism. In both of their cases, subjectivity is measured according to their relationship with and progression through time. Each line in the text further defines the subject in terms of his marginality and in accordance with normative limits they have apparently crossed and that have placed them in jail.<sup>29</sup> Each event's place in the text corresponds to its place in history's time line and becomes an invariable quality in defining who Molina and Valentín are in clear and concise terms.

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<sup>29</sup> Defining marginality in terms of their relationship to historical time and participation in progress itself dates back to 19<sup>th</sup> century modernization projects. In terms of Argentina, Jorge Salessi describes how marginality itself was introduced as a sickness that put a stop to sociopolitical progress. Such a sickness, however, was at the same time described in terms of queer sexualities. Information on this way of classifying marginality in Argentina can be found in Médicos maleantes y maricas: Higiene, criminología y homosexualidades en la construcción de la nación Argentina. (Buenos Aires: 1871-1914), by Jorge Salessi, and also El sexo peligroso: la prostitución legal en Buenos Aires, 1895-1955, by Donna Guy. For a literary perspective to this phenomenon look to Gabriela Nouzeilles' Ficciones somáticas Naturalismo, nacionalismo y políticas médicas del cuerpo (Argentina 1880-1910), as well as Sueños de exterminio: Homosexualidad y representación en la literatura argentina contemporánea by Gabriel Giorgi. Diana Taylor provides a tangential look at the impact of official heteronormative discourse from Rosas to Videla and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in her book titled Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War".

For Puig, official notions of historical time understand subjectivity as a precursor to social interaction. In this sense, subjects do not define themselves but are instead posited in a preestablished social order. For example, before Molina actually engages in any conversation within the warden's office, we are forced to understand him within the hierarchy of the traditional penitentiary system. The *official document* that prefaces the dialogue between Molina and the warden not only narrates Molina's historical alterity, but it becomes a document that itself forms part of and helps to define a very particular narrative structure. In a sense, the secretary's document provides the backdrop to a social drama of historical proportions. Puig takes this one step further, when he presents this following dialogue as a performance taken from a well rehearsed theatre production.

Molina's first encounter with the warden reads as follows:

Suboficial: Descúbrase ante el señor Director.

Procesado: Está bien.

Director: No tiemble así, hombre, no le va a pasar nada. (152)

Molina's entrance into the office is marked by a hierarchy that was previously inexistent, or least unnoticeable and silent in the cell. The textual representation of this dialogue differs from the apparent transcription of Molina and Valentín's conversations in the sense that it manifests the metasocial nature attributed to a social order that is not said but definitely must be understood. Here, the combination of the secretary's document ledger together with the telegraphed dialogue sequence imitate the textual character of a theatrical script where roles are assigned beforehand, understood and carried throughout the performance with the minimal reminders presented by the tag attached to the lines belonging to each speaking actor. The script of the dialogue that we hold before us is

unmistakably marked by a very particular historical context and by a very particular notion of social hierarchy. The tags themselves allow us to understand each phrase immediately and before anyone speaks. The tone of the words spoken, the way they are to be received by their interlocutor and the way a possible response could be formed all comes to us through a context that is made visible by naming those present and by their particular historical background as described by the secretary's infamous document. It is not just a process of naming however. Tagging the speaker with a social marker is after all, what makes Molina into a "Prisoner". Before we can even hear what he says, we are told how to understand him. In the same tone, the warden is very much the warden, and the official very much the warden's servant, even before they open their mouths. Actions and words alike are defined here as part of a social theatre that depends upon traditional notions of chronological time in order to perfect their very own hierarchy. Here, practice truly makes perfect as each role is understood without the least amount of stage direction, helped only by time itself.

The script that is performed within the warden's office implies that what is said has been said before. After all, being part of a scripted theatre production brings with it an endless repetition that only comes to an end with the show's closing night. The conversation within the warden's office between the jail house's chief official and Molina reveals the performance of social roles at its best. In a sense, as soon as they start talking to one another, a hierarchy develops that is to reflect the relationship between dominant discourse and marginal subjectivity as it has played out since time immemorial. In fact, as the conversation comes to a close and Molina is being prepared to return to his cell, we are presented with a relationship that is itself the backbone of traditional social structures.



By now, we, as readers, realize that the central purpose of the meeting outside the jail cell has been to establish Molina's participation in an attempt to obtain information regarding the future plans of the revolutionary organisms with which his cellmate is involved. The warden has come prepared to win Molina's trust and secure his loyalties with news of his possible release. Molina is assured by the warden that for any chance of this to happen, Molina must agree to participate and provide all information that his cellmate may leak, to the warden himself. The story this social theatre tells us is essentially of the attempts by the legal and state run powers to make of the homosexual man a pawn in the condemnation and destruction of political revolution. In it, marginality is defined in terms of queer sexuality, revolutionary politics and by its very fragmented nature. Here, what the story itself tells us doesn't allow for marginal subjects to unite, nor to associate with one another. Instead their relationship is posited as being purely antagonistic. In this official space, historical narration prohibits a homosexual to be revolutionary and for leftist politics to be associated with queer sexualities. In this theatrical production, such ambiguity and uncertainty is pronounced an error and contrary to its traditional, set stage directions. What rules here are the certainties associated with the repetition of events already past.

In effect, this encounter between Molina and the prison warden soon becomes inscribed onto the central roles of heteronormativity itself. As Molina leaves the office, the warden instructs him to justify this meeting with a visit from his mother. However, for this idea to be correctly performed and accurately presented to Valentín, Molina must return to the cell with a package of food. Molina himself states that before a visit from his mother, she "compra todo en el supermercado que hay acá a pocas cuadras del penal,

para no cargar en el ómnibus con el paquete” (156). In fact, Molina insists on the exact representation of his mother’s gifts and reveals the significance of each detail in order to accurately perform the warden’s historical theater. Molina seems to play with the theatricality of the situation when he even insists that the package be “envuelto en papel madera, con carton por dentro” (156). In this sense, everything must be in place, everything must be performed to the last detail when Molina shows himself to be completely dedicated to his performance.<sup>30</sup>

The fact of the matter is, his very dedication to the scene attributes him with a directorial role when he, and not the warden, becomes a guide to the other actors. The warden himself agrees and confirms his participation in what has now been turned into Molina’s production when he begins to take down a list of groceries that Molina himself dictates: “Molina, usted dicte ya lo que le parece que su madre podría traerle” (156). “¿A usted?” Molina responds. “¡Sí, a mí!, y rápido que tengo que hacer!” confirms the warden (156). Molina is surprised at the willingness to adhere to a series of social roles that place the warden on his side, but begins his list without hesitation:

PROCESADO: ...Dulce de leche, en taro grande. ...Dos taros, mejor. Duraznos  
al natural, dos pollos asados, qué no estén ya fríos, claro. Un paquete grande

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<sup>30</sup> Ellen Stekert and Luz María Umpiere address how legend and folklore influence and inform Puig’s narration structure of the different movies within the text. In this sense the narrative web that Puig’s novel *weaves* is read in terms of the textile industry in Latin America, a manual tradition where woman have come to use the weaving process as a means of self expression in the face of their lack of traditional literary, and official venues. The web in terms of nature and the natural is also seen here as a means of sustenance, and of gathering life. Thus, the narrative measures of the novel become tightly bound to social antagonism and basic means of survival, in particular the act of finding food itself. As we proceed through this novel, these authors regard the narrative structure as consuming both reader and narrator in both textual and sexual terms: “Once one consumes another entity, that entity becomes part of the person who consumed it. When you eat or ingest something, that something is both transformed by you, and you by it. That is exactly what we find in Valentin’s final fantasy. As he is dying he has a dialogue with Molina/Marta about food in which Molina/Marta lives inside of him—even though it is he who is being consumed and recycled by the system. Thus the oral narration and the oral/food consumption join in the narrative at the end of the novel. The only thing that empowers the characters in this story is the power of narrative” (160).

de azúcar. Dos paquetes de té, uno de té negro, y otro de manzanilla. Leche en polvo, leche condensada, jabón para lavar...media barra, no, una barra entera, de jabón Radical, y cuatro paquetes de jabón de tocador, Palmolive, ... ¿y qué más? ...sí, un frasco grande de pescado en escabeche, y déjeme pensar un poquito, porque tengo como una laguna en la cabeza... (156-7)

In fact, as the list goes on, one can imagine the smile grow on Molina's face as he dictates up to the last detail of his grocery list, with Molina stopping at the end of the chapter just for a breath of fresh air in order to, presumably, continue. In this case, the script itself cuts short to signal to the actor his free reign to use his artistic judgment in finishing the scene. Molina seems to do just that. Here, irony and jest seem to ooze out of the text we are reading. We can imagine just how the smile on his face would have steadily grown as he described the brand name items to the warden of the jail. He even had the nerve to insist that the chicken arrive warm making the end result of this makeshift shopping list a domestic performance easily recognizable to any reader.

In the office, Molina and the warden share the duties of the prison house itself. While the warden does the shopping, Molina is left to care for the prisoners, to watch over them and to report any wrong-doings. However, this holy matrimony is brought to its breaking point when such a traditional storyline is translated into a prison narrative and told by the marginal voices it tries to guide. Upon Molina's return to the cell, all obligations with the warden seem to disappear as the package of groceries becomes a means of furthering his relationship with Valentín, and not breaking it. In effect, the groceries give life to and nourish a new found intimacy between the two cellmates. "Hoy acá se empieza una nueva vida," Molina declares as he returns (161). Molina looks

through the items and rejoices: “Y todo esto para comer. Mirá, dos pollos al espiedo, dos, ¿qué me contás? Y los pollos son para vos, eso no te puede hacer mal, vas a ver que enseguida te componés” (161). Despite the original antirevolutionary sentiments that the groceries carried when the warden handed them to Molina, now in the prison cell, the produce and reserves allow Molina and Valentín to become self dependent and distance themselves from the prison authorities. Here, the food becomes an essential element to Valentín gaining strength and recuperating for future battles against the prison lifestyle.

However, the food Molina brings to the cell also serves in further defining his own relationship with his cellmate. With it, Molina becomes the bearer of good fortune and a responsible caregiver to an ailing friend. He explains this new relationship to Valentín in the following way: “—Escuchame, vamos a ver si nos entendemos. Yo quiero que te comas el pollo, no, *los* pollos, los dos, con la condición de que no pruebes la comida del penal, que es la que te hace mal, ¿trato hecho?” (162). However, when asked what he will eat, Molina simply responds that he never did like cold food. Here, what we listen to in the cell is the development of yet another series of performative role-playing maneuvers. In them, Molina is no longer the obedient wife figure of the providing warden. He is now the mother who sacrifices everything—even her very sustenance—in order to care for a loved one, a stubborn, rebellious child in this case. Here, Molina completes a maternal performance and confirms Valentín’s innocent, child-like participation when their feast comes to an end. At this time, Molina insists that Valentín go to sleep in order to recuperate fully. However, Valentín rejects the proposal “[p]orque para que fuera completa el programa faltaría algo” (163). For him, something is obviously missing from this series of staged events. Something else must come after the

arrival of Molina with the groceries, and the delicious diner. Something must come before actually falling asleep. The theatrical program seems incomplete. Molina himself provides us with a possible way to *properly* fill in this void when he responds to his cellmates request in a way that suggests a new relationship be developed altogether: “—Che, se supone que acá el degenerado soy yo, no vos” (163). Even while his words are said in jest and as a means of playfully instigating his cellmate’s carefully defined heterosexuality, Molina apparently understands the progression that began with the warden’s list of groceries as ending up in an intimate encounter. Here, the traditional domestic roles established in the warden’s office, not only suggest that husband and wife translate onto warden and inmate, but insist that this new relationship lead to an (almost) oedipal love triangle. While Valentín clarifies that it is a movie narrative that he expected as a close to a great meal, it becomes unclear where Valentín would situate Molina’s hope for romance. What is certain, however, is that Valentín is waiting for a bedtime story. Here, Puig’s leftist revolutionary is quick to accept and extend the maternal care provided by his cellmate. Once Molina arrives in his cell with the package of groceries, traditional familial relations suggested in the warden’s office are now thrown out the window—or at least, left on the cell’s doorstep. Here, groceries are not the sustenance of a growing family, nor are they the tools necessary to break counterculture movements. The groceries instead provide fuel to a fire of forbidden social intimacies.

In a sense, the need of official discourse to permeate Valentín’s revolutionary politics backfires and bankrupts its own historical theatre when groceries become the pathway to a new story. The story that unfolds within the prison cell is different from

those noted on the official ledgers found in the jail house offices and Puig's own efforts at textual authority. Molina returns to his prison cell after having spoken with the warden and almost automatically breaks the conditions of the established bargain. Molina had received a bag full of groceries and had also received word of his early release. The warden seemed to be holding up his end of the deal. All Molina had to do was show himself a little bit eager to gather information from his cellmate regarding the revolutionary actions of the political left. However, Molina does quite the opposite. He arrives in his cell and is quick to use his trip to the warden's office as a stepping stone to further developing his relationship with his cellmate. For Molina, his possible release signifies a return to the outside world where difference reigns and where marginality is understood as it is in the warden's office: as being fragmented and antagonistic. Once he leaves the cell, Molina's friendship with Valentín will evidently come to an end. Molina's return to the prison cell after having met with the warden truly does mark "the beginning of a new era" as he himself suggests. Upon his return, he now pushes to maintain and even further develop his relationship with Valentín and, for the first time, openly defies the prison house's normative guidelines. The story told within the cell—the prison narrative itself—now tells of relationships and events unexplainable in any traditional terms and literally untouchable by the distant footnotes, and office theatrics. It becomes a true narrative of marginality as it now speaks about and puts into words a social interaction otherwise unrecognizable in official spheres.

The prison narrative introduces a story that is different from that outlined in the official discourse Puig represents textually in this novel. Not only is it different in thematic terms, but it is a story that cannot be represented as a traditional historical

performance. The story the prison narrative tells demands a *new* historical narrative and in doing so prepares us, as reader, for the ultimate break with traditional ways of engaging the past. The prison narrative itself is the only way a silent past can come to life. It is the only way actions and events that words cannot capture can gain a spot in history's narrative and can be understood at all. Puig's prison narrative essentially becomes a space for speaking about what occurs behind closed doors and in the intimacy of silence. It essentially gives narrative space to that which does not need a voice to be heard. In this sense, Puig's prison narrative is able to tell the story of bodies, and of their silent encounter.

### III. Kissing the Spider Woman: Puig's *Silent* Discussion of the Unimaginable

Puig's prison narrative allows us to listen to the voices of otherwise silenced social subjects. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes a space where a story without words is told. For Puig, the prison narrative becomes the place where sexual intimacy represents the apex of cultural innovation and where silence becomes the only way to engage a past that is condemned by normativity. It is precisely in the prison narrative that Puig locates sexual memory and speaks about forbidden social unions in sexual terms.

In this sense, the relationship between Valentín and Molina is much more than simply against the warden's wishes. In fact, it is a relationship that official discourse, its documents, reports and even its footnotes are unable to represent at all. It is only within the jail cell and in the prison narrative that such a relationship can be spoken about and come to life. Here, anything seems to be possible and the inmates' words are able to touch upon any topic. Here, marginality unites in a narrative structure that embraces the uncertainty associated with the darkness of the prison cell in order to bridge the gaps traditional epistemological structures create as they navigate and further separate different social subjects. Here, in the cell, the prisoners are able to give a voice to the inexpressible. However, it is not only that which is heard that holds meaning within Puig's prison narrative. That which is not heard at all and instead expressed in silence proves to tell the most significant story.

Silence is present from the very beginning of Puig's text. It appears to us, as readers, in the form of ellipses and is used to separate day from night, sleep from being awake and doubt from certainty. Here, silence becomes a language of its own and a



language that Puig has decidedly expressed with dots, with “...” and definitely not words. The first time we actually witness textual silence comes at a moment when Molina’s memory falters and he is forced to stop the narration of Cat People. Valentín suggests that he continue the narrative the following evening in order to give Molina time to rest and recuperate the memory he has lost. Valentín adds that the evening is the time for Molina’s story, since during the day, he has no time for such “silliness”: “Hay cosas más importantes en que pensar” (15). Molina does not respond. He remains silent. As a result, we do not hear anything. We hear nothing but “—...” (15). That is, when Puig, as scribe of the prison narrative, decides to represent Molina’s silence textually he makes a conscious decision that in turn forces us to *hear* silence doubly. In fact, we first hear Molina’s silence when words are unable to accommodate his feelings. He just doesn’t know how to respond to Valentín’s harsh words. We hear Molina’s silence for a second time when we realize that the silence holds meaning and that it was transcribed as part of the prison narrative. We hear the silence when we ourselves are made to imagine, and to fill in the blanks of what he would possibly say.

However, Puig refutes this automatic response and our desire to substitute silence with words and with sound. When Puig represents Molina’s silence textually, we not only hear “nothing”, we now see it. “Nothing” now becomes a space on the page that is marked and occupied specifically. We now see silence and recognize that it is not a space to be filled with meaning, but instead holds meaning in and of itself. In Puig’s prison narrative, the inexpressible literally comes to life and takes narrative form. In effect, silence becomes, ironically, a way to speak about the most marginal of subjects, for Molina’s thoughts are now uncertainly represented within this dialogue. They now

spur questions regarding the length or duration of the silence and whether actions accompanied Molina's lack of verbal response. Unlike words, whose duration is specific and related to the time it actually takes to speak the letters on the page, such a translation of words into time is impossible when no words exist to be spoken or measured. Silence now is synonymous with narrative ambiguity and becomes a marker for a timeless narration that goes beyond meaning. Silence as it is represented here lies on the margins of a textual and narrative tradition that strives to accommodate and preserve events as they occur in time. It is in its essence, marginal storytelling at its best.

The important place silence holds in the prison narrative reaches its climax when it appears as a central way of expressing Molina and Valentín's forbidden relationship. Here, the marginal narrative structure *par excellence* literally confronts the most private of acts when silence becomes the way both prisoners choose to express a moment of physical intimacy. Molina had just received confirmation of his release and is notably saddened about the fact that he will have to leave the comforts his relationship with Valentín has created. Molina explains himself in the following way: “—No sé, tengo miedo de todo, tengo miedo de ilusionarme de que me van a soltar, tengo miedo de que no me suelten. ...Y de lo que más miedo tengo es de que nos separen y me pongan en otra celda y me quede ahí para siempre, con quién sabe qué atorrante...” (217). Here, the words themselves are flat, without emotion and without the context of their enunciation. What makes us, as readers and as listeners of this narrative wonder are the running points that speckle Molina's comments. We are forced to wonder: Is he getting choked up? Is he crying? Or is he just thinking about what to say next? The textual nature of the prison narrative leaves much unsaid while at the same time, ironically, suggesting everything at

once. After all, Puig here is scribe and not author. The silences and the ellipses that represent them help say what is not said and their meaning here is infinite. Here, silence is much more significant than any traditional narrative. It essentially says much more.

However, it is not so much what the silences *say* that is so intriguing in this prison narrative. It is what occurs when nothing is said that seems to take precedence here.

Silence comes to tell a totally different story than the one that we read and listen to.

Shortly after Valentín listens to Molina express his sadness with regards to his possible departure, emotions seem to break down and words themselves don't seem to be enough to tell us what is going on behind the cell's closed doors. Valentín begins the scene:

--Eh... ¿qué pasa?

--Nada...

--Vamos, no te pongas así... levánta la cara de esa almohada...

--No... dejame...

--¿Pero qué pasa?, ¿Hay algo que me ocultás?

--No, ocultarte no... Pero es que... (217)

And in effect, Molina has nothing to hide. Valentín sees everything as long as he is by his side in the prison cell. What Molina is unable to do is express himself completely and accurately. Words are, again, not enough for him. However, while the words spoken between the two do seem enough to give us an idea that Molina is covering his face, maybe in his lap, what they don't do is present us with complete ideas. The prisoners only express themselves partially through their *testimonio* and through the help of Puig as scribe. The rest is implied, and apparently understood, or at least directed to a specific

community or social subject that *will* know what is going on. Meaning here seems to come from the silence itself and from how we are supposed to understand it.

How we understand silence becomes as central to communication as words themselves. In fact, shortly after the moment Molina decides to express his sadness to his cellmate, the prison lights are turned off for the night and words, sounds and silences become the only way anything at all is understood. Now in the darkness of the cell, seeing is not believing and darkness affects even the prisoners themselves—not just the way we, on the outside, *see* them. As we listen to the prison narrative and move along this emotional encounter between Molina and Valentín, the prisoners are literally reduced to the story they tell and their actions lost to historical blindness. However, when dominant discourses insist on keeping the prisoners in the dark, saying nothing seems to tell a story that words only suggest exists and gives a voice to a forbidden story of social marginality. In the darkness, we notice that for Molina even words become a burden when he says to Valentín, “—No hablemos... más...” (219). But, as Valentín continues and the conversation between the two proceeds something happens to the story we are listening to.

--Vamos...no seas así..., Molinita.

--No... te lo ruego... no me toques...

--¿No te puede palmear tu amigo?

--Me hacés peor...

---¿Por qué?... vamos, habla, ya es hora que confiemos el uno en el otro. De veras, te quiero ayudar, Molinita, decime qué te pasa. (219)

Words can no longer keep up with the story being told. Here, they come as an after effect to the event itself and a makeshift translation of a story that the prisoners themselves don't even insist on representing. It is in the silences where we learn of Valentín's physical advances towards Molina and of the beginnings to a story that neither participant wants to verbalize. It is, after all, the beginnings of the same story that brought Molina to this prison cell, and, for Valentín, is a story that shows him weak in the face of political hardship and a perfect target for further interrogations. As a result, the words that are heard, and that we read represent a story told in retrospect and a story that is separated from such forbidden actions. Only after two marked silences and two sets of ellipses can the words Molina speaks, and the text we read, express even partly the initial stages of this forbidden physical encounter. Only then can Molina tell Valentín, "don't touch me". Only after the silences do we hear Valentín clarify that he has just put his arm around his cellmate and expose what this hidden story tells. Here, the silences suggest the beginnings of a new story and when Valentín insists that Molina speak, his own break in speech and resulting silence overpowers the meaning the words themselves transmit. What we are left with is a barrage of possibilities to what is to come. After all, we have just learnt that the silences tell of physical contact: why then does Valentín insist on speaking?

In effect, silence covers up a story that is not to be heard. To the unskilled listener they are just that, silences. When nothing is heard and when the silence is silent, we, as readers, lose all access to this marginal narrative. In order to enter it, we must first interpret, and decipher its code. If we read the words themselves, Valentín is merely

comforting his cellmate and friend, and, Molina simply responds to his sympathetic gestures:

--Y ahora vos... me cortaste la gana, de llorar. No puedo seguir, llorando. Y es peor, el nudo en la garganta, como me está apretando, es algo terrible.

--...

--...

--Es cierto, Molina, ahí es donde se siente más la tristeza.

--...

--¿Sentís muy fuerte... te aprieta muy fuerte, ese nudo?

--Sí.

--...

--...

--¿Es acá que te duele?

--Sí... (219)

An innocent reading of this scene follows precisely what the words tell us. Some sort of knot is tightening itself around Molina's neck and Valentín is helping loosen it—whatever that means. However, even the most innocent of readers understands that this “knot” really refers to Molina's emotions and to their tightening in a metaphorical sense. But, as we continue to find meaning outside the words themselves, we come upon a tale of physical intimacy. The words themselves have been left behind and the story of these two men touching each other is found in the silences and pauses. Failing to follow this path means failing to hear the story of the homosexual encounter, for that is exactly where the unsaid and unspoken narration is taking us.

The sequence between the two cellmates continues and the suggestive silences become the narrative space that tells of the most intimate of social encounters. Here, sex itself falls outside of what words are capable of and is expressed as a story told in tandem with the reader itself. With both literal and textual foreplay well underway, Molina leads us to the silent narration of homosexual sex with these words:

--Valentín... si querés, podés hacerme lo que quieras... porque yo si quiero.

--...

--Si no te doy asco.

--No digas esas cosas. Callado es mejor.

--Me corro un poco contra la pared.

--...

--No se ve nada, nada... en esta oscuridad.

--...

--Espacio...

--...

--No, así me duele mucho.

--..

--Esperá, no, así es mejor, dejame que levante las piernas.

--...

--Despacito, por favor, Valentín.

--...

--Así...

--...

--Gracias... gracias...

--Gracias a vos también... (221)

From the beginning of this encounter between Molina and Valentín the reader is given hints, but is never explicitly told what is going on. We must use our own experience to engage such a fragmented text and read between the lines and into the silent ellipses. It is only with our own experience that we can understand what Molina wants Valentín to do to him. If we take this notion literally and to its extreme, it is precisely our imaginative approach to the silent story told here that allows us to avoid becoming completely dumbfounded in the face of Molina's gymnastic maneuvers. In our most extreme innocence, we would end up asking why Molina is leaning up against the wall with his legs lifted upwards anyway? What in the world is Valentín doing to him so fast or slow that would make Molina hurt or be thankful? Reading such a passage with innocent eyes allows us to recognize the importance of understanding what is said, or not said, in between the lines. Without being able to imagine the awkwardness of any intimate encounter we would be lost to this story that tells of passion and desire.

Here, the silences do much more than evade the strict limits of textuality and the word itself. The silences that we see on the page and hear from outside the prison cell doors, and from within the corridor, force us, as readers, to think about our own sexual experience. Silence makes sexuality into a path that leads to meaning and to the key to understanding marginal stories. Silence makes of sexuality a bridge between social difference. After all, we don't necessarily have to have had a homosexual experience to be able to read between the textual words and see that the silences are referring to the awkward encounter between two, presumably, naked bodies. In this sense, the story of



passion, desire and pleasure, like the physical encounter in Puig's jail cell, defies normative limits and that which is acceptable in any traditional sense. Both, in this case, are forbidden by official discourse: on the one hand, the warden himself insists that Molina remain in political and social confrontation with his cellmate, while on the other hand, traditional textual narratives refuse open meaning when words are used to fix stories and subjects in time. In the end, the prison narrative itself not only permeates the walls of official discourse in order to reach us, the readers, but it also creates a narrative that uses its difference to speak about the marginal space, acts and emotions that define it. It becomes a narrative that speaks about marginal subjects but that marks them in a different time, as part of a different past, and as part of one that is documented in silence, and located in the discursive darkness. Puig's prison narrative essentially reveals a sexual memory and the nuances of its very narration.

## Chapter 2: Discovering Silent Pasts: Copi's Archive of the Marginal Subject

“It is no longer a question simply of saying what was done—the sexual act—and how it was done; but of reconstructing, in and around the act, the thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it, the images, desires, modulations, and quality of the pleasure that animated it. For the first time no doubt, a society has taken upon itself to solicit and hear the imparting of individual pleasures”

Michel Foucault The History of Sexuality V1

How do you speak about the past without talking about history? How do you speak about the past without considering the seemingly *natural* progression that our archives create as they mark a passing through time and space? When we stop to think—before we actually talk—about the past, we realize that this *natural* relationship between one finished event and another and their *proper* space in time are not *natural* or *proper* at all. In fact, this priority given to chronology, to order and progression are characteristics of a systematic way of recording the past that allows us to remember, reflect and reconstruct events as they happened. Historical records as such, create a way of engaging with the past that places knowledge and understanding in direct contact with the compilation or gathering of the historical artifacts. As a result, it is the archive, the library, or any book case, where many locate history in its most concrete form.

The archive and its many symbolic parallels are regarded as a means of reliving specific moments of the past. From it we develop a historical narrative, a historical memory that allows the past to come alive as an explanation, as a justification and as an epistemological path into the present. Here speaking about the past, then, becomes a way of giving life and narrating the archive and the records of what once was. However, the question then becomes: How then, do you speak about events or actions located in history's *blank spaces*, outside of the archive and its records of the past? The work of an Argentine exile named Copi, who lived in Paris from 1962 until his death in 1987

provides a way to help come to terms with such questions. In particular, let us go back to 1977 and to the publication of his most recognized novel called El baile de las locas.<sup>31</sup> Despite a narration that takes us from Paris' Left Bank, through the fast paced lights of New York, onto the famed beaches of Ibiza, and into the holiest of all capitals, Rome, this novel tells of much more than a cultural history of the 1960s and '70s. This is a novel that reflects upon the unique openness of a post '68 Parisian atmosphere to sexual freedoms that finds expression to be ironically dominated by the market politics of a capitalist economy. In this novel, sex creates history and is left outside of history. On the one hand, it is sex that wrote May '68, sexual freedom, and helped place notions of equal rights into social history. On the other hand, it is sex that which is being taken over by the commodity goods and which silences the author's desire to tell the story of his own homosexual experiences. In El baile de las locas, Copi does not have access to Puig's prison narrative, but instead narrates his sexual memory in the midst of dominant discourses. Where Puig's protagonists are free to narrate their intimate relations, Copi finds his sexual memory overwhelmed by normative pressures. The result is a text that shows the dynamics of sexual memory itself and just how the author insists that such a story be told.

The story El baile de las locas begins in Paris, a week or so before the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, 1976—supposedly the day this novel was finished—and places Copi in the center of the tale as both author and protagonist. As the story takes shape, Copi is

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<sup>31</sup> Like the majority of Copi's work, this novel was originally written in French and published in Paris under the title Le bals des folles (1977). The majority of his texts can be found in Spanish translation and for reasons of coherence with chapters 1 and 3 of this dissertation, I will be using the Spanish translation to quote from when it is available. In any case, I regard the translation of Copi's work as an interpretation of its content and therefore an important factor to take into account at the moment of critical reflection. As such, I will be commenting on how Copi's texts loose or gain meaning via such linguistic shifts.

confronted by his editor, who seeks reimbursement for a loan given to him and, as a consequence, is forced to hurry the production of his next novel and what appears to be the same story we are reading. The heterosexual editor gives Copi specific commands to write a novel about homosexuals—“you know the topic quite well”, the editor recognizes (Copi 13). With this encounter between Copi and his editor there comes not only a thematic orientation, a sort of prologue to the *real* story, but also an acknowledgement of the traditional historical divide that at the same time separates fiction from historical truth, dominant from marginalized discourses, and particularly hetero from homosexuality. More astutely, however, this petition made by Copi’s editor asking him to *write a novel* about himself—and other homosexuals like him—identifies narrative expression and particularly historical documentation as central to subjectivity and its formulation.

In asking Copi to write about homosexuality, the editor identifies the author by means of a historical model of sexuality that applauds the (mis)understanding of queer sexuality via the seemingly necessary distance of stereotypes and social bias. Here Copi’s editor does not ask Copi to talk about heterosexuality, nor does his petition ask for descriptions of other dominant social narratives. What he does ask for is an anthropological confession of Copi’s past love affair with another man, Pierre, in the name of his own economic interests. Although Copi’s narrative voice does not allow us to probe the reasoning behind the editor’s wishes, it becomes quite obvious that the proposed thematics for the book we are reading are meant to serve within the marketplace as either; (1), a traditional romance used to educate the heterosexual on these *alternative* sexualities—in which case, the original petition itself places the unique intrigue of Copi’s

homosexual "autobiography" within the already established framework of romantic stories of past love lost: a genre that itself teeters on the limits of high culture—and provides yet another critical element that situates Copi's text in a specific (lesser) narrative form—or, (2), an eroticized story of flamboyance and eccentricity that will certainly identify with, and be appropriated by a queer public, while at the same time fill the daunting task of upholding the *homosexual* stereotype. In both cases, Copi's editor refuses him access to any original, new narrative structures and limits the narration of Copi's own past to the service of dominant discourses and to a series of already established social definitions. In any case, in the Paris of 1976, what seems to sell is not just sex, but the confessionals of sex's misunderstandings.

However, as Copi mourns his lover's death, it becomes evident that what he has lost is not easily objectified according to his editor's terms. While contemplating his editor's request, Copi wonders: "¿Una novela sobre homosexuales? ¿Pierre en una novela sobre homosexuales? Me siento indignado. Salgo de casa de mi editor decidido a no escribirla" (13). Copi disregards the editor's proposal and with it its proposed narrative limits. In its place, Copi gives himself a new set of instructions: one that changes not only the projection of the story to be told but also expands, and breaks through any structural wall that would otherwise stand in its contents' way. Contemplating such a possibility, Copi motivates himself with his own editorial petition: "Estás a punto de inventarte una novela para ti solo.(...) ¿Hay algo más íntimo que la novela de Pierre? El cuerpo de Pierre, pienso" (13). Here Copi recognizes that traditional narratives are unable to tell the story of Pierre's body as he knows it. At this point, narration does not facilitate the actual *telling* of the story, but instead impedes Copi's intimate secrets from

being revealed. What Copi needs is a different way of approaching the story of Pierre's body: one that puts the body first and historical tradition second.

At the beginning of the second chapter, titled *Confesión* or *Confession*, Copi formally notifies the reader that this novel, its author and, consequently its readers, will reject the editor's petition and search to capture the intimacy of Copi's relationship with his lover's body via a different narrative.<sup>32</sup> And it is just that: Copi's narrative is different from any romance that traditionally tells a lover's story, or even from an autobiography where the narrator is the central subject around which a historical narrative circulates.<sup>33</sup> In the first lines of this second chapter, Copi begins to describe the structural aims of his text:

Les diré de antemano que lo que van a leer es una novela policíaca, que hay varios crímenes y dos culpables, pero nada de policía (es algo que no soporto en

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<sup>32</sup> The twelve chapters of Copi's novel are all given titles. In order of appearance, they are: Pietro Gentiluomo, Confesión, La rival, La serpiente de Nueva York, Ibiza, La bola de cristal, El Mediterráneo, Rue des Tríos-Portes, treinta y tres, El vapor, La amnesia, Con el corazón en la mano, La última pissotiere. The titles themselves guide our reading of the novel in thematic blocks. This proves to be yet another way Copi denies fluidity to traditional historical narratives.

<sup>33</sup> In *Myth and Archive: A theory of Latin American Narrative* (1990), Roberto González Echevarría classifies the main forms of Latin American narrative in relation to three kinds of hegemonic discourse: 1), legal discourse (pertaining to the literature of the Colonial period), 2), scientific discourse (seen within the literary canon ranging from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, until the first two decades of the twentieth century), and 3), anthropological discourse (lasting until the publication of *Los pasos perdidos* by Alejo Carpentier (1953) and Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967)]— while present literature is characterized by its attempt to reorganize and rewrite these elements, forming a sort of discursive archive. In the present, legitimacy is obtained by imitating anthropological discourses and in this imitation, criticizing previous hegemonic discourses (144). This critical narrative was described by Carlos Fuentes in *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (1969) as one that utilized categories that were traditionally absent from Latin American literature; such as the creation of myth and a critical imagination through ambiguity, humour and parody. This new literature aimed to create a new sense of historicity and language in order to be able to express a modern reality, its political revolution, capitalism and poverty (Fuentes 29). According to Fuentes, "sólo la palabra vertida puede descolorar eso que pasa por 'realidad' para mostrarnos lo real: lo que la 'realidad' consagrada oculta: la totalidad escondida o mutilada por la lógica convencional (por no decir: de conveniencia)" (85). However, while accepting the value of the so called "new Latin American narrative", sex remains part of a hidden discourse. This is exemplified in Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* where in its now famous chapter 69, the author invents a codified language in order to capture an intimate moment. Copi, therefore, intends to activate sexual narration and at the same time undermine hegemonic discourse. Copi's novel shows itself to be an escape from normativity and in doing so insists on its own peculiarity as a means of opposing the relationships presented by authors like Carlos Fuentes and Roberto González Echevarría.

las novelas policiales) y por tanto, tampoco castigo. Y aquí lo que les propongo para el primer día de trabajo (pues ustedes van a trabajar conmigo en busca del placer cuando los crímenes ocurran, sin que les proponga, por supuesto, otro placer que el completamente intelectual). (19)

It is not a coincidence that Copi decides to tell his memory of past love lost through the detective genre. Although seemingly unrelated to Copi's tale, the detective genre is quite in tone with our author's apparent goals. It is the opposite of any confession. After all, what we have here is not the story of a detective/police/law enforcer searching for the coveted confession? No, what we have is a gay man using his own voice to counter that very confessional that his editor so eagerly pursued. Also, the detective genre implies giving value to hidden information in hopes of discovering and orienting the original tale around a central (historical) mystery: in this case the (homo)social encounter between two men. However, Copi's story avoids the possibility of any such simplistic explanation. What he leaves us with is a detective novel without police, and crime without punishment. But is this possible? If in all other narratives—be it a detective story, Dostoevsky's classic and even Foucault's critical theory—crime is inseparable from punishment: how then can Copi separate the one from the other and still maintain narrative cohesion? In Copi's story of the death of his lover, even the traditional psychoanalytic attempt to work through an emotional loss in order to come to terms with the source of pain as Freud would suggest in his essay "Mourning and Melancholia", falls apart when the death of Pierre insists upon a different way of talking historically about Copi's past.<sup>34</sup> For Copi, mourning involves embracing the emotional discomfort and

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<sup>34</sup> Here Copi is in line with Lee Edelman and Gilles Deleuze who notice how Freudian narratives express social interaction in strictly normative terms.

chaos of melancholia. Here, there is no “working through”, and there is no particular goal of clarity and order. Instead, Copi’s text attempts only to speak about a moment when narratives are not yet formed and when traditional social markers are of no use.

In this novel, Copi does not simply tell of what happens in the homosexual world. Here he inscribes Pierre’s body onto the way he speaks of the past in a push to express what happens at the moment two naked bodies collide, and at the moment two men are socially defined as gay. Copi talks candidly about the man’s naked body in an attempt to express sex as the crossroads of social interaction *par excellence*. As he remembers life with love, sex becomes the only clearly understandable form of social interaction as it is precisely during the sex act that subjectivity, in all its naked truth, is finally tangible and separate from social history that confuses and complicates social perception. Here, the passion of the moment makes subjectivity an instantaneous construct that is inseparable from the intimacy involved in the touching and feeling of another’s body. To speak of the moment when subjectivity is at its most precise is to speak of a social encounter outside of time itself.

El baile de las locas exemplifies Copi’s attempt to expand the expressive limitations of the narrative act present in all his artistic production. This critical perspective became part of Copi’s simultaneous artistic portfolio that included everything from his cartoon production to his short stories and theatre pieces; and it inevitably found its own intersections with a certain number of particular works. This chapter will focus on the initial stages of Copi’s career, in an attempt to grasp the development of a narrative theory of society’s historical limits. To do so, we will look at the complexity of his comical sketches within Le Nouvel Observateur; witness the representative



capacity of the visual image as it is stretched to new (theatrical) heights in his first formal theatre presentation called Loretta Strong (1976); and finally, we will read the queer subject within the narrative void where sex is had and subjectivity felt and necessarily understood, as we return in mode of conclusion to El baile de las locas.<sup>35</sup> As we explore Copi's life, his artistic production testifies to a historical vision definitely not at work, but instead, at play. It is precisely Copi's playful way of approaching the past through the body that allows for his artistic production to define social relations that otherwise go unnoticed by other, more traditional historical narratives. In a sense, it is his very artistic production that creates a means of recording the body, and of creating for it and for the subject who wishes to touch it, its very own historical archive. For Copi, sex literally becomes the way to engage his own marginal past, and sexual memory a way of documenting the history of what goes on behind closed doors.

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<sup>35</sup> This series of intersections is approached in a chronological fashion, upholding what would be—in the conditions of this study—the tradition of dominant historical narratives. However, when the most recognizable aspect of Copi's work is understood to have been his comic production, this study then becomes oriented in a different way. Beginning with his comics we begin with an aspect of popular culture as the origins of our study and do something that in itself is against dominant academic discourses even today. In beginning with Copi's comics, this study is also drawing attention to the fact that Copi as an artist was known more for this *lower* art form than he was for his theatre or narrative: something that in itself goes against the traditional image of both a dramaturge and novelist who strive to be recognized publicly via these *high* art forms.

For proof that Copi was more recognized for his comic production just look at the distribution numbers for Le Nouvel Observateur: "Dicen algunas versiones que, cuando *Le Nouvel Observateur* empezó a publicar la historieta "La mujer sentada", de Copi, aumentó la tirada, especialmente por el interés." (Freire). In a discussion I had with Yve-Alain Bois, when asked about Copi he mentioned something to the extent of: "Oh, I know him. I went to one of his plays once." But when asked to specify which and who was its protagonist he could not continue. Instead he went on to tell me that he along with his friends eagerly awaited the publication of his cartoons to see just how Copi would manipulate his minimalist aesthetic to create such innovative and critical discussions. Needless to say, Bois had no trouble remembering the characters of Copi's comics (there, after all, only is one protagonist) and the places where they were published.

## I. Copi's La femme assise: A Weekly Archive of the Margins

Copi, whose given name was Raúl Damonte, was a cartoonist, dramaturge and novelist who lived in Paris from 1962 until his death in 1987. Born in Buenos Aires in 1939, Copi was taken into exile by his family with the advent of Peronism.<sup>36</sup> It was upon Copi's return to Buenos Aires in 1955, after having spent time in both Montevideo and Paris, when he began his career publishing comic strips in the satirical magazine, Tía Vicenta.<sup>37</sup> Here, the large cast of contributors included then unknown cartoonist Quino as well as songwriters and musicians like Maria Elena Walsh. Together they worked to create a new style of graphic humor within Argentina: one that would imply constant transgression free of any ideological associations (Russo 57).<sup>38</sup> It was under such strict guidelines that enforced both creative and sociopolitical freedoms that Copi introduced the first drafts of a cartoon series that forced its readers to contemplate implicit social

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<sup>36</sup> Copi's family tree in general is of particular interest in order to understand the facility with which he was able to embrace alternative ideals and aesthetic concepts. His father, Raúl Damonte Taborda, was a radical journalist and politician who was openly critical of Peronism. In his Ayer fue san Perón, 12 años de humillación argentina (Buenos Aires, 1955) he elaborates a harsh critique not only of fascism and Argentina's dominant regime, but of Peron himself (included in Damonte Taborda's essay is a series of newspaper editorial dialogues between this journalist and the nation's president). His mother, Georgina, on the other hand, was the youngest daughter of Natalio Botana (the founder of a well known daily newspaper published in Buenos Aires called Crítica). Copi's maternal grandmother and wife of Natalio, Salvadora Onrubias, was also politically and artistically inclined as both a declared feminist and successful dramaturge. The colorful world that surrounded Copi as a youth would later take literary form in his uncle's memoirs (Memorias, Helvio Botana) and, according to David Wetzel, was used as a model for major sections of French writer, Guy Hocquenghem's celebrated novel on AIDS, Eve (1987), (Wetzel 118).

<sup>37</sup> Tía Vicenta was the first political humor magazine in Argentina and was established by Juan Carlos Colombres (Landrú) in 1957 only to be censored and eventually closed by the Onganía administration, in July 1966. This magazine was the first to show comic strips by such cartoonists as Quino, of Mafalda fame (von Rebeur).

<sup>38</sup> Russo insists that Tía Vicenta initiated a new style of political and graphic humor. However, Oscar Vázquez Lucio—better known as Siulnas—, author of Historia del humor gráfico y escrito en la Argentina and successful cartoonist himself, places Tía Vicenta at the beginning of a renaissance of a specific type of politicized graphic humor that had been absent for several generations (13). Among the precursors to Tía Vicenta, Siulnas includes Natalio Botana's Crítica. According to Siulnas, Crítica was an essential space in the creation of extended cartoon stories, or *historietas*: that which today we understand as a cartoon strip (273-5). It is not a coincidence that this same magazine would later fall into the hands of Raúl Damonte Taborda: Copi's father (“¿Quién fue Diógenes Taborda?”).

issues of gender, social hierarchy and power relations alongside Argentina's daily political happenings.<sup>39</sup>

In his first cartoons, Copi introduced the public to a simplistic sketch of a middle aged woman with straight shoulder-length hair, a large nose and beady eyes who sat constantly on a rickety-looking chair. This cartoon protagonist and the stories it told, although originally published in Buenos Aires, didn't gain international acclaim until Copi made his definitive move to Paris, in 1962, where the strip was baptized, La femme assise, or The Seated Woman. In a sense, the political turmoil that forced him and his family from Argentina was no place for the ascension of an unknown cartoon figure to cultural dominance. It was only upon leaving his native Buenos Aires and establishing himself in Paris, that in 1964, Copi's seated woman made her debut as a character who presented herself "como la Sara Bernhardt de la historieta, la filósofa de la burguesía. Pero por sobre todas las cosas e[ra] la observadora de un mundo cada vez más convulsivo, cada vez más decadente" (Freire). It was this woman who found her place in the political magazine, Le Nouvel Observateur, alongside contributions by Roland Barthes and Jean-Luc Goddard as well as the daily news.<sup>40</sup> It was here, that both Copi and the Seated Woman found their place on a chair—and in the focal point of the social

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<sup>39</sup> In Russo's La historia de Tía Vicente, the author includes some of these first images of Copi's seated woman: a cartoon strip that would make him famous later, several years after his definitive arrival in Paris in 1962. In them, one can witness Copi's only cartoon production aimed specifically for an Argentine public (47, 144-7).

<sup>40</sup> Throughout his career as a cartoonist, Copi published his drawings in numerous Parisian magazines. As a cartoonist he never dedicated himself fully to one specific publication, but instead published simultaneously in several: Copi began publishing in 1964 in Le Nouvel Observateur (as was mentioned earlier), 1972 in Hari-Kiri and Charlie Hebdo, in 1979 in Libération, and 1984 in Gai Pied. His comics have been compiled in five editions: Humour secret (1965), Les poulet n'ont pas des chaises (1966), Le dernier salon où l'on cause (1973), Et moi, pourquoi j'ai pas une banane? (1978), Le monde fantastique de gay (1986).

eye—that was quite different from any seat, or glare for that matter, offered to them earlier.

A selection of this initial series of cartoons was compiled shortly after in an edition titled, Les poulets n'ont pas de chaises (1966), or Chickens Don't Have Chairs.<sup>41</sup> In this series of cartoons, Copi presented his public with a female protagonist who sat—comic strip after comic strip—calmly on her chair, awaiting the action that her author was to bring her way. Her spot on the chair became more and more central to the cartoon's framework as Copi introduced his protagonist to other characters. In many cases the chair itself became the thematic guide to the conversations, struggles and debates held within the comic strips' linear frame. Even the title of the compilation—*Chickens don't have chairs*—reflected the central position of the chair. However, it is not simply the chair that provides the thematic pull to Copi's narrative. Instead, many of the stories are created by answering and deciding *who* sits on it. Much like the implicit questions asked by the title—*Why don't chickens have chairs? Should they even have a chair?*—, this comic series discusses why it is exactly that this woman with a big nose deserves to occupy such a central position within the cartoon's social framing.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Although first published in French, this series of cartoons quickly crossed the Atlantic and was introduced in New York's Evergreen Review: a literary magazine that published authors like, Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs and Malcolm X as well as English translations of Antonin Artaud, Roland Barthes, and Latin Americans of the likes of Juan Rulfo, Carlos Fuentes, Octavio Paz, Jorge Luis Borges, and Pablo Neruda. By 1969, the compilation of Copi's cartoons was published in English by Grove Press, in New York, using as its material those strips that appeared in the Evergreen Review. That said, the cartoons originally present in Le Nouvel Observateur and the French edition of *Chickens don't have chairs* are not necessarily the same as those published in the Evergreen Review and the English language compilation. For the purposes of this chapter I have chosen the French original as my primary text and when possible will use the English translation of the comic. If the comic I refer to is not present in the English compilation, I will include the original with my own translation of the text in parenthesis.

<sup>42</sup> Marílu Marini, who starred in Alfredo Arias' 1984 adaptation of Copi's comic strip, explains the origins of Copi's most famous character. She notes that "[e]n Francia, a diferencia quizá de la Argentina, la burguesía es muy poderosa y constituye un tejido social muy importante. Copi se inspiró en ella para crear a La mujer sentada: un personaje muy trágico, un ser de una soledad terrible, que no encuentra forma de establecer un diálogo de ningún tipo. Todos los personajes vienen a proponerle cosas, pero esta mujer no

The answer to the question of who occupies the chair comes quickly to the forefront of the cartoon's storyline. Ironically, for Copi, the answer to this question and to the cartoon itself is in the initial interrogation. For Copi, to ask who sits on the chair brings to the table a series of social norms that revolve around the figure of the patriarch that he wishes to question. For Copi then, to tell a story of a woman is reason enough to tell her story. But to tell a story about a woman in a chair desired by others becomes even more notorious and deserving of being told. In fact, as Copi gives the woman the chair, he gives her much more than the central role to his narrative. When this chair is separated from the ever-so-significant kitchen table—where night after night we see the traditional heterosocial roles sit down for dinner—Copi gives his protagonist a role in a story that is located outside normative settings.<sup>43</sup> In Copi's cartoon, the woman not only sits on the chair, but sits on a chair that is located outside in the public sphere and outside of her traditional social space: the house. However, we must not confuse this chair with the dominant male's throne. After all, he doesn't seem interested in this chair. After all, why would *he*, if his dinner was at the table, beside another, more welcoming chair? What Copi ends up producing is a debate about *who*, if not the traditionally dominant (heterosexual) male, can occupy the chair, or, narrative protagonism, for lack of a better allegory.

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puede salir de su testarudez, del papel que se autoasigna: filósofa de la burguesía. Esto la conduce inevitablemente a la catástrofe" ("La portera del universo").

<sup>43</sup> Reflecting upon her own theatrical interpretation of Copi's seated woman in its first Argentine presentation in Buenos Aires, in March 1998, Marilu Marini comments: "La silla es el poder, el lugar, la identidad. Si ella se mueve de ahí muere porque es lo único que la sostiene. Saber que la silla está ahí le da preeminencia sobre los otros personajes. Y eso es lo que le permite existir" ("La portera del universo"). Not only does the actress recognize the importance of the chair, but does so while also conceding it power to define those who sit on it.

As we see in our first comic strip, (plate 1), the protagonist in Copi's narrative can easily find a substitute.<sup>44</sup> In this case, the "who", of who gets to occupy the chair, is related to the functional purpose of the same cartoon narrative. The cartoon begins with the female protagonist taking her usual place within Copi's comic strips and while on her chair she silently watches as another character enters the frame. The figurine that has just entered is a chicken and it proceeds to ask why it doesn't have a chair. The question is answered when both the woman and the chicken accept that the chair should belong to the one that accomplishes the functional purpose of a cartoon: to *make* people laugh. Now the question becomes, of course, *who* makes people laugh. While Copi goes through this simple causal relation of *who does what* and decides that the woman doesn't make people laugh—or that the simple act of separating a recognizable character from her even more recognizable chair is funny in itself—the cartoon ultimately points fun at the struggle for social protagonism put on by marginalized subjects. Here the joke does not lie in the "who" sits on the chair but instead in the fact that the chair really doesn't mean anything if it weren't for its documented history that tells of its past occupants and of the current struggles for its occupation.

In fact, in another strip (plate 2), the chicken, the woman and her chair are all thrown out of Copi's narrative frame. When the struggle for the chair is itself deemed boring or just not funny by its author, the protagonists literally lose their jobs and are forced out of the story line. Scattered with market-oriented thematics, in this comic strip we see the struggle for narrative protagonism at its peak: where the weak—and definitely not funny—story lines are substituted much like a lazy worker, for different, more

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<sup>44</sup> It should be noted that none of Copi's cartoons are titled. Instead they are defined collectively by the series name: Le femme assise. This of course is significant in terms of the discussion at hand. For the duration of this essay, I will be referring to the selected comic strips according to their plate number.

appealing—more productive—narratives.<sup>45</sup> In this strip, the apparent conflict established earlier between the chicken and the female protagonist vanishes, giving way to *class based* loyalty. Here, the two characters unite under the watchful eye of the narrative panopticon in order to produce the desired comical product.<sup>46</sup> However, much like the mediocre joke told by the female protagonist earlier that left her sitting on the floor, Copi literally sends his counterproductive workers packing. Although the strip is complete, we are left with the daunting thought of Copi sitting on his own chair, immersed in the power relations of this cartoon world. It is not a coincidence that both the chicken and the woman clean out their desks and leave the cartoon's frame in a scene reminiscent of two homeless people trekking through the streets. After all, would Copi not then be the evil office manager, or the cold hearted business-man looking to cut loose ends? As this is but a symbolic exit—both the chicken and the woman return to Copi's cartoons—the act becomes one of jest that is once again directed to their own place within social interaction. The object of Copi's joke now becomes the seriousness of assigning already established social roles to its subjects and of describing each subject solely via this socially productive position.

It begs to be repeated that what is funny for Copi is not the jokes told or forgotten by his protagonist. Instead, in Copi's comics, fun is poked at the strict limitations used to narrate social interaction and just how such a historically focussed narration expresses

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<sup>45</sup> The capitalist notion of market value, of supply and demand, etc., is also seen as a central thematic guide in Copi's most recognized novel, *Les bals des folles* (The Queen's Ball)—which will be discussed later on in this chapter. Here Copi also discusses the marketability of other, particularly queer and homosexual stories. And much like he does in his cartoons, Copi avoids sacrificing alternative stories to dominant narrative structures by revealing clever ways of speaking about the marginalized subject.

<sup>46</sup> Eduardo Romano, in his article titled “¿Y usted de qué se ríe?” (And What Are You Laughing At?), comments this same strip. In his brief discussion, he draws attention to the act of enunciation: that is to say, that the critical moment of the comic lies in its circular nature. It begins and ends on the same question of how to make people laugh. In this sense, as Romano suggests the circular nature of this strip also points towards the presence of a narrative that literally falls back onto (in order to watch) itself.

and captures, if it does at all, societies' marginalized subjects. Once again it is the chicken and the *seated* woman that allow Copi to address this issue. In plate 3, we witness a strange beginning to a typical story. In the first frame, the woman asks what seems to be a very simple question that serves as a way that she could *understand* the other character better. This is a strange beginning as the chicken and the woman have interacted with each other so many times before: such an introduction must have occurred earlier. But then again, this is supposing that Copi's characters, not to mention the order of publication, follow some sort of development through chronological time—which, as we will see later, is probably not at all true. What the woman asks the chicken then, is significant for several other reasons. First of all, the question, “Are you a chicken or a duck?” implies that the chicken can only choose to *be* one of the two, either a chicken or a duck. It is a question that when posed restricts its interlocutor to two means of including itself in social history. At the same time, instead of allowing the chicken to define itself in its own terms, the question forcefully provides acceptable, already established social identities for the chicken to follow. This not only would allow the chicken to be admitted seamlessly into the woman's notion of *what it is*, but dictate and normalize all of the chicken's future actions, so as not to fall out of what the woman has defined as the chicken's social limitations.

However, as the strip continues, we notice that the chicken rejects such limiting social definitions by calling itself a peacock. When the “chicken” affirms that it is a “peacock”, it blurs any normative characteristics associated with its traditional role as social protagonist. What is considered to be a chicken in normative terms is now that which defines what it is to be a peacock. The result is a subject formation that is no



longer imposed, but instead is considered and outlined as an independent endeavour that not only includes naming oneself, but also the necessary spreading of one's wings, in a somewhat symbolic parade of colourful feathers that anticipates the rainbow of Gay Pride. This comic strip becomes emblematic of a debate central to Copi's own artistic production when it is viewed in terms of the repeated tension established throughout this series over who or what can sit on the chair and why,. This cartoon questions how one occupies *that* chair and what sitting in a central position permits or prohibits when it comes to social representation and a subject's agency.

In a particularly noteworthy cartoon, (plate 4), these issues of narrative expression, subjectivity and normative limitations consolidate themselves into one story line. Here, this same female protagonist sits beside a little pond only to have her tranquility disrupted by a fish that jumps out of the water and takes her spot on the chair. At first glance this strip seems to tell the comical tale of a woman who tries, to no avail, to catch a little fish. However, as Copi has shown us, the story is much more complex. Copi begins this comic strip, as he does with many, if not all others by establishing the protagonist's continued struggle to stay on *her* chair. Also typical within many other strips, it is this story that is then intersected by the new, unknown story of another character: in this case a fish. As the two narratives collide, the fish is quickly integrated into the original storyline and becomes one of many characters who have sought to rob Copi's protagonist of her chair in the author's previous cartoons. However, different from Copi's other cartoons, here the woman not only losses her spot on the chair thanks to the fish's intrusion, but as she dives into the water she becomes part of the fish's untold reality and its untold story. Copi's famous female protagonist is pulled

underwater and out of the narrative limits of the cartoon, leaving in her place the unanswered questions about her new experiences in an otherwise mysterious reality. The fact that the story remains focused on the fish in the chair and does not deviate in order to follow the woman into the water suggests that being part of, and existing within, the already established and well documented narrative is essential to speaking about both characters as social subjects.

As reflected in these specific cases, Copi's La femme assise addressed issues of social protagonism, subject formation and the restrictive force of dominant historical narratives; and it did so on a consistent basis. The cartoon series appeared in the periodical's index in a weekly spot within the "Notre époque" section of Le Nouvel Observateur. The formal spot given to Copi's Seated Woman situated her alongside, for example, Andre Breton's last Surrealist manifesto or in the company of an interview with Che Guevara. However, amidst a periodical that gave priority to textual print, Copi's cartoons found themselves inevitably paired with local advertisements and other visual images. In this sense, Copi's cartoons became an allusive but very real part of the social forum, but nonetheless a part that was discussed in jest and as a sideshow to the debates surrounding the dominant textual narratives. But as time passed, the Seated Woman became inscribed within Paris' documented history. As the days passed and Le Nouvel Observateur was put on the shelf with the other late editions, Copi's Seated Woman and the social issues she engaged with found themselves sitting, together on that same chair, within a very traditional archive, telling a very different story.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> In fact, Copi published a series of 7 short stories in a collection called Virginia Wolf a encore frappe (Paris, 1983)—translated into Spanish the following year and published in Barcelona by Anagrama as Virginia Woolf ataca de nuevo. The first of the seven stories is called "¿COMO? ¡ZIS! ¡ZAS! ¡AMOR!" and is about the relationship between the cartoonist and his writer: that is to say, the author of the words in

## II. Imag(in)ing Narratives: Copi and an Impossible Historical Theatrics

By 1966, Copi had become a well respected cartoonist and along with a weekly column in Le Nouvel Observateur had published two collections of his drawings: L'humour secret (1965) and Les poulets n'ont pas des chaise (1966). By this time, Copi had also integrated himself into Paris' thriving world of the performing arts. Post-war Paris had become a theatrical center where international playwrights like Bertolt Brecht, had found fame in the wake of existentialism and it's Theatre of the Absurd (Bradby 4). Amidst a creative atmosphere where international experimentation was favoured over and above the national French theatrical tradition, Copi attended L'Université du Théâtre des Nations and was brought into contact with prominent Latin American artists like Argentine nationals Jorge Lavelli and Jérôme Savary, and Chilean dramaturge and actor Alejandro Jodorowski among others (Bradby 11). As a result, shortly after his arrival in 1962, Copi joined four other Spanish speaking expatriates (Jorge Lavelli, Fernando Arrabal, Alejandro Jodorowsky and Roland Topor) to form the theatre group Pánico.<sup>48</sup> Copi also acted with Jerome Savary in his Grand Magic Circus—a revolutionary theatre

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the word bubbles that *narrate* the story that the images tell. In this story Copi identifies himself as one of the illiterate cartoonists who have together decided to send their lone writer back to his native Japan—the fact that the writer is Japanese and working in Paris as a cartoon narrator is itself a thematic twist that deserves much more time to be contemplated properly. As Japan is soon described as a place where comics *don't work*, this trip home for the Japanese cartoon narrator named Nunu-Nip becomes a sort of banishment from Paris where the visual image is said to prosper. However, when the cartoonists propose to accompany the protagonist to Japan, the writer reveals that he too is ashamed of being associated with them. In this text, Copi not only formally separates the literary from the visual, but he does this by means of scorn: each group lacks respect for the other. The relationship as such becomes one that reflects the different functions of both the word and the image. It is however, not a coincidence that Copi, as author himself, makes the Japanese writer commit suicide, leaving as a result the cartoonists as the only means of commenting on social interaction.

<sup>48</sup> Copi's place within Teatro pánico is a point around which information varies. While those who study Copi's life and work recognize his presence as actor within this theatre group (Canavese, Vallaza), many who have directed their attention to the group and its influence within Europe and Latin America either overlook him, or do not consider Copi as a member.

troupe that circulated in Paris' Left Bank. It was in this way that Copi became an active part of Paris' theatre production of the 1960's ("Copi y el teatro gay").

The above narrative marks Copi's entrance into Parisian theatre with surprising coherence. However, it must be noted that there is much conflicting information regarding the beginnings of Copi's career in Paris due to the sheer nature of theatre in the 1960's—definitively abstract, spontaneous and often unscripted in the traditional sense. What can be said, and what is equally, if not more important in understanding Copi and his work, is the fact that this *beginning* was markedly different from that of his career in the pages of Le Nouvel Observateur.<sup>49</sup> While Copi's career with Le Nouvel Observateur began with a certain start date (1964), and can be easily retrieved in the newspapers archives, Copi's presence in French theatre of the 1960's is documented with less care and in a totally different way. In fact, when it comes to speaking about French theatre and Copi, one must even venture into untraditional and even unauthored texts to gain any access at all to his story. Copi is often mentioned in tandem with contradictory information and unverifiable storylines in places like random theatre pamphlets, independent internet publications and even presentations on popular internet-video-posting sites like Youtube. His participation in the history of French theatre is chaotic to say the least. His very story tells of multiple theatre groups, different production styles and at times unscripted presentations, and this is reflected in the way we, as historians, access his past. However, Copi's place within both historical narratives—the one found

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<sup>49</sup> Before leaving Buenos Aires, Copi had written two plays: Un angel para la señora Lisca (1960) and El General Poder (1960). However, even this is debatable. Copi himself remembered only having written—and not ever directing, producing or acting in—one play at the age of 17 (Tcherkaski 77). Others fail to recognize the existence of El General Poder and insist that this work was produced in Buenos Aires when Copi was 19 (Wetsel). This is just one of many examples of the way in which information surrounding Copi, his life and work, confuses itself alone with his persona.

in Le Nouvel Observateur, and that which speaks of his participation in French theatre—contrasts two very different ways of speaking about the past. It also insists that Copi, and subjectivity itself, be looked at on multiple narrative fronts. After all, if we were to solely read into Copi’s history as a cartoonist, we would be missing significant details that help us to better understand who Copi is, and what his artistic production means to marginal subjects.

Copi himself remembers his initial transition from Buenos Aires to Paris to have favoured the later: “Cuando llegué a Paris dejé de escribir teatro. Dibujaba, hacía otras cosas, pero no escribía más” (Tcheraski 77). Although this is not literally true—Copi did *write* while in Paris—Paris became a place that inspired Copi to draw: that is to say, it inspired him to create images. While the inspiration seems here to be merely artistic, the pages of his fiction suggested that there be an economic reason to this aesthetic shift, (El baile de las locas or in his short story “¿COMO? ¡ZIS! ¡ZAS! ¡AMOR!”), found in Virginia Woolf ataca de nuevo). Either way, Copi decided to define his artistic creation by rejecting writing and by regarding the written word as a limit to his work.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> In Copi: Sexo y teatralidad (2003), Marcos Rosenzvaig discusses how Copi’s preference of the image over the written word extends into his theatrical work. Rosenzvaig recognizes Copi’s theatre to be drawn as if they were themselves comics. In his theatre, he comments, “[n]o hay descanso, todo es un continuo separado entre cuadro y cuadro, entre dibujo y dibujo. Copi dibuja con los actores, y esta manera de concebir el teatro lo hace ser creador de un lenguaje” (17). According to Rosenzvaig, Copi is able to use this unique, personalized language to unite his cartoons with his theatre and novelistic production—something that I will demonstrate in this chapter. Nonetheless, Rosenzvaig’s comments on how Copi’s cartoons manifest themselves throughout the entirety of his work helps explain to what extent Copi decentralizes the traditional focus placed upon the *word* both as referent and social symbol: “Él logró trasvolar sus imágenes como dibujante para hacer de la letra un dibujo, una imagen vertiginosa. La historia de un cómic se resuelve en pocos cuadros, en pocos cuadros se cuenta una historia. No está interesado por aclarar el pasado de sus personajes ni de dónde vienen. Copi entiende el teatro como lo que es: la desmesura” (21). As Rosenzvaig’s comments prove to be insightful, he disregards one of Copi’s first plays, Loretta Strong (1974), as infantile (113). It is precisely in this non-traditional way of presenting language itself where I see Copi continuing to revolutionize his narrative image: this is a precursor to the topic at hand in this section of the chapter.

As Copi began to articulate his own critical platform against traditional modes of narrativity, it is not a coincidence that his first theatrical work in Paris was an abstract sketch—a *happening*—based on his most famous cartoon protagonist: the Seated Woman. Titled Saint Genevieve dans sa baignoire, or “Saint Genevieve in Her Bathtub,” Copi’s first production was a five minute performance directed by fellow Argentine expatriate, Jorge Lavelli. It was here that Copi found himself, for the first time, on stage as both author and protagonist. For Copi, being on-stage and performing was something spectacular in every sense of the word: being on-stage meant being able to define his own relationship with representation. However, Copi was never *just* on-stage. In Saint Genevieve dans sa baignoire, for example, Copi sat in a bath tub sprinkled with talcum powder and literally nothing else (Martel 90): an image that itself can not be found on paper, but was definitely not easily forgotten. In his theatrical work as a whole, the particular importance placed on the actor and the visual image he created—many times the actor or protagonist was Copi himself—undermined the traditional role of the written text.<sup>51</sup> In placing creative emphasis on the visual aspects of his theatre—those elements that are essentially left out of its script—Copi’s work became an intriguing spectacle to watch as each representation was very different from the next.

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<sup>51</sup> Copi’s work as a whole is regarded as minimalist. In it “Copi logra todo con una impresionante economía de medios: así como los trazos de sus caricaturas son sencillísimos (el ojo es un punto; el pelo, cinco líneas no demasiado rectas; la nariz, un semicírculo), en sus obras son escasas, cuando no inexistentes, las acotaciones y las exigencias de escenografía, de iluminación, de utilería; mucho menos sugiere a los actores cómo interpretar sus textos, ni propone al director cómo llevarlos a escena. Se diría que sus obras teatrales se basan exclusivamente en la fuerza de las palabras, que, aunque no desprecian la teatralidad, muchas veces la trascienden y pueden leerse como relatos en primera persona, o a varias voces: es por medio de los parlamentos como nos enteramos de lo que ha sucedido, de lo que va sucediendo, y sólo las palabras que salen de los personajes nos ofrecen la información necesaria sobre ellos” (Zapata 12). However, without stage directions, the words are the only things that remain stable. In this sense Copi gives creative freedom and emphasis to that which is presented on stage. It is the focus placed on the visual presentation of his theatre that complicates its critical evaluation (Wetzel 119).

It is in this sense that Copi not only used the stage to define himself theatrically, but he also used it to define the meaning of the script altogether. With Copi's theatre, the visual image overpowered the public as well as his own text. This is particularly true for Copi's first published play and one of his most controversial works: Loretta Strong (1974).<sup>52</sup> Loretta Strong premièred the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, 1974, at the Theatre Gaîté-Montparnasse in Paris and in it Copi told of a woman who left a distraught planet earth in search of an alternative that would be her home and allow her to harvest gold. This piece is a delirious monologue that lasts the duration of Loretta's odyssey and presents the one-sided nature of a continuous telephone conversation with numerous people, animals and aliens, both on and off her space ship. As this work comes to life, Copi's Loretta Strong establishes a divide between text and visual performance by exaggerating the actor's incapacity to represent, or even simply identify, the actions that would *naturally* accompany the written word. Here nothing comes naturally: not for the actor, not for the public and ultimately not for the words that search for a tangible referent with which to anchor the performance. Instead, Loretta Strong becomes a play that *draws* attention not

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<sup>52</sup> It must be noted that the Spanish translation of Loretta Strong being used in this chapter is done by Luis Zapata and uses Mexican idioms. Different from the majority of Copi's work, published in Spanish by Barcelona's Anagrama, this version of Loretta Strong is part of the recent translation boom of Copi's work by independent editorials based in Argentina (Adriana Hidalgo, *El interpretador*) and Mexico (Milagro). In any case, Copi himself made a decided effort not to participate in any translations of his work. During the translation to Spanish of Copi's L'uruguayen (Christian Bourgois: París, 1972), Jorge Herralde, editor and founder of Anagrama, remembers Copi's particular lack of interest. Herralde recalls the moment: "A la salida, Copi con un peludísimo abrigo blanco hasta los pies, nos fuimos a un bar para comentar la jugada: ningún problema, dijo, podíamos editar el libro, él no tenía tiempo (ni ganas, supongo) de revisar la traducción (ni ésta ni ninguna de las otras que fui publicando)" (38). Copi's reaction in this case is in itself significant as it suggests that for him writing in French is a purposeful endeavor and essential to his artistic creation. In fact, Copi begins El uruguayo in first person, (that is, as Copi himself), and assures his interlocutor that he is aware of his how strange his writing—in French—may seem (Las viejas travestís 90). However, as Copi tells his reader, the goal of this text "es más por ser leído por usted que por lo que le voy a contar" (89). For Copi, the critical element does not lie in the language used, as Ilse Logie suggests in her article that reads El uruguayo as a work that rejects any national Argentine identity (421). Instead, both in this short story as well as through his artistic creation, Copi's critical perspective lies primarily in the act of perception: that which is perceived by the public, as opposed to the message that is intended to be *read* either in a social or textual sense. Much like in Loretta Strong, meaning becomes secondary to the performance itself.

only to the incoherence of representation itself, but also to the inaccuracy of any attempt to historically situate its *mise en scène*. While Copi's cartoons archive the very presence of the marginal subject and of the socially absent, Loretta Strong questions the possibility of reproducing and of *representing* the past at all, let alone the physical body that has lived it. After all, how will Loretta Strong resituate humanity by herself? Can a replica of human life be represented by "one" person? Where is the Adam to her Eve? And so on and so forth. What becomes clear with Loretta Strong is that traditional storylines are of no help in deciphering what is presented on stage.

Loretta Strong questions the simplest relationship between text and image. In an interview with José Tcherkaski, Copi remembers how his friend and director, Jorge Lavelli, was faced with the critical decision of choosing the actor who would represent Loretta Strong: "Jorge quería hacerlo [Loretta Strong] con una actriz, así que me abrí y lo hice yo solo".(Tcherkaski 79). Lavelli made a critical misinterpretation: he took for granted what Copi recognized to be a complex relationship between the textual word and its corresponding physical representation.<sup>53</sup> According to Copi, Loretta Strong *was* a woman. However, being a woman, for Copi, was merely a detail to be performed. The end result was shocking: Copi appeared on stage in a canary yellow suit and proceeded to undress and present the entirety of his monologue stark naked, with every part of his body painted green, except for his penis, which was painted a bright red (Martel 90). Contrary to how Lavelli imagined the role, Copi's representation of Strong decidedly negated the *naturally* female protagonism and not only replaced it with a man—himself—but a man who was dressed like a chicken that later became something else that

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<sup>53</sup> This fragment of the interview suggests that Copi himself directed the first representation of Loretta Strong. However, Luis Zapata in his Spanish translation as well as Copi's own brother Jorge Damonte both cite Javier Botana as director (117).



was rather indefinable. The title role, Loretta Strong, was no longer just a name that reverted to a specific gender role. Loretta Strong instead became Copi's theatrical interpretation of gender itself—something that in this play, as in many others, is stretched literally *out of this world*. In other words, being a woman in any traditional sense was left on paper and to the staleness of traditional narration. For Copi, it was the image of the present that allowed for innovation and for gender to be much more. Here a woman could have a red penis and could be painted green. While on stage and outside of the text, the woman could be essentially anything.

In Loretta Strong, Copi takes this one step further as social interaction becomes purely imaginary. The text itself begins with its one and only stage—or social—direction: "*Loretta Strong y Steve Morton. Loretta Strong mata a Steve Morton*" (Copi 89). Here, Copi/Loretta is ordered by apparently higher—textual—powers to violently prepare the social theatre. However, the forceful omission of her male counterpart becomes much more significant as it brings with it the elimination of any other metatextual—read metasocial—indications. Both Strong and Copi are now able to face their current missions—a spacial mission for Loretta; a textual one for Copi—and the future it holds according to their own terms: Together they must safely rebuild the human race. As a result, neither Adam and Eve nor Mother Earth and Father Time are stories capable of capturing the "beginning of time" narrative established in Loretta Strong where the protagonist is both man and woman, mother and father, and neither at the same time. What is left for the protagonist—and the audience—is a nuanced version of the *Big Bang Theory* where Loretta explodes outwards into the galaxy (among the earth's other particles) to cultivate her own *rich* future and essentially reconstruct a past without any

documentation to guide her. In this story, the future of *mankind* rests upon the fruitful loins of a woman who is a man, who is a chicken, who is Copi—coincidentally the author of this narrative that has created its own circularity. In Loretta Strong, the question is not whether procreation is possible—as we will see, for Copi anything goes. The question becomes instead, is it representable? Can Copi/Loretta comply physically and visually with the demands of the story being told without anything to guide them? Is the reality staged just too much for Copi's script? Or vice versa, is the script just impossible to represent? While Copi inspires innumerable questions, and in fact denies the true need to fill in their question marks with answers, the rest of this section will present one possible response to this list of inquires.

On stage, Strong's speech unfolds into an unsettling telephone monologue that comments on, questions and debates everything from the explosion of the earth into pieces to masturbation with a group of rats that Strong herself apparently gives birth to. While the protagonist openly expresses her thoughts, any possible response is left blank and is replaced by yet another question, comment or problem to be solved. The insistence upon, and at the same time absence of, an interlocutor confuses the meaning of everything that is being said. Copi's play is at once a monologue and a dialogue. But why decide between the two when the distinction between the genres—between genders—is of no use? Instead, Copi makes a point of exaggerating just how unavoidable such a crossroads and such intertextuality is when it comes to communication itself. Throughout the text, Loretta constantly asks for confirmation that someone is at the other end of the telephone line:

¿Bueno? ¿Bueno? ¿Bueno?

¡Habla una terrícola!

¿Bueno? ¿Bueno? ¿Bueno?

¿Quién es usted?

¿Un hombre mono de la Estrella Polar?

¿Me quiere ver la cara de pendeja? (90)

In the absence of any visual or oral response, the public's imagination is forced to decipher the voice she eagerly awaits. In this case, this proves quite easy. Such a task easily brings about images of Charlton Heston in The Planet of the Apes (1968) and also a more direct textual referent in its original French version La planète des singes (1963) by Pierre Boulle. In both cases, Copi relies on his public to complete what his play leaves untouched. Here the public is forced to reconstruct the historical context by making reference to documentation that is just unavailable to Copi/Loretta on stage: we mustn't forget that the world has just exploded! In any case, the text itself has turned into a dialogue with not only the public's imagination, but with the images, or lack of images, that are presented on stage.

In this respect, the ironic monologue that Loretta Strong engages her public with—both the original audience in Paris' Theatre Gaîté-Montparnasse as well as her (imaginary) telephone interlocutors—creates a critical relationship with the text from which it comes.<sup>54</sup> The monologue simply inspires images that are not fulfilled visually.

In one particular instance Strong insists that she has been blown up:

¿Bueno? ¿Bueno?

¡Perdí el control!

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<sup>54</sup> In fact, in Copi's El baile de las locas, Copi suggests a particularly interesting separation between his scripts and the actual theatrical presentation. He notes that: “[Mi editor] Me adelantó los derechos de mis primeras piezas, que fueron publicadas antes de tener director ni actores” (7).

¿Linda? ¿Linda?

¡Linda, estoy explotando!

¡Ay, carajo, tengo que volverme a pegar solita! (102)

What seems to be a crucial moment and the protagonist's farewell cry to her long lost friend, Linda, turns out—in Copi's theatrical reality—to be one of Loretta Strong's many dramatic fallacies. Unable to bring such an event to its *real* end, Loretta is soon distracted by a sudden silence at the other end of the telephone (103). This suggests that her having exploded is secondary to the presence/absence of her interlocutor. It also alludes to the false nature of such an explosion even occurring.<sup>55</sup> If it had occurred, how would she be able to use her telephone anyway? As with many other scenes, Copi cannot represent his protagonist's explosion theatrically. Instead, as both protagonist and author, Copi decides to simply prance around stage as if having nothing to do with the script itself.<sup>56</sup>

It is not until just past the half way mark of the performance that Copi addresses the disjuncture between Loretta Strong's delirious theatrics and the public's unattended-to-expectations. Up until now—and truthfully continuing right on to the end—incoherent and stark contradictions have populated this play. However, it must be considered that

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<sup>55</sup> Rosenzvaig explains this phenomenon in Copi's work—and especially in this text—by calling attention its childish nature. As was mentioned earlier, Rosenzvaig believes *Loretta Strong* to be the most infantile of Copi's plays. In it, he insists “[l]os niños juegan a matar como las niñas a ser madres. Una mesa puede ser una cápsula espacial; un teléfono, un scacorchos y un revolver de plástico, una metralleta intergaláctica. Todo está permitido en el mundo de los niños. El futuro remoto linda con el pasado remoto; la frontera es la infancia. (...) Lejos de la Tierra, Loretta no puede dejar un segundo de comunicarse. El vértigo es absoluto: entre el coito y el parto transcurren segundos. Loretta se hace penetrar por la heladera y pare al minuto un murciélago de oro. Pero eso es lo que se dice, mientras que lo que sucede es distinto. Ahí radica lo interesante de la obra” (113).

<sup>56</sup> In one of the first presentations of Loretta Strong, Copi does just this. In the presentation at the small theatre Drôle de baraque in Paris, on October 19, 1977, Copi is seen wandering the stage, painted green (although not completely nude), in a dress and wearing high heels. The stage itself is almost completely empty, consisting of only three wooden walls and a brick façade. As Copi recites his monologue he ventures into a crowd that watches intently.

the performance itself, that is, Copi's presence on stage, is given meaning via an albeit confusingly simple plot line: that of Loretta Strong escaping from Earth in order to save herself and establish a gold plantation on a distant planet. In this regard each delirious question, comment or exclamation becomes a sort of guide to understanding why Copi is on stage. By the time we reach the halfway mark the words take theatrical life in such a fashion so as to momentarily nullify the otherwise very distinct division established between Loretta/Copi/actor(ess) and the/their public. It is at this particular moment in the text when Copi as author calls upon the theatre's traditional formal aspects.

¡Ya no se ve!

¡Voy a cambiar de canal!

¿Bueno, bueno, bueno, Linda?

¿Qué dice?

¡Está loca esa mujer!

¿Qué intermedio?

¡No hay intermedio! (108)

In this passage, Strong seems to take on multiple voices in an attempt to guide her audience through the performance.<sup>57</sup> As Strong yells "You don't see anything/ I'm changing to another programme", she insinuates the audience's possible discomfort with what is going on on-stage. Not only is this voice appropriated by the protagonist, but it is powerful enough to warrant an immediate response. In doing so, Strong doubles herself

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<sup>57</sup> It should be noted that in the English version translates this passage as follows: "You can't see it anymore/ I'm changing the programme! Hello, hello, hello, Linda?! What did you say?! She's mad!/ What intermisión?/ There isn't an intermisión!" (Taylor 118). In this interpretation of Copi's text, the Spanish *canal* (or channel, referring to a television channel) becomes the British *programme*. Although also referring to the television program of the Spanish version, the use of program also alludes to the theatrical metalanguage to which I refer to above.

and asks herself what “she” (the public in French—*la publique*—is feminine) just said. Her response, however, is not as understanding as this thoughtful inquiry may suggest. After calling her public crazy for expecting an intermission, she outright denies the possibility of any break or pause in the continuity of her own delirium. Although quite in sync with Strong’s monologue itself, this exchange takes on properties that other moments of the text do not. By taking it upon herself to voice the public’s possible uncertainties in the first person and essentially threaten to leave the stage altogether, Strong erases the limits that separate theatrics from reality and performance from social interaction. At once, the public is put on stage and Strong is taken off. The limits between Copi’s unrepresentable script and the reality lived by each member of the audience are no longer valid: confusion reigns.

Copi continues to integrate his public into Loretta Strong’s reality by insisting upon Loretta Strong as part of the public. This can be particularly noted as the play comes to an end. At this point, Strong’s mission to find a suitable planet to harvest gold has seemingly come to a halt without resolve. As her universe explodes around her, Strong frantically attempts to rejoin her *earthly* friend Linda, with whom she has been carrying on a broken telephone conversation throughout the duration of the performance. In the midst of Strong’s struggle to maintain physical contact with Linda, the discussion—albeit one way (we must not forget that Copi has created all these images within his protagonist’s monologue)—becomes one that revolves around their own spectatorship. At this point, Strong and Linda seem to enter into a typical discussion that would in any other case occur in the theatre’s lobby, during the play’s intermission.

¡Tome las pepitas de oro y váyase sola a comprar sus helados, yo me quedo aquí a leer el programa!

¡Ay, cálese, y váyase sola!

¡Señorita, un helado!

¿Dónde estará?

¡Es sorda!

¿Me oye?

¡No grite así!

¡Señorita un helado!

¿Bueno, bueno, bueno, bueno?

¡No sé, Linda, no sé!

(...)

¿Bueno? ¿Bueno?

¡Voy a entrar de nuevo! (114).

In this fragment, Strong's dialogue with Linda once again effectively merges that which is off stage, (her friend Linda as well as the viewing public), with that which is on stage (Strong and Copi himself, not to mention a delirious reality). For Copi, it is the actor on-stage, and not the public, who needs a break or an intermission from the reality she performs. In this sense, not only does theatre resemble reality, but reality becomes theatre. At this point reality and theatre perform indistinguishably within each other.

As Loretta Strong comes to a close, what Copi leaves us with is a delirious reality where anything is possible. But it is here, in the midst of what seems incoherent, that Copi achieves his critical goal. For in his on-stage reality words are made into

impossible actions, interactions and representations. However, after Copi integrates the viewing public into such a contradiction, this delirium becomes quickly confused with the seemingly intelligible nature of reality. In Loretta Strong there is no difference between that which is understood and that which is not. On the contrary, each and every possibility becomes equally questionable to the onlooker while at the same time becoming equally impossible to document. Proving to be detached from representation itself—be it theatrical or social-- the original script gives way to the physical image of an actor who relies on the imagination of an observing public. The physical body and its representation, therefore, are no longer confirmed by the text—that in this case also created its incoherence—but instead are dependent upon and, more importantly, contradicted by the visual image. What is left is nothing other than an empty word and an image of Copi's body that is able to give meaning in the absence of any normative fixture. Unlike the text that baffles those who hear it, the image of Copi, in Copi's work, creates meaning through its intersection with other things, actions and events. Consider once again the title of this play: Loretta Strong. It is only by looking at Loretta Strong that we are able to understand the *she* is a woman, a man, bird, a theatrical character and her own author all at the same time. It is with such a creation that Copi is able to demonstrate the historical void that lies at the crossroads between the visual image and the written word. By inventing Loretta Strong, Copi insists on a critical means of expressing social actions and interactions through its own crossdressed *image*-ination.

In Loretta Strong, Copi exaggerates the incapacity of his monologue in voicing the encounter between the on and off-stage realities. As a result, this traditional narrative is itself deemed incapable of expressing the spectacle of social encounter and is instead



used as a specifically non-historical tool to tell the story of how things came to be. In this case, although incapable of forming part of the past, the monologue aptly creates its historical context in merely being visually present. After all, it is easily understood—although not *quite* believable—that the protagonist is on a space capsule after having fled her earthly dwelling. In this case, the events surrounding the present performance are outlined with an implicit precision while the dialogue between Loretta Strong and her acquaintances is left incomprehensible and incomplete. In stark contrast with the overview of the events that have led up to this moment, the protagonist's inquiries are constantly left unanswered and presented in a fragmented, one-sided state. Here, not only are words just not enough to capture the chaos of social interaction, but all we are left with to satisfy our confusion is a naked body.

### III. Sexual Memory: Writing a *Timeless* Archive with Copi's El baile de las locas

With Copi, social interaction occurs in the critical crossroads where subjects meet in time and space and where textuality separates from the visual image. As such, this crossroads is emblematic of how subjects interact and join together with their past and at the same time of what keeps them apart. Copi suggests in his work that the historical encounter is a moment traditionally dominated by the text—sometimes written, sometimes not—written by overarching social narratives. However, when we go behind the closed doors of Copi's theatre or within the closed off boxes of his cartoon freeze frames, traditional narrativity dissolves when it is forced to express a different sort of relationship with history's archive. What happens in the intimacy of Copi's social performance, where the physical body's representational qualities are stretched to its limits, complicates traditional ways of dialoguing with the past as it attempts to represent moments when social perception itself is fragmented. In this way, Copi questions historical documentation's role in the formation of subjectivity and in El baile de las locas takes this notion one step further when he allows the reader to speak historically about sex itself: at once, the most intriguing and problematic of all historical acts.<sup>58</sup>

Copi introduces this critical project together with the novel itself. In it, there are not one, not two, but three tales being told. The first is a story of Copi the author and his failed attempt to write a narrative history of his own homosexuality: a story that tells of his struggles with the actual writing of such a past but also of the exterior pressures placed upon him by his editor, industry acquaintances and the marketplace during the five days of its production in October, 1976, that impede him to do so. The second is a story

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<sup>58</sup> Foucault, in his History of Sexuality, alludes to our contemporary interest in sex and sexuality and the perceived desire by dominant discourse to *know* more about it in order to be able to control its *uncontrollable* intimacy.

of Copi the protagonist within a fragmented memory narrative that recalls seven significant moments in a ten-year relationship spanning from 1965 to 1976 with a lover named Pierre who has recently passed away. The third and final story line also takes place in the present, October 1976, and also stars Copi as its protagonist. In it we not only learn that Copi is the primary suspect to a city-wide murder investigation but we accompany him on these violent rampages and listen in as he contemplates the effects of the many public sources that attempt to shed light upon and order the mystery that is Copi's own life.

As the novel we read progresses, the three stories align themselves around the text that Copi has produced during those five days in 1976. Here we discover that the text that Copi is struggling to write coincidentally is one that attempts to transcribe the same intimate memory of the relationship with his lost love. At the same time, it is precisely this text that is at the heart of Copi's criminal investigation and provides a narrative history with information that would condemn its author. Here the history of Copi's homosexuality is placed as both protagonist and foundation to the telling of each storyline. However, when the relationship between Copi's memory and the writing process is put into doubt, so to is the existence of the text that transcribes Copi's intimate memory as well as the narrative that marks him as a social deviant. It is by questioning the existence of a text capable of expressing not only his relationship with Pierre, but the intimate sexual events that form the crux of its narration, that Copi is able to exaggerate sex's exceptional place within social epistemology while at the same time present the simultaneous nature of the sex act as a nuanced means of understanding a historically formed subjectivity.

In El baile..., the text as symbol of social representation, discursive order and archival document comes under question when it is asked to express Copi's memory of the trials and tribulations that surrounded his intimate relationship with Pierre. This begins as early as the first sentence of the novel, when Copi states in a clear first person narrative that this is a novel that he as author has had difficulty writing. To be more precise, *this* is the third attempt at its beginning (7). From the first paragraph we know that the two previous versions of what we are reading have been lost and consequently forgotten by their author and have become part of a different kind of archive: one that is lost, and maybe forgotten, but that expresses the difficulties attached to speaking historically about sex. In general terms though, this in itself is significant as it provides the foundation for a story that takes place on multiple levels while avoiding, in each case, a stable basis for any narration to occur.

On the one hand, the possibility that the text that we have in our hands is the third of three versions makes us wonder whether the story that Copi is writing is really the *final* version or just one of many lost copies and of many copies yet to be written of a text ultimately intended for us, but that is never allowed to find the reader. In this case, we are essentially delving into an archive of unfinished attempts that at once define Copi's past sex in a nontraditional way. On the other hand, the fact that Copi is unable to remember the story he told in the previous versions questions the likelihood of them being versions of anything at all. Wouldn't to be a-version-of-something imply some sort of coherence or similarity in both content and form between the original and its replicas? And wouldn't the recognition of such coherence require a functional memory on behalf of its author? Maybe, maybe not. This very question, however, continues to cause problems as

it puts into doubt the mere possibility of there being a textual version to such intimate sexual interaction. In any case this is a discussion Copi deems worthy enough to prolong—as it becomes the link that ties the three plot lines together.

This dynamic is presented to us on the first page of the novel. Soon after, we find out why the author-protagonist, Copi, is having such difficulty and why the text itself has become so problematic and so incompatible with the project at hand. We learn that the story that is to occupy the text within Copi's El baile... is about the memory of his lost love, Pietro Gentiluomo, or in French, Pierre, as Copi refers to him lovingly. However, it is not just any memory narrative that would otherwise attempt to work through the pain of a particular loss, as per Freud. No, this is a text that insists on telling the intimate details of his relationship with Pierre and even those of his lover's male body—naked and often having sex with Copi. It is a story that must have appealed to the gay reader who Fredrick Martel describes as searching in the 1970's for such avant-garde publications (90-5). The fact was that the times called to the forefront a conversation about male-male sexual desire (Millar 30) and Copi seemed to agree. However, what Copi introduces and problematizes by making his story about homosexual intimacy incompatible with the historical act itself, is to what extent a story grounded on homosexual sex, or on sex of any kind, demanded a different place within our social archive: outside of Freudian tales of Oedipus, outside the marketplace stories of sexual stereotyping present in pornography, and symbolically outside the physical, concrete form of the written word, and literally of the text that we read.

Above and beyond the story's original incompatibility with the fictional text that his protagonist is writing, Copi continues to question the place for speaking about sex by

situating its narration strategically within the margins of popular plot structures. First of all, the beginning of Copi's story about his love for Pierre does not correspond to the actual beginning of the book we have in our hands. Instead, Copi begins the narration of this relationship with the second chapter and a chapter that is coincidentally titled *Confession*. *A la Foucault*, Copi suggests that homosexuality must be spoken about, or at least approached through the confession. This not only suggests an apparent hesitation in verbalizing such intimate details, but also positions its expression within a religious, legal or even psychoanalytic discourse that names the speaker as troubled while establishing the reader's authority as that of a spiritual, social or mental healer respectively.

However, when his *Confession* and the writing process actually begin, the original project of expressing his relationship with Pierre's body takes on a significant morphed nature. As Copi begins, he states that this will be "una novela policíaca". In it, he continues, "hay varios crímenes y dos culpables, pero nada de policía (es algo que no soporto en las novelas policiales) y por tanto, tampoco castigo" (19). In placing the confession of his relationship with this man's body in the detective genre, Copi decidedly links his specifically gay story to the compromising narrative structure of a particular mysterious tone. At the same time, in what is after all a chapter where Copi *confesses* to being the protagonist to his own story, he infers, by its simple parallel nature that the other guilty party is none other than Pierre. Although not criminals, per se, as Copi insists that there is no place for the legal prosecution in his text, the homosexual nonetheless seems to be negatively isolated within a particularly prejudicial narration where their protagonism—and not to mention sexuality—is equal to an unnamed but understood criminal action: gay sex. In this case, the ultimate expression of their social

intimacy becomes that which is persecuted by the narrative that tells of its existence: gay sex literally becomes the unspeakable, unrecordable, and therefore ahistorical.

Copi does not allow for such a relationship to last very long. In this case the detective genre itself becomes yet another mode of complicating the story-telling process as it becomes the entry point into a memory narrative that has no structural limits. This divide is revealed shortly after Copi defines his position as protagonist: “He aquí lo que les propongo: en esta novela yo seré masoquista. Es algo que yo habré descubierto en 1965, cuando comencé a llevar una vida pública homosexual, tras haber tratado de maldisimularlo durante mucho tiempo” (19). Here we discover that Copi will play a masochist in the detective novel that he will star in. But, as soon as this is suggested, Copi leaves it behind in order to justify such a role. It is precisely this contextual history and explanation that on the one hand joins his particular story to his sexual identity, and on the other hand, takes him into his past and into a tangential historical narration—neither part of nor completely separate from the popular and predictable murder mystery—that allows him to articulate his relationship with Pierre. In this case it is in deviating from the more *common* narration of his past that allows him to enter a different sort of memory: a sexual memory. Sexual memory, in this case, becomes then representative of a memory narrative that deviates from the norm and is, simultaneously, that which allows for the story of past sex to be engaged.

The creation of this narrative tangent naturally separated Copi’s past from his present and with it Copi’s story of gay sex from his actual criminal protagonism. But before we delve into the problems within the author-protagonist’s present, let us follow him back in time and into his *own* memory narrative. After all, doesn’t a past that

promises of the telling of sex seem more interesting, provocative, *different* and *revolutionary* than yet another murder mystery? Copi was aware of this special preference when he created El baile... from within a historical moment when sex, specifically homosexual, lesbian and transgendered sex was finally coming to the social and historical forefront. However, above and beyond the historical context surrounding its production, Copi realized the inadequacy of traditional forms of narrativity to express the inexpressible nature of sexual intimacy, something that a close friend of his and philosopher in his own right named Guy Hocquenghem wrote extensively about. As a solution and as a suggestion, Copi takes hold of a narrative tangent in order to take advantage of its momentary crossing with normative structures and reflects with it the historically timeless nature of social intimacy.

The author-protagonist's memory narrative is a fragmented one and tells of seven significant moments in his past relationship with Pierre. These moments range from their encounter in 1965 to Pierre's death in 1976, presumably a short time before the composition of this novel, which Copi himself dates October 16<sup>th</sup> of that same year.<sup>59</sup> Each time Copi enters his memory narrative, he enters his past through a complete narrative that likens the telling of each event to what Nietzsche regards as an effect of history itself. In Nietzsche's essay, The Use and Abuse of History, the past weighs upon its narrator and becomes an insurmountable pressure within the present. For Copi, the past is likewise solid and heavy as he speaks of it with no spaces, no narrative voids. It is

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<sup>59</sup> The memory narrative—that which is linked directly to the writing process—describes the following moments in Copi's relationship with Pierre. But before reviewing them it must be noted that Copi's first encounter with Pierre—whose really name is Pietro Gentiluomo—is narrated before the actual book he is writing begins. This first encounter takes place in 1965 when Copi was 25 and Pierre 18 and tells of their meeting in a museum in Rome, of Copi's introduction to Pierre's mother, her tragic death in a movie theatre blaze and Pierre's first encounter with both Copi's *intellectual* acquaintances and home in Paris (10-2). It stands apart from the rest of the memory narrative as in it Copi still contemplates the problem of expressing such an intimate relationship to the outside world.



a past that is concrete and solid, while at the same time malleable and uniquely maneuvered by its narrator. Nietzsche's narrative past becomes the object that man himself attempts to hold up on his shoulders. For him, it is more than just a weight, a symbol of the lingering pressures of the past. However, Copi's memory narrative, while solid in its narrative form, rejects any such position within the present. As the historical cadence of Copi's memory speaks of past intimacy and especially the past sex act, it unites the overlapping, simultaneous desires, actions and sensations that characterize this intimate encounter in one singular chronological narrative line.<sup>60</sup> In doing so, time itself stretches over the sex act and sex becomes that which intersects narrative continuity and forces historical narratives to be created via its iconography. Understood in this way, Copi's memory is then able to radiate through time and space, instantaneously going back and forth, pausing and fast forwarding meaning itself as it connects events.

This narrative rupture is made evident in Copi's first memory narrative after having *begun* his novel about his relationship with Pierre. Here, he situates the reader in Rome 1965 and nostalgically remembers the first impressions left on him by his new lover's body:

Cuando caí con Pietro quedé alucinado, todos mis sentidos se transformaron. (...) Yo amaba en él sobre todo su olor fuerte y cambiante: era su alma. Algunos tienen como olor dominante las axilas, otros los pies, otros el sexo, Pietro era el olor de los cabellos, siempre el mismo, incluso después de lavarlos. Olían como a sabor de miel, aunque fuesen negros y crespos. Y mezclado con el trazado de ese olor dominante un dibujo cambiante de mil combinaciones de olores, el de sus

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<sup>60</sup> Copi presents Pierre's naked body to his reader seven times (20-1, 35, 41-2, 57, 84, 132, 138). However, only four of these describe him having sex with Copi and are therefore the moments that will take precedence here (35, 41-2, 132, 138).

pequeños pies, que me daban el peso que despedía su cuerpo, el de su sexo, que me hablaba como una antena de la sexualidad que destilaba en torno nuestro, el aroma de jazmín de sus testículos siempre húmedos, y las axilas que combinaban infinitamente lo agrio, o dulce y lo amargo, según los humores. Pronto aprendí a interpretar todos estos olores y me guío en el mundo exterior por ellos, son mi sexto sentido. (20-1)

Pierre's body literally permeates Copi's narrative and as its smells move and change, so too does the author-protagonist's memory. Here, Pierre's body comes alive through the memory of its varying and multiple smells. In doing so, the memory becomes meaningful only insofar as it resonates with us, its reader. As a result, the memory of Pierre's body activates a living portrait whose intimacy extends through time and space. In this way, erotic desire is transmitted via the sensual image created by Pierre's smell; a smell that itself sketches the incomplete nature of the past. The intimate memory of Pierre's body becomes expressible only through other memories and their relationship with other subjects. The memory of other subjects in turn join together in order to give form—to trace the outline of—Copi's own erotic memory.

The memory of Pierre's body comes to life by means of this particular graphic representation and as such is developed in drastic contrast to Copi's own writing process. As this first memory narrative comes to an end, the fixation of Copi's erotic vision of Pierre's body within a textual narrative turns into a significantly violent act. Reflecting upon this process, the author-protagonist notes that “desde el momento en que he empezado a escribir ya lo he matado [a Pierre], el movimiento hipnótico del Bic sobre mi libreta bloquea el recuerdo de su olor” (21). Here one movement supersedes another

when the pen literally squashes the memory of Pierre as it is flattened onto paper. The memory that once lived and moved comes to a harsh stop as it is defined textually. For Copi, the writing process inspires a certain uniformity both of creation and movement that counteracts any recollection of sexual desire and flattens memory's *transhistoric* tangents in favor of the contextual rigidity of the word itself. Considered this way, the existence of any memory of the sex act becomes dependent upon the multidimensional nature of the physical and emotional desires it attempts to record.

The graphic nature of Copi's sexual desire further develops into the second memory narrative, when the memory of Pierre's own sexual identity is remembered alongside and in conjunction with notions of religious iconography. This begins with the introduction of Copi's antagonist, Marilyn. In a memory narrative that reunites approximately four years, from 1965 to 1969, we discover the love triangle that develops between these three characters with Pierre as its central figure. In it, Marilyn is described as the queen figure within a group of transvestites. In the words of the author-protagonist himself, "Marilyn e[ra] una mujer de mariquitas que se peina[ba], se maquilla[ba], se vest[ia] como Marilyn Monroe e imita[ba] todas sus muecas y sus gestos, todo est[aba] ahí, el movimiento de los párpados, la boquita glotona" (25). She was a professional performer, a living copy of an exaggerated femininity and as such became an authority on femininity itself in the eyes of her admiring, notably male public. The cult status that Marilyn later achieved in light of her brief success as a Marilyn Monroe interpreter quickly placed her on the top of the transvestite community.

Her status as *original* woman performer within this group of men who themselves wish to perform as women justified this particularly cult-like following. In a community

where the patriarch was constantly abolished, Marilyn assumed the figure of *highest* Queen, or priestess, as she took it upon herself to transform Pierre's body into a woman's by means of a ritualized process of hair plucking and make-up application. Marilyn's spiritual role in Pierre's creation/transformation is exaggerated when she literally alters the course of his *true* metamorphosis. Instead of furthering the man/woman transformation, Marilyn secretly substitutes the female hormones Pierre was voluntarily ingesting, for male supplements. In this case, Pierre's personal patron saint of transvestism, the Virgin Marilyn—she actually claimed to be a virgin—became the creative power behind Pierre's new body and behind its developing into Copi's own erogenous relic. In this sense, Marilyn became not only the model after which Pierre's *heavenly* body was formed, but also the maternal body that gave birth to its miraculous nature.

The incomplete transformation of Pierre into a woman allowed him to gain specific female physical traits and at the same time maintain his most *masculine* characteristics. With Marilyn as his creator, Pierre's broad shoulders, large legs and muscular frame together united with a pair of round paraffin filled breasts and an eroticized bellybutton to become, for Copi, the centre for sublime erotic pleasure. The simple idea of hairy breasts gave him the impression of having “entre las manos dos enormes testículos,” that excited him even more “por la cosa surrealista” (35). In this sense, Pierre's sexual ambiguity and confusion became a positive erogenous factor. In fact, for Copi, Pierre's metamorphosis allowed him to discover sex itself in a totally unique way. Pierre, Copi recalls, “[t]enía un ombligo profundo que olía un poco a chocho. Pronto conseguí meter en él dos dedos, y luego la polla entera. Sus espasmos

eran constantes, locos, los míos también” (35). For Copi, the sex act, like Pierre’s body, had morphed into something unknown and uncontrollable. As Copi relives the sex act, he recalls: “Yo tenía la impresión de penetrar más a Pierre que por todos los culos y chochos del mundo. Y él llamaba al goce que yo le procuraba ‘Gioia Divina’, exclamación que emitía cada vez que yo hundía mi polla en su ombligo al tiempo que mamaba y mordisqueaba sus pechos que imaginaba cojones.” Here, Pierre’s body has become the vehicle to a never-before experienced sexual splendor. In his reincarnated transvestite self, Pierre’s testicle/breasts and bellybutton/vagina/anus allow him to, at once, pleasure Copi and passively be pleased. Understood in a particularly divine way, Pierre, son of Marilyn, gives to Copi the miracle of orgasm. Here, not only does the memory of Pierre’s body parallel the story of Jesus Christ himself, whose body too is sacrificed for *his* (read homosexual) people, but he does so in such a way that allows this intimate moment to be understood in what Copi himself deems, *surreal* terms. As a result, the sex act itself becomes intelligible in its religiosity and in its location *sur* (or above) historical reality.

Throughout Copi’s narrative, the sexual memory of Pierre’s body is consistently mediated and understood by means of its physical resemblance with both secular and non-secular spiritual icons. Even in Copi’s first encounter with Pierre in Rome, his body was described as hard, beautiful and capable of (sexual) miracles. Presented here in a portrait equal to those of the pagan gods of Pierre’s ancient ancestors, his body quickly became statuesque when situated in Copi’s own sexual Pantheon. It is here where Pierre remains until Copi’s third memory narrative. In it Copi tells of a mature, now sexless relationship with Pierre. This narrative takes place within the two years prior to Copi’s

writing of this novel—from 1974 to 1976—and describes the couples trip to New York in '74 to visit Marilyn, how she *steals* Pierre from Copi, and how Copi, once again, wins him back. The couple reunites in Ibiza and finds refuge and peace in a small house on a beach amongst a group of hippies. Here, Pierre leaves his fondness for cocaine and New York, as well as his female hormone treatment that he had begun years earlier with Marilyn in Paris, only to become obsessed (read addicted) with LSD and begin yet another physical transformation. Entirely engulfed in the memory, Copi narrates:

Yo detesto todo este mundo de retrasados mentales que sólo hablan de drogas y de camisas indias. Los soporto porque esto divierte a Pierre, prueba nuevas drogas y se pasa el día entero sentado junto a la piscina en la posición del loto mirando fijamente el sol mientras yo dibujo a su lado. No quiere que lo toque, se masturba según un método suffí. Se levanta con el sol y se queda tieso sobre las dos manos hasta el mediodía, toma dos uvas y un vaso de agua mineral, por la tarde se queda quieto sobre una pierna, al atardecer mira la punta de sol sobre la cabeza, al menos estoy seguro que no se acuesta con las chicas. (...) Ha engordado de tal manera que no puedo meterle ni un dedo en el ombligo. Pero le amo. (57)

As we see here, Pierre no longer pleasures others as he did before. Instead, his body gives himself a pleasure of both a spiritual and physical nature. While turning his desire inwards and onto himself, Pierre's statuesque body leaves Copi, the sex act and his Roman (Sex) Gods behind. Now without sex and forced to love his partner asexually, Copi's memory places Pierre's obese, saggy body ironically and comically alongside another, larger and equally interiorized divinity: the cross-legged Buddha. This image is later confirmed when Marilyn arrives once again on the scene. However, this time no

transformation is needed. Rather, she arrives in Ibiza after Pierre has defined himself as a religious *guru* with the intention of once again becoming his highest priestess (61-2). As Pierre's religiosity reaches new heights, it becomes likewise ironic and grotesque. What remains in the light of Pierre's supposed divine status is the memory that joins it to his physical metamorphosis. As such, the inscription of spiritual icons onto Pierre's body becomes a decision made by the author-protagonist in order to create his memory narrative. Understood in this way, it actually seems that Pierre's body cannot be remembered in any other way.

Pierre's memory consolidates itself within religious iconography during the author-protagonist's narration of the sixth and seventh memory fragments. Having once again united, Copi and Pierre find themselves in Rome, shortly before this book is written, living in a small apartment overlooking the Vatican. In this memory narrative, Copi remembers the loving patience required to help Pierre recover from the severe mental and physical damage of long term drug use and return to, an albeit vague, resemblance of his earlier *love-making* figure. In the end, Pierre's religiosity is developed in tandem with his sexual being. This parallel is confirmed with the first sentence of the seventh and last memory narrative: "Pierre se ha curado lo bastante de la droga como para poder coger un trabajo (sin pago, claro está, si no lo habrían puesto de inmediato en la calle) en un pequeño teatro subvencionado por el Vaticano en via Borgo Santo Spiritu, donde se representan vidas de santos. Lo utilizan por su parecido con Jesucristo y sólo actúa los domingos por la tarde" (131). Only sentences later, Copi continues the memory of Pierre's last transformation and what seems to be the natural path to his healthy mind and body:

A fuerza de amor y caricias he conseguido poder meter de nuevo la lengua en su ombligo, que se había encogido considerablemente, puedo meter también el glande, pero le hace aún un poco de daño, él ha perdido el hábito del placer, es mas difícil de recuperar para los pasados del ácido. Un año de esfuerzos para lograr introducir de nuevo la mano, luego mi muñón que al principio me hace un poco de daño, y finalmente llegamos a espasmos casi constantes, nos empleábamos a fondo. (132)

As Pierre resumes his role as object of worship, he also is reintegrated into sexual activity. In fact, Copi's memory not only unites Pierre's rebirth with Christ himself, but superimposes Pierre's born-again-virginity onto the religious act of resurrection. In this case, Copi recollects his sexual reunion with Pierre in the same light as Christendom remembers the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such an inscription of sex onto religion and of one body onto the next—that is Pierre's onto Jesus Christ's—allows Copi to express the sex act in historical terms—albeit through a religious memory that itself is founded on myth and symbolic function. But much more significant is the fact that the particular narrative with which Copi chooses to speak of sex just happens to be that same story that is considered by Christendom to explain the origins of humanity itself. In other words, what Copi achieves here is sex's inscription onto arguably one of humanities' most important and well recognized foundational narrative sequences and one that is constantly relived and worshiped: one that is constantly brought into the present and away from its distant past.

Sex's place within history becomes more evident as Pierre's place within religion solidifies. Now in Rome with much improved health and a recurring role as Jesus Christ



in a local theatrical production, Pierre himself decides to formally integrate himself into the religious order in hopes of selflessly ridding Copi's—notably not himself—of his past sins. In fact, he wishes to become one of the Carmelite nuns that so graciously invoked upon him the role of Jesus Christ in their small theatre functions. Ironically, even the nuns approve of the idea and in order to begin Pierre's entrance into the convent they introduce him to a surgeon. After all, isn't it logical that Pierre first become a woman and a virgin—yet again—in order to become a nun? Of course it is, and as we have seen before, with Copi anything goes. But in this particular case, Copi is horrified with the possibility. In hopes of feeling Pierre's *miracle* once more, Copi manages to arrange for one last night with Pierre with the one stipulation that Mother Superior herself stand watch. This is how the night unfolds:

Se recuesta de nuevo, junta las manos, y reza. Yo me deslizo a su lado entre las ropas, lloro sobre su hombro, sé que es la última noche. Se duerme, y empieza a roncar. Yo deslizo mis labios sobre su cuerpo, atrapo su minúsculo pito entre mis labios secos, él me aparta la cabeza suavemente con la mano, se da la vuelta. Yo aprovecho para hundir mi cara entre sus piernas, y empiezo a lamerle el ano. No, murmura, per favore. A mí se me ha empinado ya, le mordisqueo las piernas. El dormita, o simula, mientras sigo chupándole el pito y sus suaves testículos, luego el pelo del pubis, y el ombligo, donde introduzco la lengua. Sei pazzo, cosa fai? Le meto los dedos y él se contorsiona de placer, le chupo una tetilla mientras se la casco con la otra mano. Ma cosa fai, cosa fai? murmura él. Hundo mi mano entera en el ombligo. Sus intestinos, se contraen, la respiración se le entrecorta, él mismo me empuja el brazo dentro del ombligo hasta el codo, es la primera vez

que me adentro tanto, aparto suavemente los pulmones con mis dedos, llego al corazón, lo acaricio con la punta de los dedos, Pietro murmura amore, amore, y ambos nos dormimos.

Las campanas me despiertan por la mañana, como siempre en Roma, pero hoy no paran, es el día de Resurrección, al parecer. Tengo el brazo frío, Pierre está muerto. Yo intento retirar mi brazo del interior de su cuerpo que se ha contraído hasta el punto que tengo la impresión de estar atrapado por un reptil. Tiro, logro soltarme, y empiezo a lanzar gritos de horror, un guardia suizo abre la puerta: è morto! Todos enloquecemos, la casa entera penetra en la habitación, Suora Angelica sufre espasmos abrazada al cuerpo de Pietro. El cuerpo de Pietro que se ha puesto firme y duro como una estatua, ni una sola gota de sangre ha salido de su ombligo. ¡Un milagro! exclama el guardia suizo poniéndose de rodillas. Un miracolo! Todo el mundo llora, todo el mundo grita, incluso las hermanas de la orden silenciosa.” (137-8).

During this, their last night together, love-making is no longer an act of mutual pleasure. Sex becomes, instead, the ultimate sacrifice. Here, sex itself does not involve either of their sex organs, but is essentially altered when Copi's arm penetrates Pierre's abdomen. The end result is the substitution of the erotic climax for an eternal embrace where death is but the portrait of Jesus' (read Pierre's) *Sacred Heart* and the triumphant cry of humanity itself.

The effects of such an act do not stop here. We mustn't forget that this is part of the author-protagonist's memory narrative. As such, we must also realize that Copi's sexual memory achieves miraculous feats as it successfully inscribes the sex act onto the

history of worldly religion. An act that is not very different from a traditional memory narrative that links its telling in the present, for example, to the service of mnemonic devices—something that Francis Yates in her The Art of Memory notes as fundamental in a successful narrative endeavor. Although Copi's memory of these intimate moments with Pierre is structured primarily according to the chronology in which the events took place, the memory of sex itself adopts a nature of its own when it finds a place within religion's historical archive of symbols, persons and narratives. Here sex is able to take a central place—that of religion—in the understanding of humanity. This is a place that not only allows sex to participate in, but also transcend traditional historical narratives and the way the past is archived in the present. In fact, Copi's sexual memory never goes away, it never is forgotten as it never is written down, it just is.

As we recall, El baile de las locas is divided into two general storylines; one that narrates Copi's sexual memory of Pierre and another that talks about the events that occur during the *actual* writing process of the book that records this memory. The latter is situated in the present, from October 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup>, 1976, and here the writing of Copi's sexual memory is revealed not just to be difficult, but to be itself absent from the story that ironically tells of the creation of a novel. In fact, the narration of Copi's sexual past is completely separated from the present. This is evident even from the beginning, when the author protagonist establishes himself in a run-down pension on Bd. Magenta with the specific purpose of isolating himself in order to write. When he arrives, he even goes so far as to highlighting the professional nature of his stay: “Hago mi maleta y me traslado en taxi a un hotel del Bd. Magenta. Me toman por un provinciano que viene a pasar dos semanas a París. Dos semanas, es mucho [*para un turista*]. (...) Les digo que pasaré dos

semanas escribiendo. Yo soy escritor” (16, cursive is mine). Copi *is* a writer and during the next couple of weeks he *will* write: apparently this is what he does. As soon as he installs himself in this his creative sanctuary, the writing process becomes quite present. Once there, Copi confesses, “escribo durante tres o cuatro horas seguidas, duermo otras dos o tres, salgo a comer algo por el barrio, y vuelvo para seguir escribiendo. (...) Estoy solo para escuchar el ruido de mi bolígrafo sobre el papel y respirar el humo de mi hierba, bien rociada de vodka. Sólo allí me siento con fuerzas de asesinar a Pierre” (16-7). While Copi makes this conscious effort to define himself as a writer and confirm that what he does is write, what he writes on each page remains to be known. Although he has no problem *talking* about the past—as we have seen—, Copi is unable to separate his inner-monologue syntactically from any possible indication that it is being transcribed onto paper. In the text we read, the only distinction that separates the present from the past and the future are their specific verbal guidelines: an “I went” here, an “I will go” there, with a few “I go”’s thrown in the mix. As a result, there is no way of distinguishing Copi’s thoughts from that which is apparently appearing on the pages of the book that he is supposedly composing. Despite his insistence on being a writer and his detailing of a strict writing regimen, defining what the actual author-protagonist is doing, remains itself a supposition.

However, in direct contrast to the specifically narrated but not transcribed nature of the past and what can be understood in this context as an archival vacancy, is the narration of the present. In this case, Copi narrates the present before it becomes the past. With a first person narrative, the telling of the present coincides with the acts themselves and forms a strange parallel with the memory narrative as neither one is recorded

textually by the author-protagonist. In the present, the way Copi feels about writing, how he feels about the subject of his writing and what he does after he supposedly finishes writing all take narrative precedence over what he actually *is* writing. The author-protagonist himself reveals this when he tries to deal with his loss: “Estás muerto, y no puedo escribir sino sobre ti. Te añoro terriblemente, cierro mi libreta, me hago un porro de hierba muy fuerte y lo fumo llorando, finalmente me calmo y tomo una ducha” (23). As we can see, what is narrated is not what falls on the pages of his book, but instead what happens to the author-protagonist during its composition. The narration of the writing process now becomes the narration of the life of the author and more specifically of a gay author named Copi.

As this new story takes form, we see that its protagonist is a man who enjoys his hash, his vodka and his sex with no strings attached. As with the memory narrative, Copi is the protagonist. However, in the present, Copi’s drug and sex-filled lifestyle becomes synonymous with social deviance and the basis for his social condemnation. In fact, from the moment he arrives at his hotel on Bd. Magenta, Copi becomes a suspicious subject for just this reason. Copi himself realizes this when he is introduced to the owner: “La dueña y su hija se dan cuenta de que no estoy en un estado normal, pero les importa un bleo desde el momento en que no subo a nadie a la habitación y apenas hago ruido” (16). Although the strangeness that is associated with Copi is at first linked to his difficulty dealing with the Pierre’s death, it later becomes clear that it is even more so due to the alcohol-colored, marijuana-induced daze in which he constantly finds himself and it is precisely this lifestyle that defines Copi in the eyes of those around him (23). Understood in this way, the story that replaces the writing of his own novel essentially

becomes a story of social marginality and a story whose subject is isolated from both his surroundings as well as from himself. After all, isn't the *real* Copi narrating his own story by making himself a fictional character? And isn't this character's fate suddenly in the hands of those who consider him as *strange*, and eventually as criminal?

The story that takes shape in between the seven memory narratives is itself narrated in the first person by the author-protagonist and tells of a world full of crime but also of authors, editors and literary production. It is a world where everyone is writing—or so we are told—and where the pressures to do so come from much more than the desire to express a creative urge or collect on their editor's monetary incentives. In this world, everyone writes about someone else and everybody wishes to tell somebody else's story—everyone but Copi that is. While the author-protagonist dedicates himself to the difficult task of expressing his own intimate experience, those around him focus on the story of others. In fact, it just so happens that much like Copi himself, they too are obsessed with observing and talking about Copi. So, while Copi writes about his own past, his present actions become a narrative focal point on a grander, social level when they in turn become the subject of unendorsed biographies and the cover story to several of Paris's daily newspapers.<sup>61</sup> In these textual representations, Copi is not only able to see himself, but he is able to recognize who this self truly is (or is not). However, once Copi reads his own textual representation, he is forced to read himself historically and at once attribute meaning to the actions that he is incapable of writing and understanding.

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<sup>61</sup> It must be recognized that to some extent Copi's past is also regarded by other *authors* as central to their own creative endeavors. Among them are Marielle de Lesseps—*real life* co-author of *The King Kong Story* (1977) and is presented in *El baile*, as Copi's good friend and confidant—, (who ironically has taken it upon herself to include both Pierre and Marilyn in her novel), and Marilyn herself, (who throughout the last 10 years has recorded her life with Copi on facial tissue, crumpling each piece up and sending boxes filled with these *narrative fragments* to her mother, who would then try to decipher the story they told).

Copi is the protagonist of a very strange story that he himself is unable to comprehend. But it is only as his story takes form as part of a series of *detached* narratives that Copi is able to recognize his own protagonism within a murderous tale that begins with Marilyn's own mother. The story goes as such: While in his rundown hotel bedroom, Copi is shown the headlines to one of Paris' newspapers, Ici-Paris and discovers that Marilyn—his long-time enemy and estranged wife—had supposedly committed suicide in an Italian penitentiary. However, for some reason, Copi is suspicious of the details of her death and more precisely with the way the information is presented in the newspaper. In order to get to the bottom of the mystery, Copi contacts his good friend, Marielle de Lesseps, who, in this case, was particularly useful as she had rare access to the *information highway* that was the telex system.<sup>62</sup> Although the telex communication wire was unable to help in any way, Marielle sent Copi to speak with Marilyn's mother. After all, Marielle was also researching details about Marilyn for her own novel and seemed to be at least one step ahead of Copi when it came to her life. So, Copi finds Marilyn's mother in a second floor apartment alongside her battery powered crystal ball, her stuffed owl and her deck of Tarot cards. But, rather than read Copi's future and give him the answers that he was yearning for, the elderly woman's claims to clairvoyance are revealed to be as empty as the crystal ball itself. Instead, Copi's hopes of arriving at the *truth* surrounding Marilyn's death dissolve when he comes face to face with his own past. Marilyn's mother's attempt to read her crystal ball results, not in the telling of the future, but in the development of a historical narrative of Copi's past. In it, the author-protagonist is ironically disassociated from both his cartoons as well as his lost

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<sup>62</sup> The telex was a means of long distance communication by sending text messages through radio signals (similar to the fax machine). This was the most popular and efficient method of communicating in the 1960's and '70's in Paris.

love, Pierre. Instead, the talentless clairvoyant defines Copi as a heterosexual pervert who has somehow won over Marilyn's innocence (72-9). However, what frustrates Copi most is not the fact that she is unable to *see* who he really is—a gay man whose life was invaded by her viscous daughter—nor that she is unable to uncover the *truth* behind Marilyn's death (something that, even with his extreme hatred, continues to be of interest to the author-protagonist). What most bothers Copi about this elderly woman's version of the past is the fact that it is *his* past that she attempts to tell. Not only does she attempt to tell Copi about *who* he is, but she does so only after having secretly read fragments of his past on facial tissues that were sent to her in crumpled up balls by her daughter, Copi's enemy, Marilyn. When the talentless clairvoyant attempts to recount the tragic death of Copi's adopted sons in Ibiza's shark infested waters, Copi's patience for such a layered and disconnected storytelling wears thin:

¿Quiere que le cuente su muerte? le pregunto. Hay algo en mi tono que le da miedo. ¿O prefiere verlo en su bola de cristal? Ya he visto su muerte en mi bola. He visto que han sido despedazados por un tiburón así como su barco neumático. Sí, pero yo he visto la escena con mis ojos. Puedo contársela. Ella no quiere, sufre del corazón. Usted la escuchará, le digo. Se levanta para llamar a su nieta con el interfono, la hago sentarse de nuevo brutalmente, cierro la puerta. ¡Mira su bola de cristal y dígame si ve lo mismo que yo! Señor, me dice, apenas le conozco. (...) Enciendo la bola. ¿Ve usted su pequeña Delphine [la nombre real de Marilyn] colgada? Señor, me dice, me siento mal. ¡Mis sales! Yo la abofeteo, la cojo por los cabellos, le golpeo la frente contra la bola de cristal, tiembla, se hunde en su silla, tiene una gran bola azul en la frente, un hilillo de sangre le corre



por la oreja. Abajo se oye el ruido regular de la calle, miro por la ventana, el Bd. Magenta sigue igual. La vieja continúa con sus estertores, la estrangulo, muere sentada. (79-80)

Here, it is no coincidence that Copi uses the crystal ball not to learn about himself through his past and future, but to kill the voice that would otherwise—although erroneously—narrate this information. Understood in this way, Copi wants nothing to do with these versions of his past, his future and of himself.

Instead, after this violent interaction with historical voyeurism, Copi literally finds refuge within his own memory narrative. While sitting on a park bench contemplating the recent events, he is approached by a man hoping to find some company. However, this stranger also makes reference to Copi's past with Marilyn, forcing Copi to quickly protect himself from repeating the earlier uncharacteristic act of violence. "No tengo ganas de hablar, hago como si corrigiese el cuaderno que llevo siempre bajo el brazo. ¿Escribes? me pregunta. No, corrijo. ¿Puedo leerlo? No. Esto la enfría. ¡Hasta la vista! canturrea y se va" (82). In this encounter, it is not only his novel about Pierre that literally shelters him, but is the act of him writing his *own* historical narrative that allows him to escape the present and the many versions of the past, and of himself, that it holds.

In short, the security of telling his own story is contrasted, time and again, after each memory narrative, with Copi's return to the present. As if awaking from a dream, in the present, he finds himself disoriented. Asking questions like, "where am I?", or, "what day is it?", it becomes obvious that Copi does not feel at home in his "now". In any case, after having killed Mme. Audieu (ironically, Mrs. Goodbye), Marilyn's mother, he is forced to leave his hotel when the owner's daughter shows him yet another newspaper

article in Le Parisien. This time he finds a computer sketch of himself alongside a picture of Mme. Audieu (95). “Al lado [de ella] se ve una foto-robot del culpable, felizmente no me parezco a él aparte del bigote. Decido cambiar de hotel y afeitarme” (95). However, as Copi soon discovers, his actions are not so easily undone. On the contrary, as time goes on, both his face within Paris’ local media as well as his place within history itself becomes more and more precise. For example, in the fifteen minutes that he took to shave off his mustache, a new and much clearer picture appears in Paris-Soir alongside the story of his violent interaction with the clairvoyant as well as a radio news broadcasting of a detailed description of Copi himself: “Mme. Audieu era una abuela ejemplar, la han asesinado a plena luz del día y en su casa para robarle su secreto, es increíble. Toda la familia ha visto perfectamente al asesino, un hombre delgado con impermeable y con bigotes, de acento argelino” (97). Not only does his picture prove to slowly sketch itself in time, but his person, both its physical and emotional characteristics come to life as time itself goes by and the original event becomes more and more part of the past. In a sense, Copi becomes a recognizable social subject only once he has been *written* and *recorded* and then communicated as existing within and as part of the city’s past.

As time goes on, details of the mysterious murder are revealed: Mme. Audieu’s daughters, other clairvoyants and even passersby are interviewed. However, details of the *complete* story are also hidden from the public view. For example, the newspapers do not yet know that Marilyn—whose picture recently appeared in their pages as an appendix to her tragic suicide story—was both Mme. Audieu’s daughter as well as the murderer’s wife. As the author-protagonist draws attention to this information gap, he strives to negotiate within this liminal space of misunderstanding in order to separate

himself from any such story that would otherwise bring him unwanted consequences along with a concrete historical role. Within this space's ahistoricity, Copi is safe and "enteramente protegido" from society's judgments: here he is neither guilty nor innocent (89). Here, the crime is perfect not because of his as-of-yet unknown participation, but rather because of his invisibility and social inexistence.

This security only lasts as long as Copi's story is incomplete. In order to ensure the silencing of his own past, Copi himself goes on a fantastic killing spree of all those that were involved. First off, is the same queen that sought companionship and was rejected by our author-protagonist earlier on in the park. However, this is not just any queen. His name is Jean-Marie and he is another gay author, working for the same editor as Copi. It so happens that he too has been writing a novel about Copi and has been watching him for days—ironically since the moment that Copi began writing this very novel. As a result, this author knows everything that we know about Copi and more. He has witnessed the clairvoyant's murder and has consequently recorded its story despite our author-protagonist's desire to hide it. Although Jean-Marie is writing Copi's biography, he proves to be more interested in completing his own history than he is in finishing Copi's. Strangely enough, this author has dreamt of being murdered and has decided to make Copi his murderer and he uses his knowledge of Copi's past to make this a reality: that is to say, he defines Copi's present literally through his past.

However, after a murder sequence where our author-protagonist tortures the queen in a secret, hidden room, Copi witnesses the rapid passing of time and with it the rapid clarification surrounding the details of his first murder. Now, Marilyn's photo is on the cover of France-Soir together with that of Mme. Audieu, and although the link

between the mother and daughter has still not been discovered, Copi sees his story slowly taking form in the public sphere (103). As Copi himself admits, “no han establecido aún la relación pero aparecerá sin duda en la edición de noche” (103). As we soon see, this happens very quickly:

Enciendo la tele de Jean-Marie. Son las noticias de la una. Desde la edición de las once del *France-Soir* Marilyn ha doblado a su madre en popularidad, no han descubierto todavía que es su hija. Si, en las informaciones de última hora: ¡la francesa encerrada en Roma por tráfico de drogas es la hija de la vidente de Bd. Magenta! Por informaciones marginales se descubre que la francesa ha sido actriz, pasan un trailer de sus películas publicitarias con la boa. ¿Estén relacionados ambos casos? ¡Sí! Noticia de última hora: el asesino de la madre parece ser el marido de la francesa encarcelada. Un salto bastante inesperado, el presentador no sabe muy bien cómo tomarlo: hay que improvisar para poner a videntes y traficantes de drogas juntos en una misma noticia, eso no se ha hecho nunca. Pronto encuentran el lazo de unión: yo. Un dibujante humorístico completamente drogado, enseñan diapositivas de mis dibujos, una foto del café-teatro en que he trabajado de travestí, otra foto vestido de oso en una fiesta, otra mía de pequeño en una playa, ninguna se me parece, por este lado no tengo que temer. (106)

Here, time proves to be the only factor that stands in the way of Copi being found guilty of murder and of the story that justifies such a claim to be completely discovered.

However, when the victims' stories unite and Copi becomes the centre of both Marilyn's as well as her mother's stories, he remains unable to see himself in such social terms.

Instead, what he sees are moments of his past and distant and estranged versions of his person either dressed as a woman or little boy, but never of himself. Unable to *see* himself as a part of his own past, Copi insists that he be seen in the present and regarded outside historically defined subjectivities. Now, at this precise moment, he is not the same man who was once as a boy on a beach, nor is he the same *woman* performing in a café: in short, at this moment in the present, he is *not* Copi.

Once the author-protagonist finishes his murderous rampage, eventually killing his own editor and executing the mass murder of dozens of dancing *queens* in a Paris public restroom, not only does he remain unable to assume his role within such a fantastic story, but he does exactly the contrary, he forgets it totally. Actually, his amnesia erases the events that led him to murder and even the murders themselves from the past. Upon discovering this, Copi rejoices, “¡Mis cuatro últimos días no han existido más que en mi imaginación!” (121). In the end, Copi is not a murderer, but without the story that has unfolded and presented these five days in October to us, the reader, Copi himself loses all meaning. For without the story that has just been told, we know nothing about the so-called author-protagonist. In this case, he has done nothing and there is nothing to be told about him.

Since Copi’s story is therefore fictional, it essentially lies outside of time and outside of any documentable past. And since this story tells us about Copi, about his life as a writer, about his life with Pierre and about the sex act itself, all of these things also exist within this liminal space: a space that itself becomes, like Copi, the place where such supposedly incoherent unions are made. It is here, outside of traditional notions of the archive—a place where information is supposedly found—that Copi is able to talk

about sex not only as part of history, but as a part of history that interacts with other events in a special way. Here, Copi is able to express the sex act in transcendental terms and show how sexual memories can interact through time, and, in such a way, form a complete, coherent narrative. For Copi, the memory of sex achieves the same narrative clarity that is often attributed to social and collectively experienced pasts. In El baile..., sex becomes intelligible, expressible and understandable.

In El baile de las locas, Copi defines himself, his story and his sexual intimacy apart from any possible spot in traditional historical narrations. Here, much like in Loretta Strong, Copi questions the utility of considering the text as representative of that which leads to social understanding. As Copi's stories tell of ambiguous, ever changing characters that are at once men, women, animals and Copi himself, any possibility of inscribing such social subjects into the historical archive becomes an impossible act. Instead Copi, as both protagonist and author, is only understandable in the moment and in the space that separates the present from the past. Copi then becomes a subject that not only is difficult to understand, but also a subject that is comprehensible only in its totality. In any other case, Copi would be completely misinterpreted and misunderstood. Copi's story of Pierre would not mean nothing at all if it weren't situated in a text that is itself both invisible and distinctly precise and clear. Copi's representation of Loretta Strong would not be so shocking if it didn't completely dissolve and at the same time reinstate the necessity of stage directions—even if they do become part of the performance itself. And finally, it would be essentially impossible not to regard Copi himself as both a man who consciously inscribed himself into Paris' weekly archive, Le Nouvel Observateur, precisely so as to show the stories social history is missing. In other

words, to appreciate both Copi and his work, one must regard them as part of, as well as absent from, the certainty of historical narratives. In fact, it is by being so many different things, representing so many different spaces, that Copi himself is only locatable in between his cartoons and his novels, in between fact and fiction, and in the space between the presentness of social intimacy and desire for historical clarity. Copi himself is only understandable in terms of his own archive, where marginality takes shape by means of narrative chaos. Speaking historically about marginality, and more specifically, speaking historically about Copi himself requires that we engage traditional ways of documenting the past in a completely different way. Instead of embracing the order and completeness associated with the archive, we must look within the voids and within the archives hidden spaces in order to see Copi's past the way he meant it to be seen.

Chapter 3: Insinuating Pasts: Poetic Subjects and their Sexual Memories in María Moreno's El Affair Skeffington

El Affair Skeffington (1992) by María Moreno is a critical anthology that introduces us to an unknown American poet named Dolly Skeffington as part of the expatriate community within Paris of the 1920's.<sup>63</sup> As we open its pages we find a biographical introduction, and then 28 poems translated into Spanish that bring together Skeffington's three poetic volumes. As a whole, Moreno's El Affair Skeffington is an anthology that leaves nothing to be desired. Just as we would hope, it has all the elements of any *other* anthology: an introduction, the primary text and a list of relevant secondary readings that we as readers understand as the critical and historical backdrop to the editor's introductory comments. It is a text that has no loose ends and answers the questions that necessarily are asked about who Dolly Skeffington was, why we should read her poems, just how Moreno herself came upon translations of her work while in Madrid, and, of course, those questions surrounding exactly how we read and understand the compiled selection.

In fact, the introduction itself promptly addresses these questions as it delves into the narration of both Moreno and Skeffington's story and their place of encounter. But, even before this can occur, Moreno alludes to the difficulty of speaking about Skeffington and, particularly, of speaking about the past that she occupied. In fact, the very first paragraph of her prologue reads as follows: "Avergüenza empezar-- ¡una vez más!—con el hallazgo de un manuscrito, no de John Shade, Emily L. o Gabrielle Sarrera

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<sup>63</sup> María Moreno is a cultural critic, journalist and Professor of Communications at the Centro Ricardo Rojas of the Universidad de Buenos Aires. She currently writes a column for the Argentine magazine Página12 and was the host of a television program, *Portarretratos*, on public television, where she brought to the public forum marginal themes such as ghettos, tranvestism and feminist issues that would otherwise go unmentioned in national and regional news. Her publications include El Affair Skeffington (1992), El petiso orejado (1994), A tontas y a locas (2001), El fin del sexo y otras mentiras (2002), Vida de vivos (2005) and Banco a la sombra (2007).



sino de una total desconocida: Dolly Skeffington. Una vez más también se trata de inventar una precursora en cuya obra—por demás problemático de definir—podamos leer, como dicha la convención, lo que queremos leer” (Moreno 9). Here, Moreno refers to the act of *recalling*, *recollecting* and actually *reactivating* Skeffington’s life story as an invention of sorts. For Moreno then, this paragraph becomes a disclaimer. “Be aware”, she appears to warn, “This anthology is *not* what it seems!” But the warning goes much further than this. The fact of the matter is, Moreno herself is not what she seems to be, for understanding narrative history as a fiction has serious implications with regards to her own text and the very one that we as readers hold before us.

If speaking about history is essentially the invention of the past altogether, Moreno’s introductory words then make the fluidity, coherence and even the content of Skeffington’s past, not to mention this critical *anthology*, an invention in itself. This first paragraph and the rest of the introduction now describe a totally different scenario. Skeffington and the material supposedly anthologized here are no longer part of a distant past we must narrate in order to understand, as Hayden White would suggest. Now, as Skeffington’s fictitious qualities are revealed, Moreno suddenly leaves her place as editor to assume the role of author. With this, the author is now part of the present, not the past. However, this doesn’t make things any easier. The problem that must be addressed now is that Moreno is noticeably separated from her own work. As Moreno situates her story in Paris’ intellectual community of the 1920’s, Skeffington’s life story and work are now seven decades, two oceans, several continents and a different language, away from their *real* author.<sup>64</sup> Literally speaking, Moreno’s literary creation is suddenly part of an

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<sup>64</sup> In *The Art of Transition: Latin American Culture and Neoliberalism* (2001), Francine Masiello describes how intellectuals in Latin America have assigned gender an important role in expressing the complexities

expatriate community in Paris and written not only years before she was even born, but in a different language than her native Spanish.

In El Affair Skeffington, chronological time and the recollection of a distant past do nothing but separate author from text and stop two different social subjects, here Moreno and Skeffington, from creating a valid relationship. After all, Moreno must first find Skeffington's work in order to even read and understand her own text, presumably for the first time. Although the fact that Moreno has to first find a Spanish translation in order to understand her *own* work *is* in itself significant,<sup>65</sup> it is the limitations of chronological time that force a gap between the two women, seven decades apart. It is precisely this gap that then forces Moreno into the library and allows her to find the text that she herself wrote. However, it is this chronological gap and historical separation that both allows for this text to exist and complicates the relationship it speaks of. It is in this sense that the past not only separates social subjects along linear time, but requires that

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of the gendered subject: a term that suggests a certain level of marginality, or at least, representational difficulty. While she recognizes the power of literature and culture to question dominant notions of democracy and neoliberal economics, the gendered subject is regarded as key to proposing a method of suturing and creating a social whole. In the market based postmodern world, gender provides a way of transforming and transporting meaning across the otherwise closed borders established via geographic, economic and political terms. Moreno, she asserts, uses translation and parody to break with this rigid understanding of the subject and to allow for a space that speaks of unspeakable, lesbian relations (170-1). This argument and Moreno's example is condensed to article length in her essay in Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature. Ed Daniel Balderston and Marcy Schwartz. New York: S.U. of New York P, 2002. 213-23.

<sup>65</sup> For Masiello, translation goes hand in hand with the geographic location and cultural significance of the Left Bank of the 1920s. It is this distant historical moment, separated from the author by both time and language that ironically allows Moreno to speak about it. Masiello notes that "[n]ot only is the description of Paris-Lesbos an assertion of the polyglot world of the exiles, it is also a matter of rebellion and perpetual movement around issues of sexual choice and one's authority to claim it in writing" (The Art 170). Translation becomes important as it allows for unspoken relationships to be revealed and for lesbian love to be expressed: "Moreno explores what cannot be said, she devotes attention to sameness and difference, she takes her readers on an odyssey through prohibited territory and language, she tests asynchronicities against conventional literary order, she toys with traditional concepts of authorship and the genres that have excluded women. At the same time, she reminds us that the memory of all sexual pleasure is in itself an act of translation, a repositioning of discourses that creates an illusion of access to what is far out of reach or lost. (...) From the known maps of charted pleasure, we then move out of fixed terrain; lesbian sexuality in this instance is a condition of expatriation. It produces a need to speak beyond father and homeland, to announce the insufficiency of any single language, to celebrate the noncorrespondence of images emerging from flawed translation" (170-1).

traditional notions of history be engaged through specific narrative paths that validate the chronological value assigned to information found in the archive.

Ironically, being a part of this particular narrative history isolates Skeffington from other traditional ways of speaking about the past. As Moreno develops such a narrative, history itself tells our author to understand Skeffington as part of Paris' post-war culture, and specifically, as a member of a group of expatriate men and women who lived on the city's Left Bank and were known for their diverse and active intellectual and creative projects. It is via this traditional compilation of historical material that we discover that Skeffington arrived in Paris in 1923 with her father, as Olivia Streethorse, and that it was only upon stepping foot on the Left Bank that she assumed the name Moreno refers to in the title of her text. In this sense, the reconstruction of the past creates a series of limits that give meaning to Skeffington and recognizes her as a historical figure. After all, according to Moreno, Skeffington only exists in the past, on Paris' Left Bank, and in the text that she (Moreno) writes in her name. Skeffington cannot be considered in terms of other identiarian structures that extend past these historical markers. Nationality, for example, becomes an obvious antagonist as Skeffington forms part of a famous expatriate community. However, any attempt at understanding her as part of a formal literary history is also questioned and complicated. In fact, as an unpublished author, Skeffington has no (formal) literary history either. While chronological time insists on separating our author from her protagonist and from the rest of her artistic production, what we are left with is a text that insists on joining the past with the present and our author with her text in completely different terms. Here, neither national history nor literary genealogy help Moreno engage with her protagonist's past.

It is in this sense that Moreno's introduction to Dolly Skeffington's 28 poems in this fictional anthology suggests in the opening paragraph that, "Things are not what they seem". In other words, traditional ways of understanding history cannot help us here to define a confused literary relationship, nor can it help Moreno understand her own protagonist as a social subject. The answer to Dolly Skeffington is not found in the past, but instead in her own relationship with the text that we, as readers, have in our hands.<sup>66</sup> In fact, as we look at the cover of the book itself, we confirm that Skeffington is neither the subject of Moreno's anthology nor the focus of a historical project. Skeffington instead engages in a unique relationship with Moreno that begins at the very title of this text and extends throughout the length of its pages. The title, El Affair Skeffington, tells us that Dolly Skeffington is in fact part of the story Moreno is narrating, and Skeffington is not at all the author as we may have expected if we were reading a traditional anthology. The author in this case is listed as María Moreno along with another whose name is found in parenthesis: Cristina Forero. But who exactly is Cristina Forero? And why is she here at all? Is she yet another unknown subject whose past must be invented and defined at the price of further alienating its author? All we have to do in order to answer this question is read the inside of the front cover. Here we are informed that María Moreno was Cristina Forero and that El Affair Skeffington is Moreno's first

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<sup>66</sup> Insight regarding the issue of just *who* Skeffington was is provided by Mónica Sifrim, when she notes that Skeffington seems to have chosen her historical invisibility. Sifrim suggests that, "Olivia-Dolly ha trabajado duramente para desaparecer, de tanto que quería, con anticipatoria clarividencia teórica devenir y no ser. Precisamente en una época en la que pululaban las personalidades notables (nombrar algunos, Gertrude Stein, Hemmingway, Djuna Barnes, Scott Fitzgerald, Isak Dinesen, Ezra Pound y Joyce) ella se propuso fracasar en la ficción autobiográfica, negarse a la construcción de Autor, escribir sin público posible un libro que pudiera fluir de nadie a nadie. Y por sobre todo se negó al anclaje en cualquiera de las definiciones congeladas de la identidad, ya sean literarias, de género, de clase, de personalidad. (...) En ese sentido no deja de ser lógico que Dolly elija la poesía entre todos los géneros literarios. La poesía no se vende. Es decir: no pide, no ofrece, no dice nada. No aspira a producir significados, ni generar testimonios, ni dar cuenta de su autor" (91-3). The historical marginality to which I refer alter Sifrim's comments as it becomes a move of agency. Here the subject chooses to write herself into a no-history: that is, into a different, unrecognizable archive of the past.

published text under her *new* name.<sup>67</sup> Moreno's own biography presents her as beginning her career as María Moreno, as author, and a history that is distinct from Cristina Forero's who was but a *mere* journalist. However, as we return to the affairs of Skeffington's life and the prologue itself, we remember that she too has changed her name from Olivia Streethorse and that she has also just witnessed the release of her first published texts within the same book we are holding. While their pasts separate one from the other, Moreno and Skeffington suddenly come together as authors within the same text.<sup>68</sup> In El Affair Skeffington the relationship between the past and the present and between Moreno and her protagonist is founded on a purely textual and narrative relationship: history, although ever-present in the story itself, does nothing to link Moreno with her protagonist. What brings author and protagonist together are the *affairs* that warrant being told through the compiled set of poems. For Moreno, sex and the memories that are attached to it link author to her protagonist and create a historical narrative that is unique in every sense of the word. In what follows of the 65 page prologue and the 28 poems, authorship itself becomes the focal point of a timeless way of activating what is described here as a particularly confused, complex and confounded account of a past filled with Skeffington's affairs.

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<sup>67</sup> María Moreno began her career as María Cristina Forero, writing columns in La Opinión. During her career she has used several pseudonyms other than María Moreno. Of particular mention are Rosita Falcón—an old woman and school teacher well received and loved by her readers—and Juan González Carvallo—a funny man whose sexist commentary was criticized but desired (“Perfil”). This same use of pseudonyms has been referred to as a linguistic transvestism—“trasvestismo escritural” (“Llega”). The relationship between sexuality and the written word is taken to new heights in Moreno's newest magazine project El Teje, where she publishes the narrative and poetic work of transvestite authors.

<sup>68</sup> In the relationship established between the author Moreno/Forero and her protagonista Streethorse/Skeffington, Adrián Cangi sees the perforation of testimony through historical biography. He explains that “si al final nadie sabe bien quien es Skeffington, tal vez, nadie sepa quién es Cristina Forero. Para inventarse a sí misma requirió de un pasado literario donde evocarse erótica y políticamente un mito de origen como el de la *rive gauche* para afirmar una potencia artificial creadora en la mujer” (89). Although his commentary is purely intuitive, it suggests a novel way of reconceptualizing the autobiography genre as historical *assemblage*.



## I. Archival Confusions and Historical Fictions in Moreno's *Prologue*

El Affair Skeffington is a text based on expectations. We as readers approach this text as an anthology because it appears to be much like other anthologies that we have seen. However, Moreno takes hold of our expectations as early as her book's cover, and puts them to task as she questions the foundation to any future expectation that we may have. From the onset, the close relationship between author and text suddenly changes and gives way to separation and distance. Here, that which traditionally separates the past from the present is exactly what separates Moreno from Skeffington and makes the author/protagonist relationship impossible. However, while the progression of chronological time destabilizes the relationship between our author and her own literary creation, inhibiting the one from knowing the other, it is only by reconstructing such a narrative history via explicit and implicit textual references that Moreno is able to bridge this gap.

At first glance, Moreno's urge to unite with her protagonist seems much like an urge to reconstruct history itself. However, to reconstruct history would be to perpetuate the same relationship that has separated Skeffington from her author, and Moreno from her text. While engaging with the past is the only way to be joined with her artistic creation, Moreno insists that it be done in a different way. As a result, Skeffington's unknown past is not told in traditional historical terms, but is narrated as a compilation—an anthology, if you will—of other texts and narrative voices. Following suite, the 54 page prologue uses different texts and textual references in order to create a disorienting historical montage that is capable of speaking about her protagonist, Dolly Skeffington,

as a social subject, and, more importantly, as a protagonist to a story that Moreno now openly creates.

In a sense, the way Moreno attempts to negotiate around conventional means of engaging the past, and allow for author and creation to unite, appeals to Surrealist Avant-garde aesthetics. For Moreno and the Surrealist artist, it is not only the story told explicitly by the text in question, but the way it is created that help us understand otherwise unrecognizable social boundaries. Much in the same way that Buñuel's films or the photography of Max Ernst depend upon the explicitness of the work's production, the contrived nature of Skeffington's historical narrative is what distinguishes it, and her, from traditional historical narrations.<sup>69</sup> Unlike other historical narrations that use citations to build their histories, Skeffington's sexual past is revealed via a narrative that is complicated, confused, and not at all founded on the traditional terms of the historical order of chronological time. Traditional methods of recreating the past through the clearly ordered and understood archives, through personal memoirs, biography and eye-witness accounts are complicated when these elements are incorrect, fragmented, decontextualized, (mis)interpreted and (mis)read as they become part of Dolly Skeffington's life story. Here, looking into the past is synonymous to seeing one thing through another, each object filtered, as it were, by our own expectations.

In The Surrealist Look: An Erotics of Encounter (1997), Mary Ann Caws explains this penetrating glare as very much a defining feature of Surrealist art. She notes that with Surrealism, the onlooker's glare is able to see the different layers of the work of art

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<sup>69</sup> Rosalind Krauss explains this best in terms of Surrealist photography. For her, it is the explicitly constructed nature of Surrealist art that not only defines its aesthetic quality in such terms, but it also defines the object that protagonizes the particular frame. In Surrealist photography, she claims, "[w]e see the object by means of an act of displacement defined through a gesture of substitution" (91).



and, as a result, is at once able to see itself likewise in layers. Subjectivity itself becomes the center of this contemplation as the onlooker's gaze doubles onto itself: "To find ourselves, but to find ourselves *other*, and then still other, this is central to the surrealist enterprise. Any of our *others* is already problematic, to say the least, and already potentially lost to the next, whether an other person or the most loved text or belief" (Caws 22). Likewise, Skeffington's past is told only in our, the reader's, presence and specifically in the dual action of construction and perception. By presenting her protagonist's unknown, or simply forgotten and invisible past as a disorienting textual montage, where narrative voices overlap, contradict, misinform or are completely unrelated to one another, Moreno reinvents how we regard subjectivity. The dynamic overlapping, cutting and pasting of cultural material that ultimately allows Moreno to speak about Skeffington's past now becomes essential in constructing her marginal subjectivity.<sup>70</sup>

In fact, Moreno even provides us with a bibliography to her textual construct. However, as we may have expected, this bibliography does nothing but confuse any hope of understanding this text in any traditional sense. At the end of her book, Moreno lists a series of 27 texts in no apparent order—definitely not alphabetically as one looking for order would hope—ranging from literary works by authors of the likes of Ernest Hemingway, Ezra Pound, Collette and H.D., to philosophical inquiries by Freud and

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<sup>70</sup> Paul Hammond describes the importance of the consumption of art in the context of the first wave Surrealist film (from 1924 to 1935). He makes it clear that it was much more than the mere production of a disorienting art form that completed the Surrealist aesthetic. Essential to this project was the theater itself and the very process of going to the movies: "[E]ntering the dark auditorium was like closing your eyes. Your isolation from the crowd, your body submitting to a feeling of depersonalization; the droning music obdurate the sense of hearing; the stiffness of the neck necessary for the gaze's orientation: all this was like going to sleep. Then there were the intertitles—we're watching a silent film—with their white letters on black suggesting hypnagogic visions. The very technique of film evoked the dream more than it did reality" (23).

Susan Sontag, to critical historical works by members of contemporary academia like Shari Benstock, Jeffrey Weeks, and Héctor Libertella. As we scan down the list, we see books that are missing bibliographic information, books that are not easily found or simply don't exist and books that seem to be related to the history of Paris' Left Bank, while others appear to be mistakenly included here on the page. For example, Moreno lists a book titled Amourese Colette by Genevieve Dormann. Here, what we are faced with is a book by a French author whose title is either misspelled or correctly spelled, not in French, but in Catalan. In either case, Moreno complicates our retrieval of this book in any library or internet search engine and makes this exact title impossible to find. The "u" in the French "amoureuse" is missing, while the Catalan translation, where "amourese" (of the same meaning) is correctly spelt, has yet to be done. What we have then is a piece to Skeffington's historical puzzle that doesn't fit the spaces we have made for it. We must make a totally new puzzle or accept the overhangings. We must move on.

But as we do, we soon see that this is not a singular case and that our puzzle can never fit the piece that Moreno provides. Overlapping is essential to the maze Moreno is guiding us through. In Moreno's bibliography the details of other translated titles are inconsistent, to say the least, and general inaccuracy in the place and date of publication as well as the name of the publisher are commonplace. What seems to stand out more than anything else is the contrast between texts that tell of Paris' Left Bank, the history of the expatriate community, and post-WWI cultural production and those that do the absolute opposite. On the one hand, Moreno lists for us a fundamental work in understanding Paris' artistic community during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shari

Benstock's Women of the Left Bank. Although this citation is itself complicated as it is cited in its inexistent French translation as Femme de la rive gauche, it does, nonetheless acknowledge this study as important in understanding this particular historical time and place. On the other, however, Moreno presents us with titles like, Exsexo. Ensayos sobre el transexualismo—English title, Horsexe: essay on transexuality (1983)—by Catherine Millot, El sida y sus metáforas—English title, AIDS and its metaphors (1989)—by Susan Sontag, Homosexualidad: Literatura y política—English title, Homosexuality: Sacrilege, Vision, Politics (1982)—by Robert Boyers and George Stein. While the translations themselves do exist, these texts and their content seem to be far from anything that would help us better understand this historical moment. Such a contrast in titles suggests an archival search that goes way beyond its original, superficial goals of explaining Paris' Left Bank and defining Dolly Skeffington in historical terms. What this extra-textual list of books suggests is that in some way, Moreno is telling us that her protagonist must also be understood in terms of other, marginalized subjects such as that of the homosexual, transvestite or AIDS/HIV victim that we see in the texts by Boyers, Millot and Sontag respectively. For Moreno, the bibliography no longer helps to reconstruct the past by means of a particular path through the archive. Her bibliography instead insists that the past be recreated through a series of texts that provide information on issues that must be understood outside of traditional notions of chronology and as simultaneous, continuous and intimately related events.

In El Affair Skeffington, Moreno uses the library, the archive and the historical documents found within each as a way of storytelling. Moreno makes the critical engagement of a past recorded in books and stored in the library absolutely necessary for

us to understand *who* Dolly Skeffington was—or is, for that matter. Moreno uses the information found in *other* books to tell us what it meant, according to others, to be on Paris' Left Bank post-World War I and to be part of an expatriate community of artists and authors. The result is a story that depends upon the library, and on history's archive, to be told. But it is Moreno's own critical engagement of these documents and their consequent decontextualization and misinterpretation that complicates and confuses the functional quality traditionally associated with historical narration. It is precisely this critical historical perspective that attempts to recreate the past with pieces that just don't fit that ultimately allows us, the reader, to enter and engage Dolly Skeffington's past.

The textual montage formed from this manipulated and intentionally confused series of fragments, paraphrases, titles and names of authors creates a relationship with the past that is likewise intentionally unstable and difficult to address. Here, the past, along with its recreation, are complicated when Moreno's bibliography and the texts that make up both the explicit and implicit list of works cited become disorganized and filled with inaccurate data. However, it is precisely this chaotic list of books that allows Moreno to engage Skeffington's past, tell Skeffington's life story, and provide a foundation to understanding her protagonist's own literary creation. It is precisely the chaotic nature of Moreno's bibliography that allows her to speak historically about a likewise chaotic subject. In Moreno's prologue, the subject is approached through its place in time, but even more importantly, it is approached via the structure of the narrative that describes it.

Moreno first begins to tell Skeffington's story by complicating the traditional archival methods used to engage the past. As she pastes together the initial pieces of her

historical puzzle, understanding each textual reference seems just as important as understanding the subject they wish to define. As we saw earlier, Moreno's first line reads as follows: "Avergüenza empezar-- ¡una vez más!—con el hallazgo de un manuscrito, no de John Shade, Emily L. o Gabrielle Sarrera sino de una total desconocida: Dolly Skeffington" (9). Above and beyond foreshadowing the initial problems of speaking about Skeffington's past, Moreno uses this introductory paragraph to also compare Skeffington to a group of apparently well-known authors. This comparison becomes increasingly significant, however, as it is here that Skeffington is defined by her marginality. According to Moreno's first sentence, Skeffington is not like John Shade, Emily L., and Gabrielle Sarrera. As we understand from Moreno's comments, Skeffington is the only *one* whose manuscript has an unknown author: "Avergüenza empezar-- ¡una vez más!—*con el hallazgo de un manuscrito*, no de John Shade, Emily L. o Gabrielle Sarrera sino *de una total desconocida: Dolly Skeffington*" (9, emphasis mine). The linguistic organization of such a statement is in itself significant as it implies that the manuscript *is* known and that being known has apparently done nothing to change the marginal status of its author. To understand Skeffington we must then do one of two things: either, we must consider Dolly Skeffington's text as having no influence or relevance in answering such questions and disregard its mention here, or, discover a means of working backwards and use Skeffington's own manuscript and relation to authorship itself as a foundation to defining her as social subject. Obviously we are meant to choose the latter.

In order to arrive at our newly defined goal, we are given this initial list of authors.<sup>71</sup> But we are also presented with a series of questions: Why include Skeffington in this group? Why compare her to John Shade, Emily L., and Gabrielle Sarrera? However, in order to answer any of these questions we must first understand who these authors are. We must understand them in relation to their texts and as part of a bibliography that for some reason Moreno deems important and has given us. Let's start with John Shade. John Shade is an American poet and author of a single 999 verse, 4 canto piece, called Pale Fire. However, much like Skeffington, both Shade's poetry and life are part of a fiction and are part of the novel by the same name, Pale Fire (1962), written by Russian-American novelist, poet and playwright, Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977). In fact, Pale Fire is strangely similar to Moreno's El Affair Skeffington. As we remember, El Affair Skeffington is divided into a prologue, a selection of poetry and explicatory notes. Here, Nabokov's novel is broken up similarly into these same three parts. In the first section, titled here *Foreword*, we are introduced to both Shade and his most famous poem, Pale Fire. In these opening comments, the editor and compiler, Charles Kinbote—who is also a fictional character—professes his competence and honesty as he informs his reader of Shade's writing process, the events that led up to his assassination as well as the process of the text's translation by its editor from the fictional language of Zemblan to English. In the second part, we find the transcription of Shade's manuscript and in the final, *Commentary*, an extensive series of interpretative notes

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<sup>71</sup> María Moreno, in an interview done by Juan Sasturain, notes El Affair Skeffington is very much a chronicle, despite the fictitious story it tells. It is a story told through research, a story told from within the library: “—Soy una cronista también ahí [en El Affair Skeffington], lo que pasa es que lo que yo hago es hacer una crónica de un personaje inexistente pero todo lo que está alrededor es producto de una investigación” (Sasturain). For Moreno, then, the library from within which she tells the story is exactly that which gives meaning to her protagonist.

written by the editor Kinbote. In them, he cites the memory of personal experience and shared moments with Shade and his family and friends as a form of giving a definite historical meaning to almost every line of the poem. Here, not only does history give meaning to Slade's poem, but it also forms the plot and becomes the centre-piece to Nabokov's story. After all, it is not the poem itself that interests the reader, but the fact that it is not being told by its author.

It is no coincidence that Moreno mentions John Shade in her own text. Both texts make themselves to be literary anthologies; in both cases the editor attempts to historically decipher the primary text; and in both cases the reader is dealing with a translation of the *original* manuscript. However, John Shade is meant to have co-existed with his editor in a completely fictional atmosphere, whereas in Moreno's case, history separates any attempt to unite herself with the protagonist of her anthology. While in Nabokov's text the recollection of the past is justification for speaking precisely about history, in Moreno's case, history is what separates the past from the present and is exactly what prohibits our author from talking about her own protagonist. The unsettling parallels make Pale Fire an obvious precursor to Moreno's text. However, it is these differences and Moreno's own assurance that Skefington is *not* like Shade made in the first paragraph that makes the relationship even more interesting.

Along with John Slade, Moreno also mentions an Emily L and a Gabrielle Sarrera in this makeshift bibliography in her opening paragraph. With Emily L, we as readers, once again, are presented with a fictional biography, however this time with a different structure. Titled Emily L and written by French novelist Marguerite Duras (1914-1996), this is the story of a French woman who narrates a story she is currently writing about the

life and work of an English poet, who she has named Emily L. The novel begins in first person as the French writer—presumably Duras herself for the extensive biographic references—narrates the actions of her interlocutor: a French man with whom she has continued a summertime affair for the past four years. The narration goes on to tell of the minimal surroundings at a countryside marina on the Seine River where the narrator and her lover move from their seat in the restaurant to the marina dock observing the ferry slowly move from bank to bank while groups come and go. However, the main focus is the narrator's fascination with an English woman who is accompanied by her husband, sitting at the restaurant's bar. It is here when the narrator begins to tell us of the English woman's prestigious heritage, how she has struggled with the loss of a child and how all this has affected and been revealed within the very intimate act of writing poetry. It is through this narration that we read a selection of the woman's poems and are told precisely how to understand each one.

What makes this text dialogue with Moreno's is the fact that the narrator has never spoken with Emily L, but instead openly admits to fictionalizing her life and times. The actual telling of the English woman's life story then can be easily mistaken for truth as it is carefully inscribed within other observations made from inside the marinas restaurant foyer and from within the omniscient voice of its narrator. In Moreno's case, however, *author*, *editor* and protagonist remain apart as each is the protagonist of their own story. In El Affair Skeffington, Moreno is explicitly herself. Likewise, Skeffington also belongs to a very recognizable, documented and therefore, presumably verifiable past. However, it is precisely Moreno's desire to join two completely different historical moments through the act of writing that makes her text very different from Duras'. It is,



once again, the separation that history itself creates in Moreno's text that makes such a union between the stories told in El Affair Skeffington and Emily L. so very intriguing.

As we consider both John Shade and Emily L, we become increasingly aware of both who Skeffington is, and *who* she is not. But we are not quite finished reconstructing the whole picture, or even a fragmented one for that matter. After all, Moreno mentioned one more name on that list of apparently *well known* figures: Gabrielle Sarrera. While the other two names are easily found—in a historical-literary archive that makes no distinction between “real” life and fiction—Gabrielle Sarrera is not. In fact, she doesn't seem to exist anywhere. She is not a fictional character in any novel, short story or poem, nor is she a part of any recognizable past. If she does exist, the fact that she is so very difficult to encounter makes her just as invisible to the reader as if she had never been present at all. However, if we search the archive hard enough and if we think just a little outside the box, we find that “sarrera” is part of one historical document: the Basque dictionary. Here, “sarrera” is defined as an entrance, a point of access or entry, a heading in journalistic terms. Understood in this way, Gabrielle *Sarrera* is but a textual means of engaging with Dolly Skeffington. But much more than a point of entry, Gabrielle Sarrera is a *person* that brings with her name a contextual foundation—a history if you will—of regionalism, of marginality in a greater national-Spanish context. Her name, more than her person, suggests a relationship with Dolly Skeffington that is based on a similar separation from the national and a history that is based on the way the name appears textually. In this case, Gabrielle Sarrera is a meeting place on paper and in a space that is neither national nor collective. The text here is instead the entrance point, the perpetual beginning to a timeless history that continually develops each time we begin our author's

story. However, it is at the same time a definite call to *entering* marginal histories themselves. After all, Moreno insists that Skeffington is *not at all* like Sarrera. Nonetheless, it is in this way that Gabrielle Sarrera is the last name in a list of introductions—more beginnings—into the life and times of yet another history-less poet.

Through the implicit bibliography that Moreno ironically provides us with in her very first paragraph—as opposed to at the end of the text with the rest of her works (not) cited—our author tells us that the foundation that she wishes to reconstruct is in fact located in history's archive. However, as this trio of names creates a historical lineage for Skeffington, and Moreno begins to take hold of, and appropriate, traditional means of engaging the past, the link between its chains is not the chronological passing of time as one would otherwise expect. The link that joins the past events in Skeffington's story is instead the very differences and difficulties each author and text has had expressing itself historically. We ourselves experience the difficulties associated with understanding Skeffington as a product of the past when we are enticed into the library and towards history's archive in a futile attempt to discover who these names are and what they mean. The library shelf where we discover Pale Fire, Emily L. or the Basque dictionary does not solve the mystery of who Skeffington is, but on the contrary opens up new problems. In order to understand Skeffington we must dive further into the archive in order to first understand *how* to understand and interpret these texts. We soon realize that in pushing us into history's archive, Moreno pushes us into a story that is complicated and confused with an innumerable amount of loose ends. The past that Shade, Emily L., and Sarrera together recreate is at once fictional and textual, but never factual and never concrete and in it we, as historian, become lost and disoriented. What makes it so difficult for us to

engage Skeffington's past and a past expressed in non-traditional terms is the fact that, while each character is significant in and of itself and independent of its presence, (or absence, for that matter) in history's time line, these seemingly historical figures exist solely in their author's text, in the author's imagination and in the language that is put on each page of critical interpretation their story may have inspired. As a result, each character's history is not dependent upon their own life span per se, but instead on the duration of the text within which they live. The fact of the matter is that each character is only as alive as the text and the person who reads it. What we are left with then is a past that must be discovered by the historian, and even by Moreno herself, in order for Skeffington to be considered in totally different terms.<sup>72</sup> Here, speaking about the past in terms of a bibliography and in terms of the overlapping material that each book brings to the historian's table is ironically that which makes how we understand marginal subjectivity difficult.

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<sup>72</sup> In itself, this is not an exceptional critique. Many authors, philosophers and historians have spoken about the *literary* qualities of the past. For example, in his Content of Form (1987), Hayden White links narration to the ability of making the past understandable and accessible to the present. In fact, for White, narrativity is the key to accessing meaning itself. On the other hand, Andrea Huyssen's Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory describes such fictional attributes of narrative history as a particular characteristic of modernity and as a recent shift in understanding the present's relationship to the past. Both Maurice Halbwachs, (On Collective Memory) and Jacques Derrida (Archive Fever) consider the past in fictional terms as a result of its institutionalization and use towards political ends. The literary nature of history is classically represented in the Latin American context in the work of Jorge Luis Borges, among others. In Borges' Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote, fiction is intertwined with the present in an ironic parody of the influence of narrative history on social constructions.

## II. Reciting the Past: Quotes, Interpretation and Historical Narration

As Moreno's prologue continues and leaves its first paragraph, the bibliography itself becomes much more a representation of the alternative ways of reading the past and, more specifically, of how we are to approach this particular past than it does uphold traditional history's rigid structure. This becomes especially true as Moreno engages with an author whose texts are regarded as having kept Skeffington out of history. This author's name is John Glasco and he was a well known Canadian poet, chronicler of the Left Bank and author of his own life and times within this expatriate community, titled Memoirs of Montparnasse (1970). As Moreno's version of the story goes, John Glasco arrives in Paris and quickly develops an intimate friendship with Skeffington. As a token of this relationship, Skeffington gives Glasco her one and only complete manuscript that included "28 poemas organizados en tres secciones—*Exposición, Gwendolyn Massachusetts y El honor de las damas*—, y de una suerte de diario filosófico en forma de notas encabezadas por una sola palabra para indicar el tema, como si se tratara de un juego mnemotécnico" (9). According to our author, Glasco later published this manuscript as part of a small rare book, entitled Los que no fueron, or *Those that were not*. While John Glasco's Memoirs is only one of an infinite number of texts that have forgotten to mention Dolly Skeffington's life story, his Los que no fueron is the only text, not including Moreno's of course, where anything at all is said about Skeffington. Despite the text's questionable existence and despite the negative reference to its protagonist suggested in the title itself, it is precisely Glasco's Los que no fueron that forms the basis and documentable foundation upon which Moreno bases her biographical history of Dolly Skeffington.

However, before we can attempt to understand just why this book is part of Moreno's unnamed bibliography, we must first decipher what the actual physical presence of this text implies and what the book itself represents. On the one hand, ever since its (apparent) publication this small book has been difficult, if not impossible to find. First and foremost, Moreno locates its lone translation in a similarly small, out of the way, feminist library in Madrid, making what we have here the beginnings of an archive that is essentially inaccessible. Even if the text actually does exist, the chance that we could ever have this only copy in our own hands in order to verify any of Moreno's references is complicated. On the other hand, as part of a notably feminist library, this text becomes representative of a historical archive that itself is quite decidedly *unhistoric*. To call the library where Moreno found this rare edition a feminist library is to 1), create an archive that is linked to a sociopolitical context specific to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and more precisely, largely defined as part of its last three decades, and 2), create a way of speaking about the past that is specifically organized through its thematics, and not through the time that has past. Even its title, Los que no fueron, suggests a subject, a story and a past that wasn't: that is, as something that *wasn't* and isn't placed within time. It is a text based seemingly on a contradiction. It is a text that in its mere mention includes the *inexistence* within historical narration and reveals that *being* is simply a relative term. After all, if the subjects in Glassco's rare book really "no fueron" or really "did not exist", how would it be possible to tell their story, let alone publish their work as Glassco is said to have done?

Skeffington's historical presence would have been defined in positive terms as both author and visible member of this community had her life story been included in

Glassco's Memoirs. However, being excluded from this text and instead included as protagonist of Los que no fueron recognizes Moreno's character as *actually* being a part of this historical period through her inexistence. That is to say, Skeffington's absence from the recognized history of the Left Bank and from a book that was widely published, Memoirs, leaves open the possibility for her to be a part of any other version of this time and space. Her absence within Glassco's famous book also leaves open the possibility for Moreno to find a book—even by this same author—where Skeffington's story *is* told. The always present possibility of Skeffington's existence outside of Glassco's Memoirs makes it possible for Moreno to find a book that is not listed in library catalogs and as a result is not listed in history's formal archive, and make *this* the point of encounter with her protagonist's historical subject. Here, the incredible nature of history as a story of ALL past events and the sheer size and extension of the innumerable traditional archives makes it possible and plausible to find basically anything within it, even if it is a parody, an invention or yet another fiction. After all, could anybody prove the opposite? Could anybody *really* verify that a book did or did not exist? For Moreno, the archive becomes much more than a symbol of history's traditional chronological or even alphabetical order, and of the limitations placed on the narration of the past. The archive, here, represents the vastness of the past and the different places the story it tells can be located.<sup>73</sup> Moreno makes John Glassco's two texts, Memoirs and Los que no fueron, a point of reference to the impact and limitations of traditional historical narration. Glassco's textual presence, therefore, not only helps classify the Paris-Lesbos community in terms of its sexual orientation and artistic coherence, but also represents those who

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<sup>73</sup> It is in this sense that Moreno is following a literary tradition of Borges and Poe who are known to play with libraries and authorship as a means of creating and parodying social limits.

failed to capture Dolly Skeffington within their narration. He is both representative of a historical tradition and a marker of the voids that it has made invisible by the stories of the past that it tells.

The implications of locating Skeffington's life story within Glassco's Los que no fueron presents a series of complications regarding the nature of the text itself. First of all, and as Moreno herself notes, John Glassco writes Skeffington's story alongside that of Dan Mahoney and Elsa Von Freytag, "en calidad de curiosidades de época, de *personajes* familiares a los famosos de la *rive gauche* pero que no dejaron más que una obra fragmentaria, totalmente inédita en el caso de Skeffington y mínima en el caso de Mahoney" (9). In a sense, Moreno introduces and describes Glasco's Los que no fueron as a sort of homage to the marginalized subject and as a text that at once tells us about unknown persons and defines them for us. Los que no fueron makes sure that we understand Skeffington in terms of her non-conformity with traditional versions of the well documented history of Paris' Left Bank. Thanks to this text, we as readers are forced to define Skeffington as different, as distinct and unusual, and, because of that, as part of a past that "*no fue*", that "did not exist": at least not in other history books.<sup>74</sup>

Moreno locates Skeffington's story within this rare book by John Glassco and instantly creates a parallel with his other, well known text, Memoirs of Montparnasse. Here, marginality becomes a term that is defined according to one's place in a text, much more than in relation to one's actual location within social hierarchies. As Moreno

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<sup>74</sup> Gustavo Dessal takes this one step further when he makes Glassco's imaginary book, Los que no fueron, the refusal to attach the subject to any form of textual/social identification. This title, he explains "es también un buen nombre para los que no han sido atrapados por la identificación, por el rasgo que sujeta al sujeto y le impide disgregarse en el universo de las palabras y las cosas" (99). For him, textuality, and not just traditional forms of historical narration, is the very limit that Moreno is critically addressing. In this sense, it is the text itself that has proven incapable of representing Skeffington's erotic life story.

suggests, it was Glassco's reputation as chronicler of the Left Bank, in particular, that ultimately gave him the power to decide Skeffington's fate and to consider her either as part of Paris' prominent literary and social circles, or restrict her story to the outskirts of this well-known and well documented past.<sup>75</sup> When Skeffington becomes the protagonist of Los que no fueron and is excluded from Memoirs, Skeffington and her life story become part of a narrative history that is distinctly separate from dominant versions of the past, where to be dominant means to be part of an already existing and recognizable story line. As a result, Skeffington's past is literally part of a different historical book, a book of historical difference, and one that is created with the sole purpose of exposing histories rarities.

Ironically, however, it is the particular status of this book, as one that tells of rare stories that is likewise only located in a rare-hard-to-find library, that actually allows Moreno to interact with it. In a sense, Moreno's voice and interaction with Glassco's text is the only way we, the readers, come upon Skeffington's story. If it weren't for Moreno, Skeffington would remain lost amongst the stacks and shelves in that small library in Madrid. Understood in this way, Moreno creates a new way of understanding authorship itself. In Skeffington's case, it is not enough to tell her story like Glassco did in the pages of his Los que no fueron. In order for Skeffington's story to be told, Glassco's book must first be found. Authorship now becomes synonymous with discovery. However, as we soon find out, Moreno continues to modify traditional notions of authorship that relate

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<sup>75</sup> In his prefatory note to Memoirs of Montparnasse, Glassco advises that upon arriving in Paris from Montreal, he decided to leave surrealist poetry behind and write a memoir and "impose a narrative form on everything that has happened since we left Montreal last February..." (4). This emphasizes even more the striking contrast between Glassco and Skeffington. Not only is Skeffington unknown, essentially inexistent in the history of Paris' Left Bank while Glassco is a recognized member, but her manuscript is fragmented and at best a volume of unordered notes and abstract poetry: nothing in comparison to Glassco's *narrative* history that gives coherence to something that he himself describes as a remarkably chaotic time.



creation with writing, when it is her voice that mediates our encounter with Skeffington *vis a vis* Glassco's voice.

Moreno's presence mediates our entire encounter with Skeffington's past. As we read through and alongside her, we become aware that for Moreno speaking about Skeffington's past involves speaking about the events and people that surrounded her. In this sense Glassco's way of separating certain subjects from his account of the Left Bank in Memoirs becomes a point of critical inflection. Moreno insists that Skeffington's past be narrated in conjunction with, as opposed to separate from, the dominant historical narratives that speak of other *well known* figures of Paris' 1920s. Moreno argues that a narrative history of Paris' Left Bank could not be understood to its full extent without first having understood Skeffington's role within it. In other words, neither Skeffington's past nor the greater story of Paris' 1920s and '30s could be spoken about as Glassco had in his Memoirs. According to Moreno, both Memoirs and Los que no fueron are two versions of this particular time and place that must be united and told in conjunction as a unique historical montage in order for the past to be told. This task automatically makes Moreno the author of a different history: one that is able to tell of Skeffington and of Paris' Left Bank as mutually coherent and dependent and not distinct and separate from one another

It is in this sense that Moreno engages with Glassco's texts, Memoirs of Montparnasse and Los que no fueron. In her prologue to Skeffington's poems, Moreno combines these two texts by either citing them directly or paraphrasing them herself. In doing so, Moreno creates a narrative of Skeffington's past by combining texts, and integrating the two different stories to form a third that becomes progressively uncertain,

disorderly and chaotic. This chaos is first and foremost the result of Moreno's insistence in not following traditional rules associated with citation in a scholarly work.<sup>76</sup> In El Affair Skeffington, Moreno neglects all rules that would specify the importance of indicating the particular text and or page number from which the author is quoting or paraphrasing from. Instead, Moreno insists in combining fragments of Glassco's texts in an unverifiable manner that complicates the traditional relationship between textual referencing and historical certainty. If we are not told where Moreno is finding her information, how are we to believe it at all? How could we distinguish textual citation from narrative fiction? Maybe that is a distinction Moreno does not want us to make. After all, a quotation without a bibliographic reference is but another voice in a single text. That is, the absence of traditional referencing techniques essentially erases the edges of the textual fragment Moreno inserts into her narrative. Textual difference gives way to a narrative montage where voices are combined and made into one via the mediation of Moreno herself.

Moreno begins to dialogue with the two texts by Glassco in what at first seems a straight-forward means of referencing several different historical sources. However, this system soon complicates itself and is confused when it becomes impossible to distinguish the particular textual origin of the words that Moreno cites as Glassco's own. This is noted as early as Glassco's introduction into Moreno's prologue and as a protagonist in Skeffington's marginality. Moreno describes Glassco as “[h]abiendo conocido bastante

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<sup>76</sup> In an interview done by Astrid Pikielny, Moreno speaks about autobiography and about the constructiveness involved when one speaks about past experience. She says that “autobiografía y experiencia no admite la ausencia de mediaciones, esos trozos heterogéneos con que uno se autoconstruye sin mentir pero organizando todos los pormenores”. Moreno considers herself as a mediator, a sort of bridge between the past and the real that allows for a (fictional) connection to be made “Funciono,” she continues, “de alguna manera como la condición o el soporte de un discurso autobiográfico o de una historia de vida que, a su vez, serían soporte de un discurso autobiográfico mío.”

en la intimidad a Dolly Skeffington, el mismo Glassco desestima que la entrega, hecha en calidad de “recuerdo por los años vividos en común y regalo personal”, fuera una demanda de publicación, y el contenido del manuscrito es el mejor defensor de esta tesis” (9). Here, Moreno is sure to distinguish a fragment of her narration as she restricts Glassco’s words in quotation marks. However, in this fragment, there is no indication as to who speaks these cited words, giving way to a series of Who’s, What’s, and eventually Why’s. With the little information that the reader is given, we can deduce that any quotation that speaks about Skeffington and her social relations would come from Glassco’s text, Los que no fueron. After all, this is the only book that tells her story: or at least, this is what Moreno tells us and what she expects us to believe, or question—it is never clear really what *she* expects from us. In any case, we are unable to specify which, of the possibly many voices that populate Glassco’s text, is the source of such a comment. These could very well be Glassco’s own words. But it is also very possible that the voice belongs to either Dan Mahoney or Elsa Von Freytag—the other protagonists of Glassco’s text—or any number of possible voices that may exist throughout this rare book. However, for Moreno, it seems either unnecessary or impossible to locate any narrative voice other than her own. This historical ambiguity allows Moreno to combine multiple texts and versions of the past into one and defy exterior *authorship* and any *authority* that traditionally is attributed to it. The result is a text that exemplifies the power of the author to (re)create the past in her own terms and in a way that allows an in-existent, fictitious character by the name of Dolly Skeffington to be understood as a historical subject.

As noted earlier, Moreno's text begins to take shape around the initial distinction that marks Moreno as the only author able to tell this story. But before we actually move past the first two and a half pages where Moreno presents Skeffington, her problematic existence and a brief outline of her relationship with Glassco, we are faced with a series of subtitles that correspond to the titles of Skeffington's short philosophical notes published in Los que no fueron. The titles of these notes range from "¿Sola?", to "Maestro", to "Inducción", to "Weill", to "Arte", and provide names or titles to the sections that span throughout the prologue. These subtitles are used by Moreno as a sort of thematic guide to Skeffington's life and to the many voices that partake in its narration and allow Moreno to organize significant moments in the story of Skeffington's life. However, the subtitles also destabilize any possible chronological sequence from being made. The mere presence of the subtitles fragments the narrative structure and entices us, the reader, to do one of many options. The subtitles allow us to jump randomly over some, while completely reading others, while at the same time, giving us the option to look at Skeffington's life story as a series of narrative blocks, for the historical construction worker to pill one on top of another. Looking onto the past, in this case, literally disorients any traditional way of reading the past as it becomes only visible as a superimposition. Even when one reads the narrative sequence from the first to the last subtitle, there is no definite beginning, nor ending. In any case, each of these particular blocks gives a thematic glimpse into Dolly Skeffington's story. The random order of the subtitles now becomes even more random and even more inexplicable. Nonetheless, this confusion is how we read into Skeffington's past and it is the way Moreno suggests we do so. Moreno forces us to move on.

Moreno begins this thematic narration of Skeffington's past under the subtitle, *Paris-Lesbos*. Here, Moreno decides to address this moment in Skeffington's life through a term that refers to a collective group of expatriates and one that classifies the story to be told in sexual and geographical terms: that is, Moreno defines Skeffington's story as one that is about a particularly famous group of *Lesbos* in *Paris*, or essentially *Paris-Lesbos*. Instead of beginning with a subtitle such as "Paris", which would suggest a simple geographic orientation as an entrance point into Skeffington's story, or by defining her narrative in sexual terms and in terms of female-female erotics, *Lesbos*, Moreno follows suite with her protagonist's own philosophical notes. In pairing Paris with Lesbos in *Paris-Lesbos*, Moreno, like Skeffington, sexualizes an urban center, a geographical space, as well as the history that has often been used to describe Paris as an international cultural centre. However, Moreno, like Skeffington, also locates *Lesbos*, that is lesbianism, as a spacial definer. After all, it is not just Paris, but *Paris-Lesbos*. Sexuality all of a sudden is inseparable from a socially recognizable place. But, the fact of the matter is, neither Moreno nor Skeffington actually refer to lesbianism itself. It is instead distinctly marked as *Lesbos*: capitalized and made into a noun—different from its English translation as *lesbian* that can be understood as both a noun and an adjective. Paris, in this case, is no longer just a city. It is now a sexual space that defines a person, place or thing—the sexualized Paris is now an adjective. When Moreno places *Paris-Lesbos* as the first subtitle in her prologue and as the entrance point into Skeffington's life, she insists that we understand even the most simple of relationships—those between adjectives and nouns—in a different way. Understanding Skeffington as a historical subject then becomes synonymous with understanding female-female intricacy in spatial,

cultural and historical terms. Sex and sexuality no longer are ways of defining the subject: sex and sexuality are no longer adjectives. Sex and sexuality are now used, by both Moreno and Skeffington as a way of approaching the past itself, and in particular are ways of approaching a past marginalized by history and a past—Skeffington’s past—that never did exist.<sup>77</sup>

This first subtitle foregrounds Moreno’s break with traditional ways of recording and speaking about the past. In this first section, Moreno refuses to anchor her protagonist’s tale in a compilation of the vast material that has been dedicated to telling the story of Paris’ Left Bank’s female cannon. Moreno significantly leaves the term *Paris-Lesbos* bare in the face of history’s archive and in direct disaccord with the bibliography cited in her books final pages. Opening Skeffington’s historical narrative in this way anticipates just how (un)important historical documentation is for Moreno as she speaks about the past. In a sense, Moreno uses this beginning to establish her first set of conclusions: The historical foundation for the marginal subject is a disorienting discussion that has neither beginning nor end and, in fact, can only be conceived of as just as unstable as the subject it attempts to ground in time. For Moreno, speaking about the past in sexual terms does not stabilize the subject whose story is being told. On the contrary, marginalized sexuality is used as a means of engaging with the past that is likewise marginalized. Much in the same way sexuality is used to establish social

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<sup>77</sup> In fact, Gustavo Dessal describes the very nature of Moreno’s story and its structural quality in sexual terms. For him, “[e]n una suerte de inesperado travestismo, Cristina Forero (o quizás María Moreno), disfrazada de prólogo una novela que rescata el estallido de los arquetipos femeninos, corrompidos por una posguerra que acabó con los últimos restos morales del siglo XIX” (95). The textual transvestism described here is what makes this text, and Moreno’s writing in general at once so similar and so very different from that of Borges. While Borges is known for writing about an author, who writes about an author, who writes about an author, and so on, “Cristina Forero, alias María Moreno, se basa en un presunto John Glassco para prologar un puñado de poesías que pertenecieron a la no menos fugaz Olivia Streethorse, alias Dolly Skeffington” (95). In this light, Moreno’s work becomes a reflection of the complications associated with the performative nature of sexuality.

difference, it here becomes a way of expressing different narrative structures and the effects they produce.

In the light of such confusion, the *Paris-Lesbos* section begins nonetheless much like one would expect a story without an historical foundation to begin. The section begins as if there were no beginning. Moreno enters the discussion of Paris-Lesbos as if it were already well underway. Without the apparent need for introduction, Moreno continues an ongoing debate as follows: “Si hacemos de la vida de Safo una interpretación menos mítica, podemos dar a París-Lesbos un significado más complejo que el de un conjunto de mujeres homosexuales e incluir en él a otras, tanto heterosexuales como con diversos pactos de colaboración, vínculo erótico y estético con los varones...” (11). In this sentence, Moreno uses a series of comparative adjectives that suggest that *her* reading of the Paris-Lesbos is “less mythic” and “more complex” than other unnamed, unreferenced and absent versions. Although we can assume that this other is *none other* than Glassco’s Los que no fueron or even his Memoirs, there is no explicit reference in this case to either of his texts and it could very well be directed at any number of critical versions of this period. Above and beyond the assumption that Glassco is the recipient of this critique, what we as readers are left with is a debate that was initiated *already* and in *another* place. It has been stated sometime ago and somewhere else who Safo is and why and how her story has become one of mythic proportions. But that particular story has no place here. In fact, Moreno’s entrance into Skeffington’s life story and into a subtitle marked by Paris and its Lesbos is left without any particular mention of Paris or its Lesbos own past. Very different from Moreno’s introduction of Glassco himself, where concrete mention is made to the books he had

written and to his place within Paris' 1920s and 30s, the history of the Paris-Lesbos is here left noticeably unsaid.

Moreno begins this section as she situates the telling of Safo's life story in an abstract, distant place and time and creates a fragmented version of traditional historical narration that impedes us from completely understanding the story of Paris-Lesbos without going outside Moreno's text. At the very least, this way of speaking about the past insists that we too engage the past in a different way. We are forced to accept that this is not a story about the well known Paris-Lesbos. This is a narrative history of Dolly Skeffington and Moreno is telling it. By leaving certain loose ends, and by beginning the section, *Paris-Lesbos*, midstride, Moreno suggests that it is in fact the incomplete nature of her narrative that allows it to express the silenced nuances of this community. It is precisely here, in the middle of Moreno's open-ended discussion that she proposes a way of speaking about Paris-Lesbos—about “lesbians in Paris” and about a “Lesbian Paris”—that, in fact, includes males and extends past the sexual stereotyping implicit in its own name and that has become a traditional historical marker.

Nonetheless, Moreno continues to critique an historical foundation that she refuses to outline or explain. In the *Paris-Lesbos* section, Moreno decidedly presents the Paris-Lesbos as a social collective that avoids traditional identitarian frameworks used to classify artistic movements in terms of their geographic and temporal similarities. According to Moreno, Paris-Lesbos is first and foremost a continuity and something that could not be spoken about as a generational move, as with other more traditional, artistic circles:



París-Lesbos no se relevaba, existía por enriquecimiento, las nuevas generaciones podían toparse con las viejas; Anaïs Nin, que se instaló allí en 1930, superponerse con Gertrude Stein, que lo hiciera tres décadas antes. Además las estadías eran largas, las *anadrines* longevas: Natalie Barney murió a los 96 años, Janet Flanner<sup>8</sup> a los 86, Djuna Barnes a los 90 y Bryher<sup>9</sup> a los 88. Por eso muchos memorialistas dan la impresión de que las cosas sucedieron en el mismo lugar y al mismo tiempo. Fue durante tres décadas que las habitantes de París-Lesbos continuaron fundando salones, abriendo editoras o librerías para ofrecerse como bacantes a las artes y las letras. La mayoría parecían *flappers* inventadas por Fitzgerald (peinado príncipe valiente, piernas de barrote de balaustrada, manos fuertes para la raqueta y el trago largo) pero las había también como Natalie Barney con tufillo a principio de siglo. (13)

Here, Moreno nuances traditional ways of describing the duration and nature of intellectual production. Here, the story Moreno tells is of temporal transgression and permanence and becomes a story that gains textual priority over and above any traditional generational representation of the times via her own voice. Notably, however, Moreno discusses this group of women as a continuity without the help of other texts. Although she is said to be paraphrasing Skeffington's notes, it is her voice that we hear and they are her words that describe to us the *true*, almost eternal character of the Paris-Lesbos community. While Moreno's textual presence is obvious and strong, the texts that form her discursive counterpart are significantly absent. Nowhere on the page is there to be found any discussion of the literature that has described Paris-Lesbos as a close-ended aesthetic movement, for example. What we are left with is a general declaration as to the

direction of Moreno's critique: "muchos memorialistas dan la impresión de que las cosas sucedieron en el mismo lugar y al mismo tiempo" (13). But the voice of the other *memorialists* seems to fall out of sight and even authors like John Glassco, who occupy a predominant part of Moreno's own text, are neither mentioned nor directly criticized. Any insistence on referencing other texts and any possible push towards the library are apparently unnecessary and undesirable in order to understand Moreno's argument. Moreno's voice appears as the only voice able to present this way of looking at the Paris-Lesbos. All other texts are put aside and replaced by Moreno's stern narrative style and tone that denounces the very act of writing traditional memorials. Moreno's own voice now appropriates the position of any possible historical discourse. In this case, authority is literally given to our author, but for different reasons. Here, Moreno does not find narrative authority in historical documentation that may uphold her argument. Instead, she becomes author and an authority on the history of the Paris-Lesbos community simply because she decides to. After all, she is the one telling the story. She is the one who decides who is included in her text. Here, historical authority is truly textual and is strictly that of the author.

In Moreno's introduction and in particular this very first section titled *Paris-Lesbos*, traditional history is literally pushed aside and into the margins of the text we read. Moreno's authorial voice dominates the entire paragraph and in doing so, limits the presence of "other traditional memorialists" to a purely codified representation that is outside the narrative story. Here, the voice of traditional historical narration is present only in the superscripted numbers that indicate a note to Moreno's narrative. In fact, the numbers 8 and 9 that are in the text following the names Flanner and Bryher, do nothing

but highlight the 50 pages that separate the biographical endnotes from Moreno's distinct history of the time. The actual notes that tell us *who* these names are and that describe both Flanner and Bryher in terms of their respective national and editorial identities are completely separated from Moreno's narrative. For Moreno, the tradition memorial becomes nothing more than a brief literary biography that is almost completely detached from the content and context of her own historical narrative. The irrelevant nature of such information explains why the endnotes mentioned here only tell us *who* two of the seven names Moreno mentions are. What about the others? And are we to understand that the life stories of Flanner and Bryher can possibly be restricted to such a short blurb? Instead of being able to give the history of the Paris-Lesbos a complete and closed appearance, what these notes end up doing is exactly the opposite. The endnotes draw attention not to the precision of its content, but to that which is *not* mentioned. For the little information that is presented about the life of Flanner and Bryher is contrasted by the totally unknown and unnarrated stories of Nin, Stein, Barney, Barnes, and Fitzgerald. For those who are unfamiliar with this particular historical time and place, these names, incomplete in themselves, are complicated. Stein, for some, could very well refer to a childhood neighbor, a college team mate or even the protagonist of a children's novel. In such a case, Stein would be far from any relationship with the Gertrude to whom Moreno seems to refer. Who she actually *is* referring to is impossible to know. Moreno's narrative leaves holes in traditional historiography and at the same time makes a definite move to include these narrative vacancies into the story that it tells. Although these endnotes and the list of names left out of them, for example, may leave more questions to ask than they actually answer, this is not their function. The presence and lack of endnotes suggest that

the story of the Paris-Lesbos *is actually* incomplete. To complete it, and fill in the voids, would misrepresent their particular history and the way Moreno deems that it should be told. For Moreno, in order to engage and narrate this past, we mustn't try to complete it. Its history lies in the confusion these loose ends create.

Moreno continues to highlight traditional historical narrative's urge to classify and define the Paris-Lesbos community as she begins to insert her own protagonist into this particular moment in time. Skeffington first appears textually, walking on the streets of Paris' 1920s, underneath the second subtitle that guides us through Moreno's introduction: *Anandrine*. Much like the first subtitle, *Paris-Lesbos*, the second is significant in and of itself. On the one hand, it is a word that is left in its original French and is untranslated to the Spanish, as many others like *La Via Regia*, or *Maestra*, are. In fact, the second subtitle, *Anandrine*, is the only one, besides proper names, that is left untranslated from the French. This gives us two options: we can consider this subtitle as special due to its linguistic quality, or, regard *Anandrine* as a proper name itself (it is a noun, after all). Moreno, however, seems to want us to consider both of these possibilities as she specifies neither one.

The *Anandrine* section is short and is composed of two paragraphs of different length. In them, Moreno narrates Glassco's first impression of Skeffington via two lengthy passages from Glassco's own text, Los que no fueron. In the first, we read a fantastic eye-witness description of Moreno's protagonist as she walks chaotically through the Parisian Left Bank. Moreno begins the *Anandrine* section as she opens quotation marks for what follows:

“Por la calle Mouffetard caminaba como a través de una sucesión de obstáculos. Sus largas piernas norteamericanas y sus pies delgados, sostenidos por el taco carretel de los guillermina, se bamboleaban como los de una mujer torpe ceñida en un vestido de noche (tenía las medias agujereadas). Sus cabellos rojos y rizados, recogidos en lo alto de la cabeza por una peineta de nácar, se desmoronaban sobre las hombreras del tapado negro de bolsillos deformes cuyos agujeros escupían objetos de niño vagabundo—una flauta hecha con una avellana, un reloj roto, una miniatura de zapatilla, lápices—que ella se agachaba a recoger con la dificultad de una persona de edad muy avanzada y, no bien se había erguido y sacudido un poco la caspa de las solapas, dejaba caer otros: el bolso, un manojo de novelitas usadas, el mantote spaí que dijo haber comprado en el mercado de pulgas. (14)

Before reading into this quote’s content, one is struck by the fact that Moreno immediately begins this section with a quotation mark. These are not her words. Here, we learn about Skeffington from what seems to be an eye-witness account. But, once again, we must ask where this account comes from? If it is a quote from Los que no fueron, from what page? In fact, this seems to be a quote that never ends. After all, once Moreno opens the quote at the beginning of the *Anandrine* section, she never does close it. Instead the paragraph just seems to run its course, and continue right into the next. As we read, we are simply forced to accept this lack of detail to the documentation of Moreno’s apparent research into Skeffington’s life and the fact that we will likely never be able to do it ourselves. In any case, this lengthy quote presumably by John Glassco draws a vivid picture of Skeffington as quite an awkward woman. But as we continue reading the

following fragment from Glassco's text, we see that this *awkwardness* becomes, for Glassco at least, a means of describing the Paris-Lesbos in general.

“Aunque ya la había visto beber en las *terrasses* una botella de *Ricard* y tenía los ojos vidriosos, pasó sin verme y se metió en el café *Des Amateurs*.”<sup>14</sup>  
Así describe John Glassco a Dolly Skeffington. Luego se pregunta y responde retóricamente: “¿Qué era? ¿Una artista? Por cierto que no. ¿Una puta? Quizás intermitentemente. ¿Una lesbiana? Sí y no. De lo que estoy seguro es que era una *anandrine*,” (14)

Once again, this second paragraph begins with the opening of quotation marks. However, as we scan through it, we realize that they will soon come to an end and that Moreno will eventually speak to us with her own voice, outside of the fragments she takes from Glassco's book. But before they do come to an end, Glassco's voice is allowed by Moreno to first draw our attention to Skeffington's drunken state. He explains that her being drunk not only inhibits her from *recognizing* him—heaven forbid—but also from avoiding a particular café. According to Glassco, her being drunk results in her failure to pay homage to what is here presented as a dominant voice in Paris' historical documentation. In a sense, Skeffington's drunken state and her consequent distinction from those who are not drunk directly results in her entering a particular café. In both cases, presence of mind, social status and geographical space are all lumped into one in an attempt to unsuccessfully understand Skeffington's marginality. For Glassco, drawing attention to Skeffington's drunken state is not enough to describe her place in society. He must insist on her difference through the social interaction that she negates and via the space she herself decides to enter. While Moreno's voice is notably absent from this

fragment of the *Anadrine* section, she is very much part of the narration process. She is the editor of Glassco's words. Through her editing, she insists that marginality, much like her narrative, be defined from multiple directions.

At this point, we read on past yet another numerical superscript and marker of traditional historical information. This time, it takes us to the endnotes in order to provide a documented description for us of the café in which Skeffington enters. The café is called *Des Amateurs* and is described to us as dark and dingy, and as a place frequented by dark and dingy characters. The endnote provides us with a description of the café that is immediately coherent with Glassco's account of Skeffington. After all, both Skeffington and the café are described by outsiders in their own respect and in such a manner that condemns or ridicules their difference. However, it is not so much the description of this particular bar and its obvious relationship with the significant nature of Glasco's words that first grabs our attention. As we read about it, we are drawn towards the source from which this information is taken: a memoir by Ernest Hemingway titled *A Moveable Feast* (1964). With this, the 14<sup>th</sup> endnote, Moreno takes us outside her textual narrative and from a quote by Glassco, to yet another quote from another memoir. In it we read of a bar filled with sad shadows, dirty bodies and sour drunkenness. However, in this endnote that references Hemingway's text, we suspiciously read of a café that is never named. Hemingway never calls it *Des Amateur*: or at least, he never does in the quote that Moreno cites as a way of clarifying Glassco's words. What we have is merely Moreno reassurance that Hemingway's quote refers to the same café Glassco describes and comes from the very book mentioned above. The series of quotes presented here by Moreno makes us read different texts and contexts according to her own historical vision.

It is precisely this group of fragments that may or may not be related, that allows us to understand the essence of Moreno's own story and her own protagonist as we jump back and forth through the book, from narrative to endnote. It is only by reading Glassco's words, in tandem with a completely decontextualized blurb written by Hemingway in a totally different narrative style and at a totally different spatial location, that we are able to see a relationship between the Skeffington described as a chaotic, antisocial subject and the Skeffington that is difficult to classify under any traditional sexual terminology. In short, Moreno deliberately creates a narrative that is read through different texts and that literally is read through the fifty pages that separates each fragment. Speaking about Skeffington is once again done via the overlapping and superpositioning of textual references.

The structural nature of Moreno's prologue creates a series of questions and concerns about historical narration. For example, how can we understand the past via a narrative that lacks specificity? How can Dolly Skeffington herself be understood when it is her marginality that dominates the narratives that express her past? Under the subtitle *Anandrine*, Moreno suggests that such questions, and the way such questions are answered, are integral in addressing just how we speak about Skeffington in historical terms. If we return to the remaining fragment of the second paragraph in this second section, we will see just how questions surrounding Skeffington are not put to rest with answers. Instead, these questions are to be understood as a codified language in and of themselves that we are forced to regard as nothing more than insecurities and ambiguity. We recall the last lines of the paragraph as follows: "Así describe John Glassco a Dolly Skeffington. Luego se pregunta y responde retóricamente: "¿Qué era? ¿Una artista? Por



cierto que no. ¿Una puta? Quizás intermitentemente. ¿Una lesbiana? Sí y no. De lo que estoy seguro es que era una *anandrine*” (14). Here, Moreno mediates the textual space between the two quotes from what seems to be Glassco’s Los que no fueron. As she does so, she prepares our reading of the series of questions that Glassco raises regarding Skeffington. For Moreno, in particular, these are specifically rhetorical questions that her protagonist raises: they have no answer and were not designed to have one. With the qualifier, *rhetorical*, Moreno decides the narrative tone of Glassco’s words, and defines the context of their enunciation. Moreno chooses this rhetorical structure as a means of approaching and contemplating just who Skeffington is through her manipulation of Glassco’s words. After all, if Glassco asks these questions without expecting an answer, any possible interlocutor, present or not, is now marked by their passive role in a newly defined *dialogue*. But in this new dialogue, the interlocutor has no voice—they cannot provide any answer to Glassco’s questions. The interlocutor is silenced. This silence, however, creates more questions, and is the cause for more ambiguity. This becomes obvious in Glassco’s own responses: “Is she an artist? Well, no. Is she a whore? Maybe, sometimes. A lesbian? Yes, and no”. When speaking about Skeffington, the rhetorical nature of questions not only silences any possible answer and negates the traditional understanding of dialogue itself, but it ultimately results in narrative insecurity. Here, Glassco distances himself from the concise nature of his previous descriptions only to find himself pondering answers to the rhetorical questions that he himself proposes. The only way he is able to describe Skeffington with any certainty and without more answerless questions is with a term that is ambiguous in and of itself. According to Glassco, Skeffington is an *anandrine*. But what is this? To who or what does it refer? The answer

to who Skeffington is, is now the source of a series of our own questions that also go unanswered. They are questions that Moreno must have foreseen when she decided to use this same French word for the section subtitle even after decidedly aiming this text toward a Spanish speaking public.

However, Moreno once again directs us to a historical context that is suggested but not defined. When Skeffington is referred to by Glassco as an *anandrine*, who Skeffington is becomes barely more tangible than it once was. At this point, who Skeffington is, is suddenly reduced to a word. But, what does it mean exactly to call Skeffington in this way? What is implied when we, like Glassco and Moreno, refer to her as an *anandrine*? First and foremost, to call her *anandrine* is to situate her linguistically outside of the code that the reader has tacitly agreed to follow. In this case, one of the two situations must be true: either the thought of Skeffington as a historical subject is impossible to formulate in Spanish, or, her spot in history's narration is precisely that of difference. For those who are not familiar enough with French, it is a word that holds its meaning from the reader, while at the same time locates its meaning within the text that we read. One may say, its significance is lost in linguistic code itself.

With the word *anandrine*, Moreno takes hold and accentuates the conflict created within language and makes this the way Skeffington's past comes to life.<sup>78</sup> We are faced with a word, *anandrine*, that is both the first and last word in Moreno's first textual description of Dolly Skeffington. It is a word that delimits a linguistic space from within

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<sup>78</sup> For Francine Masiello, the dependence on foreign languages in Moreno's text puts special emphasis on the translator. *El Affair Skeffington* "invites us to think about the signs of pleasure that refuse to be represented in any language. In that act of refusal, there is a resistance to the false identities imposed upon individuals and national cultures by the law of the state. One also hears a shout of protest as individuals refuse to be marked. The translator's task in María Moreno's text thus takes a double course, sustaining secret liaisons and unresolved identities while testing linguistic law." ("Joyce" 66). For Masiello, it is language itself and its often codified nature that allows for sexuality to be hidden and secret to the superficial reader.

which Skeffington can be described, and does so with definite disregard to historical context. It is undeniable that *anandrine* is mentioned by both Moreno and Glassco because of what it means both in linguistic and in cultural terms. However, we as readers are once again left without any of this possible context from which to understand it, and as a result, Skeffington. For us, Skeffington is once again defined in terms of a misunderstanding, or confusion in deciphering Moreno's historical text. While misunderstanding seems to dominate this text, the possibility remains that someone else reading this same book may very well understand and follow the cultural reference located in the word, *anandrine*. For them, *anandrine* is simply being "without a man" (Lanser 107-8). In this case, Moreno's use of this particular French adjective to describe Skeffington is now straight-forward. Skeffington is described as being "without a man". But, when Glassco and Moreno arrive at how to speak about Skeffington, being an *anandrine* becomes much more. In short, being referred to as *anandrine* or "without a man" goes hand in hand with Skeffington's presentation within the cited fragment from Glassco's text as being antisocial, chaotic and unexplainable. In the context of this section of Moreno's book, "being without a man" is also about textual citation and fragmentation. Here, we are only able to engage Skeffington's past, and approach a better understanding of who she is as we look upon all the textual pieces of the puzzles simultaneously. Narrative structure is now definitely inseparable from understanding Skeffington's marginal subjectivity.

Moreno continues to reveal the chaotic nature of the subjects that existed within the Paris-Lesbos community through the free combination and suturing of quotes and paraphrases without any particular detail or care for their contextual framework. This

allows for Moreno's vision of this Parisian community to take a distinct structural shape, and for the text and its narration to themselves become obvious participants in the making of Dolly Skeffington's history. Moreno first set the stage by problematizing the traditional interpretations of the Paris-Lesbos and then by establishing Skeffington's part within this necessarily non-traditional community in the first two subsections, *Paris-Lesbos* and *Anandrine*. After doing this, our author then takes us further into Paris-Lesbos community as Skeffington herself experienced it. It is at this point that Moreno decides to internalize her description of this particular part of the Left Bank's history and delve into her protagonist's personal relationships without the help of any other textual or historical references.

This apparent change in narrative discourse, however, does little more than further complicate any possible coherence between Paris-Lesbos themselves and the past within which Moreno wishes to situate her protagonist. For example, Moreno ironically dedicates her voice, and not Skeffington's, to the fifth section titled *Baronesa*, where we learn about Skeffington's unique friendship—aka, affair—with a woman called, *La baronesa*, Elsa von Loringhoven. Moreno begins her narration of this relationship and the rest of the section as follows: “Es poco probable que dos monstruos se hagan amigos, a menos que se encuentren entre las paredes de una cárcel o de una institución benéfica. Sin embargo Dolly Skeffington y Elsa von Loringhoven solían pasar la noche juntas.” (19-20). Moreno's voice begins telling the story of Skeffington and von Loringhoven's erotic encounters by setting her narrative tone within fictions that speak of monsters, of prison life and penitence. After all, as Moreno herself notes mockingly, these are the only narratives that she has to choose from in order to speak about such improbable

unions of difference. Moreno continues: “No eran amigas a la manera de Paris-Lesbos sino en un estilo de soldadesca soez y copas levantadas donde la fraternidad casta no impedía la irrupción dolorosa de un nombre (masculino o femenino) pronunciado con rencor homicida” (20). Above and beyond its monstrous quality, the relationship Skeffington had with von Loringhoven is only explainable as being apart from those more publicized and openly recognizable female-female partnerships that characterized the Paris-Lesbos community. According to Moreno, this relationship was much more dirty: that is, much less clean and concise, much less historically friendly. But the relationship they had is never explicitly compared with the other “famed” lesbian relationships that populated Paris’ Left Bank at this time. The relationship Moreno describes here is compared with a different version of the past.

La amistad entre Skeffington y la baronesa no se sustentaba en un compás de espera—del hombre o de la mujer--, carecía de la decorosidad lesbiana con que los personajes de Djuna Barnes sugieren el suplicio de la *folie a deux*, tampoco era un simple remedo de la pasión entre varones, como sugiere apresuradamente Glassco. Podía ser la de dos hetairas pero que reciben en un burdel cubista” (22).

Here, Moreno uses textual references of Djuna Barnes and Glassco to talk about Skeffington and von Loringhoven in negative terms. This couple is neither ashamed of their shared passion as Moreno suggests of Barnes’ fiction, nor is their relationship describable in terms of a failed homosexuality as Glassco, on the other hand, would seem to imply. The relationship Moreno is attempting to describe is marginalized even by other forms of marginal sexualities, and the way they “engage in” the erotic encounter.

The only way Moreno is able to textually approach this part of Skeffington's past is by relating the passion felt between her protagonist and *La Baronesa* to that of "two hetaerae but who received their customers in a cubist brothel". In a sense, this relationship that Moreno describes between Skeffington and her lover is inexpressible in any real terms. It is only with a call to Greek mythology and to cubist aesthetics that Moreno can even attempt to do it any justice. In any case, the end result remains intangible and set away from and outside of any traditional way of conceiving the past in a clear and concise form. What we are left with is a series of *could have's*, or speculations that can only come short of any exactness.

Even the historical limitations that define Glassco's biography aren't enough to accurately define this relationship. Instead, Glassco himself seems to become frustrated with such a task and with the irregularity of this pair. Moreno makes sure to draw attention to Glassco's difficulty as she is quick to alter the narrative form of this section and insert his own words into her text when referencing either Skeffington or *La Baronesa*. According to Glassco, these two women were literally crazy. At one moment in particular, Moreno cites what seems to be a dramatic sigh of relief on his part: "Menos mal que enloquecían por turno"—escribe Glassco con maldad" (22). Glassco could only explain such an unlikely relationship through its very madness and with a scientific term developed to do exactly what Moreno makes Glassco do: speak about the misunderstood, the crazy as an outsider. This description of Skeffington's erotic relationship reveals Glassco's voice to be quite different from, and even confused by that of Morenos'. In fact, the difficulty Glassco is made to have in deciphering the relationship at hand results in a literal break down of his own historical method. As Moreno is quite sure to note,

speaking about Skeffington causes Glassco to confuse his own narrative of the past: or at the very least, speaking about Skeffington's intimate affairs reveals the holes present in Glassco's historical methodology. For example, in response to the comment he made about Skeffington being *crazy*, Moreno notes that "Sin embargo en otra parte de la biografía [Los que no fueron], Glassco reconoce que Dolly Skeffington fue internada una sola vez en *La Salpetriere*, 'pero en un viaje anterior al de su expatriación'" (22). That is to say, calling Skeffington crazy is a move made by Glassco that has nothing to do with her mental health during the period of time in question. If it would have any literal worth it would be in reference to a previous trip to Paris made by Skeffington, before she had even become Skeffington. It would reference a moment in her adolescents or infant life when she was still known as Olivia Streethorse and by the name her parents gave her. In this context, the comment made by Glassco makes no sense at all. Moreno then continues to further discredit Glassco's words with her own critical voice when she adds that in Skeffington's own notes "no existen profundas señales de una autodestrucción de plataforma a lo Renée Vivien o su modelo Baudelaire. Su vínculo con Elsa von Freytag suena más a Gargantúa y Pantagruel que a mistificación romántica del sufrimiento y la experiencia del abismo" (22-3). In other words, Moreno suggests that Glassco is both narratively and ideologically unable to approach Skeffington and account for her past.

Glassco insists on referring to her in incoherent terms. He first likens her relationship with *La Baronesa* to male homoerotics. Secondly, Glassco insists that both Skeffington and her lover be considered as socially abnormal due to their odd nature. In this sense it is precisely the confusing, contradicting and strange nature of Skeffington's interaction with *La Baronesa* that renders Glassco (narratively) powerless and unable to

successfully accomplish the central goal of narrative history: clarity. As Moreno herself notes with respect to Glassco's Los que no fueron: "Si bien Glassco no puede recordar ninguna conversación textual entre Skeffington y la baronesa, da la impresión de que aquello que no logra reproducir era tan complejo como un coloquio perpetuo entre los popes de dos vanguardias disidentes dentro de un movimiento tan moderno que ni siquiera puede otorgarse la concesión de existir" (23). Glassco is unable to historically place the conversations held between Skeffington and *La Baronesa*. What inhibits the reproduction of their conversations is the fact that they are expressed differently and in such a way that is, as Moreno suggests, uncaptureable by traditional historical narratives.

Moreno, on the other hand, seems to be quite apt at grasping the abnormal. Instead of attempting to understand their unconformity, Moreno takes hold of and extrapolates a history of difference via her own set of cultural references. As Moreno mentions earlier with respect to Skeffington: "[s]u vínculo con Elsa von Freytag suena más a Gargantúa y Pantagruel que a mistificación romántica del sufrimiento y la experiencia del abismo" (23). For Moreno, Rabelais provides a much better historical marker than anything mentioned by Glassco. After all, Gargantua is bound to Pantagruel, like Skeffington to *La Baronesa*—but also to her very author and creator, Moreno—by their opposites. In a sense, the chronological, geographical and cultural distance that separates Moreno from the protagonist of her own text seems to be that which allows her to understand and speak about her as if she were a historical subject.

It is in this way that Moreno's prologue suggests that we approach Dolly Skeffington's place within Paris' Left Bank and the expatriate community present during the 1920's via information found not only in Glassco's texts but also in a series of



different books and textual references. Moreno suggest that Skeffington's story be *read* through a series of bibliographic references that tell her story in the textual threads that extend past the page and the book we have in our hands. However, Moreno's bibliography has been stripped of its traditional functional quality and instead of helping us follow the author's path to the past it confuses and complicates any possible desire to trace both our and her steps through the library and back in time. Wrapped up in the various titles, authors, dates of publication and publisher's names, is a message from Moreno that insists that we leave our traditional historical hopes and preconceptions at the door, or better still, at her book's front cover. Her message tells us that this path to the past *is* complicated, it *is* confused and it *is* the one that we are going to have to embrace in order to understand her protagonist, Dolly Skeffington as a historical subject. With this, Moreno provides not just a template for engaging marginal pasts, but pasts that are considered in sexual terms. For, after all, this textual confusion is but a means of speaking about and approaching Skeffington's affairs. The introduction then becomes a series of preparatory moves that allow us to look at and read Skeffington's poems in a different way. What way, I can not say, at this point, with any certainty—but this is precisely what Moreno's text hopes for.

### III. A Sexual Poetics of the Subject: Reading Skeffington's *Affairs*

In a typical anthology, the introduction prepares the reader for the selection of primary texts. For Moreno then, the prologue is meant to introduce us to what follows, and to the poems she has selected for us to read. Although we understand the complications associated with such an aspiration, the structural guidelines to Moreno's text remain unquestionable. El Affair Skeffington is still an anthology despite the fact that editor, author and protagonist are one and the same. Moreno's text is still a compilation of poems; it still has an introductory note; and still contains a list of references and secondary material. The question now becomes, what have they—the introduction/prologue, notes and bibliography—prepared us for?

From the moment we read the title of Moreno's text, we expect to read about a certain relationship between *Skeffington* and the *Affair* that seems to define her as a social subject. This expectation is confirmed in the prologue when we are introduced to *La Baronesa*, Elsa von Loringhoven and John Glassco. By the time we reach Skeffington's poems, we now understand that Skeffington is in fact defined by those that knew her—and those that did not—according to a very intimate affair. That is, Skeffington is in fact understandable only as part of an *affair*, in every sense of the word. Her story is itself related vaguely as a matter of concern—an *affair* that Moreno herself is set on solving and shedding light upon. Skeffington's life and times are also very much part of a romantic *affair* that was definitively marked by its irregular and scandalous nature. The very expectation provided by the title and confirmed in the thematic development of the

prologue is something that Moreno herself is waiting for.<sup>79</sup> It is all part of her textual critique.

The prominent space given to Skeffington's affairs in Moreno's prologue inevitably affects the way we approach the selection of 28 poems that follows. This is, after all, a text founded on expectations. We expect the prologue to tell us how to read the poems and it does just that. The prologue describes Skeffington in terms of her affairs and we now use these affairs to guide our reading of the selection of her poems. In this sense, Skeffington's 28 poems become a first hand account of the *affairs* that Moreno has so carefully spoken about. This primary text can now be read as a series of affairs, and as a series of events where sexual interaction is inseparable from the social marginalization it results in.

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<sup>79</sup> Moreno's title suggests a historical literary continuum of its own as it is very similar to that of a book by Manuel Puig, *The Buenos Aires Affair*. Much like the title of Moreno's own text, the word "affair" is regarded as key, if not central, in deciphering its meaning. Francine Masiello, in particular, has understood the value of the term as lying, on the one hand, in the fantasy of Puig's protagonist Gladys, while also locating its meaning in the murder mysteries of *noir* films. However, she seems to prefer the intersection between sexual passion and political history as a way of understanding such a term: "This affair, in this context, evokes the sexual passions of Leo and is tied to a second affair which brings Argentine politics into view. The Córdoba uprisings in Argentina in May of 1969 (an activity that gives birth to the armed left and unleashes at least a decade of fierce repression by the authoritarian state) are never directly mentioned in the novel although their proximity to the time of Gladys and Leo's story certainly brings those events to mind. But Puig alludes to these events only in a foreign tongue. Here, then, is a third sense of *affair*, referring to a sexual and political violence that is rarely mentioned directly in the novel (or, for that matter, in Lacan). Puig highlights the resurfacing of violence as a deviation from, and an act against, both normative rules of sexuality and normative rules of state governance" ("Joyce" 64). Understood in this way, Puig's use of the word "affair" is a definite precursor to Moreno's as it foreshadows the link I attempt to show here between sexuality and historical narration. But, as Mónica Sifrim suggests, Moreno's text takes the erotic mystery behind the *affair* to new extremes not evident in Puig. For Sifrim, Moreno exaggerates the erotic significance behind the word "affair" to include any relationship the text itself may have with its author or reader. She explains this in the following terms: "El libro es un *affaire*, en el doble sentido de caso policial y enredo erótico. La proliferación endemoniada de marcos, perspectivas, traducciones y notas que interpretan a textos que remiten desalientan cualquier lectura de un original. Es que no existen los originales ni las historias de primera mano. La lectura también—como la identidad, el amor y la obra—es un fracaso o, por lo menos, una comedia de malentendidos. Como dirían Olivia, Dolly, Cristina Forero y María Moreno por primera vez en consonancia: "Al final, nadie sabe quién es"" (94). As an "affair", the misunderstandings that mark this story make the erotic mystery associated with who Skeffington is, inseparable from the mysterious reading and writing of this very novel. The erotic mystery of the title, in fact, goes as deep as the alliteration present within it. It is here, as Vera Goralí confirms, in the double "F" repeated in Ske"FF"ington and a"FF"air that textual reflection links reading to the self and to love in one fair push toward Narcissus (99).

The makeshift autobiography formed by Moreno's selection of poems consists of 28 poems taken originally from the three different volumes that make up Skeffington's life long work. The selection seems to be organized in no specific order, and consists of nine poems from her volume titled *Exposición*, eight from *El honor de las damas* and eleven from *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*.<sup>80</sup> Of these poems, eleven are accompanied by brief endnotes that are without any apparent signature, but that are assumed to belong to the selection's editor, Moreno. These notes are located in a section left apart from the poems titled *Las notas a los poemas*. As we go past the structural organization of the poetry and begin to read Skeffington's own work, we are drawn towards numerous qualities. First and foremost, the poems are largely symbolic journeys narrated as if they were one-sided dialogues. In general, the reader is called upon in order to fill in for, or even become the imagined interlocutor. In fact, Skeffington's language sucks the reader into the very text and into the past experience that it describes.<sup>81</sup> In the second of the

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<sup>80</sup> The selection of Skeffington's poems made by Moreno and the order in which she locates them in her anthology are as follows: *Bloody Mary* (de *Exposición*), *Mammy* (de *Exposición*), *El porvenir del socialismo\** (de *El honor de las damas*), *So sad press\** (de *Exposición*), *Demasiado peinado* (de *Exposición*), *Mic mac de blue eyes* (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *Lo sagrado* (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *Noche blanca* (de *Exposición*), *1914/1918\** (de *Exposición*), *Gwendolyn Massachusetts\** (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *Mahoney\** (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *Maldón\** (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *Aguas\** (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *La bailarina\** (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *En el museo* (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *Desprecio* (de *Exposición*), *Sobreviviente\** (de *El honor de las damas*), *Fotografía* (de *El honor de las damas*), *La repetición* (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *Luz de Europa* (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *Cenizas* (de *El honor de las damas*), *Política* (de *El honor de las damas*), *Pan de ayer* (de *Exposición*), *Virginia Woolf\** (de *Gwendolyn Massachusetts*), *Chicano* (de *El honor de las damas*), *Por un sutil desplazamiento* (de *El honor de las damas*), *Beatrice Sbarbaro\** (de *El honor de las damas*), *La fuerza* (de *Exposición*). The poems with asterisks are accompanied by notes of varying length and detail, written by the editor, Moreno. These notes are found in the following section, titled *Las notas a los poemas*.

<sup>81</sup>For Anahí Mallol, Moreno/Skeffington's linguistic play on narration in terms of the reader's own (physical/emotional/intellectual) attraction to the text. In "El affair de la escritura poética. Poesía, delito y ficción en dos textos de María Moreno", Anahí Mallol analyzes Moreno's text in response to the celebrated text by Josephina Ludmer, *El cuerpo del delito*, that locates criminal/sexual/etc offences in a particular narrative genres (in the story, history, etc). Mallol describes in referente to Moreno's text that, "si el amor sáfico se muestra, juguetonamente, como el artificio de los artificios, triunfante de la lucha contra el naturalismo y sus derivaciones interpretativas (tanto la referencial cuanto la autobiográfica, que es otro modo de la referencial), el poema, la literatura de la literatura, en el borde de la ficción, la simulación y el

compiled poems, *Mammy*, an unnamed first person narrator remembers with intimate detail a prolonged encounter with a female body. However, as the narrator engages with its memory, the first line likewise engages the reader and links us to the past being spoken about: “La veo declinar,” the narrator begins (69). The specular relationship that is established here on the poem’s first line between the narrator and the reader eliminates the temporal separation between past and present that Moreno has had to fight with up until this point of her text. In this first line, past and present become one in the moment we realize that what is being watched is the historical narrative itself: that is, what “bends down” is the very memory of *her* body. In the fifth stanza this is made clear as the poetic “I” retakes the initial line of her poem to specify the object in question:

La veo declinar si su sonrisa ausente  
 congela la disputa de los hijos  
 y decora sus frases con diminutivas  
 y una voz submarina de tortuga. (69)

The fact that the smile is absent creates a hypothetical situation that implies and activates a memory narrative. The memory of children and of heartfelt discussions quickly becomes the reader’s own. Our presence in the text gives voice to the narration as it speaks in our minds, places Skeffington’s past in our present. The reading of the text authenticates Skeffington’s place in time and space via the memory narrative that engages her very past. The particularity of this memory narrative therefore makes our presence, in the present, essential. If it weren’t for the present and our participation, a

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disimulo, se vuelve un instrumento de seducción. Su estética es una erótica, un romance fugaz e intenso, con el lector (o la lectora), con el sentido, con su materialidad, con sus posibilidades de ajenidad” (127). Here, the relationship between the reader and the text is among the many affairs that Moreno/Skeffington attempt to describe and is, for Mallol, exemplary of a space apt for erotism of all shapes and sizes to flourish.

voice would not be given to the subject remembering: the opening line, “I see her”, would be lost, its verb left subject-less.

The consequences of our possible absence go much further than merely this poem’s first line. Without our pronunciation of the subject pronoun “I”, and with it the creation of the narrator-protagonist, the narrator’s—and now our own—memory of the woman would go untold.

La veo declinar si su sonrisa ausente  
 congela la disputa de los hijos  
 y decora sus frases con diminutivas  
 y una voz submarina de tortuga. (69)

We, the reader, must first accept the narrating “I” for the verb to come to life. Only after we say “I” can the verb “see”, along with the memory narrative, follow. We must enter the text for the memory of a maternal love to be expressed. However, maternal love is not the sole subject of this memory narrative. The following stanza leads this historical narration in multiple directions:

Entre los cuatro lados de mi cuerpo viejo  
 donde ningún hilo va ya hacia su cuerpo  
 está la primera vez que grité su nombre  
 con la ansiedad del prematuro. (69)

Skeffington locates the memory of the narrator in the body, but more suggestively in “my” or “our” body. The body is revealed to be the bridge that links the past to the present, and vice versa. Or better still, it is the body that houses the memory narrative itself: “Entre los cuatro lados de mi cuerpo viejo/ (...) /está la primera vez que grité su

nombre.” The words, the text itself and the voice that yells it are all placed within the body. In this move, our voice, our time and place are one with Skeffington and are together in a body. However, this isn’t just any body. This is a body without gender: it is a body defined by “us”, by the reader and the protagonist and by our union.

This very body is the place where time is perpetual. Skeffington suggests this when it is the body that is able to bring the memory of *her* back to life, back to the present, and back to a verb tense that marks the “now”. The memory comes immediately back to life when the two different bodies meet:

De arriba a abajo y de amor en amor

y velozmente

vuelvo a caer en su regazo,

su sombra blanca e intratable

sobre mis yoes llenos de sol. (69-70)

Skeffington’s words seem to make light of any maternal reference when her protagonist, her narrator, and her reader all move up and down in unison, on *her* lap. As the words that narrate the past become one with the body, the past and present literally come to life in an orgy that avoids all temporal restrictions. No longer is the body enough to sufficiently bring the past to the present. Skeffington’s words are sure to suggest that it is sex that makes social engagement timeless. While the past remains a distant shadow, “pure and untouchable”, its presence, according to Skeffington, is unquestionably physical and undeniably erotic.

The poem comes to an end. At this time Skeffington is well aware that she has spent the seven previous stanzas manipulating her reader and (dis)locating her

narrator/protagonist. In a move that seems reconciliatory and that brings us back to the beginning of the poem—back to the eternal present—she closes with the following lines and with a push to explain this narrator’s relationship with the past:

La veo declinar,  
no lucho ni me jacto:

Tomo la plaza del mirón  
en el pornoshop de su sufrimiento. (70)

Skeffington’s narrator stops moving—“up and down, from love to love”—and seems to step out of the memory narrative as *she* becomes the object of observation, as opposed to erotic stimulation. The narrator instead takes its place—a familiar place?—in the pornoshop of historical narration, where bodies meet through time, where narrators are interlocutors and readers alike. As Skeffington ends this poem, sex falls alongside a past that is noticeably ambiguous. For, who is assigned the voyeur’s chair in the sex-shop? Is it the narrator, the interlocutor that hears the narrated words, or could we, the reader, be placed in this unique—and optimal—spot? In any case, Skeffington uses these last words to distance the past from the present once again. However, she does not specify this distance in temporal terms: the voyeur is not located in time, but in space. The voyeur is able to see the past from within a sex-shop and from within a house that “erotics” built.

In this, the second poem of Moreno’s selection, what Skeffington essentially does is destroy the traditional historical archive. For her, historical narration is located in the sex-shop and in an erotic space *par excellence*. Time does nothing to clarify the story that she tells. After all there is no way of defining just who occupies the gender neutral



“I”, nor is it possible to place the memory narrative on any one particular body. In many ways, as we read this poem, we participate in the very conversation had between Skeffington and Moreno herself. After all, it is here in this poem that both author and protagonist are one and the same as they together speak the lines in unison. In this sense, Skeffington, like her creator, Moreno, affirms that the only way to approach one another is through the very *affairs* that complicate traditional historical narrations. Sexuality and sex itself form a special narrative located in the body where difference is absorbed by the possibility of erotic pleasure.

Conclusion: Blurred Vision, Sexual Stories and the Historical Subject.

Seeing things clearly is not always the bottom line and perfect vision does not always allow for everything to be seen. Instead, clarity and precision provide for us a series of limits to the way social interaction is perceived. It tells us to focus on completeness and cohesion, and to leave segments, confusion and cloudiness on the wayside. It reduces our field of vision to the understandable and the understandable to what we see in our field of vision. The end result is an image that does not reflect the complexity or totality of what is being looked at. Instead, we are faced with a smooth surface. But the smoothing of any surface just masks the imperfections and covers over any subtleties and nuances. Essentially, with perfect vision we do not see the whole picture. When pictures are worth a thousand words, perfect vision only gives us access to those stories that follow similar structural limitations. In this sense, perfect vision leads to equally perfect narration and to stories that are equally exclusive.

But if seeing a picture is like telling a story of a thousand words, not seeing the picture at all would then lead to a story of infinitesimal length. After all, if we were unable to see the picture, we would likewise be unable to see the words that represent its story textually. How then would we know when or where to stop? One thousand words in this case, would show itself to be a limit that we would have to imagine and it would create a story that we would not be able to control. If we could not see at all, if we were blind, stories would continue without limit and without boundaries. Blindness would lead to the story of all stories and a way of speaking about social interaction where it is precisely the confused nature of its narration that gives a voice to everything and even that which words themselves can not express. That is, once we look past a picture and

the thousand-word-story it tells, we are able to give meaning to that which previously had no story at all.

On the other side of such narrative limitations there lie stories that have gone previously unnoticed, misunderstood and, as a result, have been overlooked. In this sense, blurred vision becomes an entry point to speaking about marginal social interaction and to narrating the story of their protagonists. It gives us a way to speak in the present, but also to consider new ways of engaging the past that are located outside of the organized historical narrations that document the passing of time in a traditional fashion. For the marginal subjects, as well as the visually impaired, looking into the past means engaging a narration of different sorts. It involves touching, feeling, sniffing and smelling an archive that is *normally* read. It involves activating the past in a way that activates and integrates precisely what words and traditional narrative methods gloss over, avoid or simply do not recognize. For those marginal subjects that I have referred to here as the historically blind, speaking about the past becomes a physical endeavor that finds its essence in a body that is itself missing in normative versions of time.

For Manuel Puig, Copi and María Moreno locating bodies themselves in a narrative history requires a different way of speaking about the past altogether. In order to speak of a body's encounter with another, and to share the details of this intimate encounter, their story, their history must cross through and blur the limits of traditional historical narrations. Puig, Copi and Moreno show us that in order to speak about the encounter between two or more naked bodies, we must embrace narrative confusion. We must accept a narration that does not respect the limits of chronological order, nor does it necessarily reflect the concise clarity characteristic of traditional historical narrations.

After all, if the intimate events that make up the sex act itself are not easily separated from one another, how can we expect the tale we tell of it to be ordered, concise and clear? If sex is messy, so too should its story.

For these authors, narrating past sex becomes the pinnacle of a story of marginal events and of the marginal subjects that engage in them. *Sexual memory* essentially narrates a history of the margins when it tells the story of what goes on behind closed doors, in the darkness of a shadow filled corner, or simply within the intense privacy of physical pleasure. This memory, or better still, *sexual memory* engages a past charged with emotion, sensations and simultaneous action and gives it a voice through a codified language of silences, textual absences and insinuation. For Puig, Copi and Moreno, it is precisely *sexual memory* that allows us to speak historically about the most intimate of social encounters. For these authors, *sexual memory* recognizes a story in the margins of traditional historical narration.

However, *sexual memories* do much more than just tell the story located between the lines and in the empty spaces of history's annals. It also recognizes the subjects whose social presence falls likewise through the cracks of dominant discourses. For Puig, sexual memory itself comes from within a prison cell and tells of social alterity at its best when the two men who oppose dominant discourses unite in homosexual pleasure. In this case, sexual memory is a story of social antagonism *par excellence*: here it not only speaks historically about the inexpressible sex act between two men, but does so by placing social marginality at its center. For Copi, on the other hand, the story of homosexuality falls in between the textual cracks when the story of his own lost love and erotic homage that he writes never coincides with the story we actually read. However, it

is only here, literally in between the lines that he can place his *sexual memory* and that we can read about an intimate past where traditional notions of time seem to stop and words seem to disappear in the face of great sex. In a similar gesture, Moreno locates sexual memory in the free narrative reign of poetic license. For her, the marginal past of her protagonist can only be expressed in the fluidity of poetic verse, where meaning and historical narrative alike constantly shift within each allegory, metaphor or simile found on the page. To narrate a past filled with sexual experience and desire is to tell a story that demands the complexity of insinuation and the imagination of the reader. In a sense, the past that these three authors speak about is not just that of marginal subjects, but also of marginal events that often go unexpressed and unrepresented in normative versions of the past. Instead of hiding the story of past erotics, sexual memory becomes the center piece to a historical narrative that features social alterity itself and gives face value to all that is hidden.

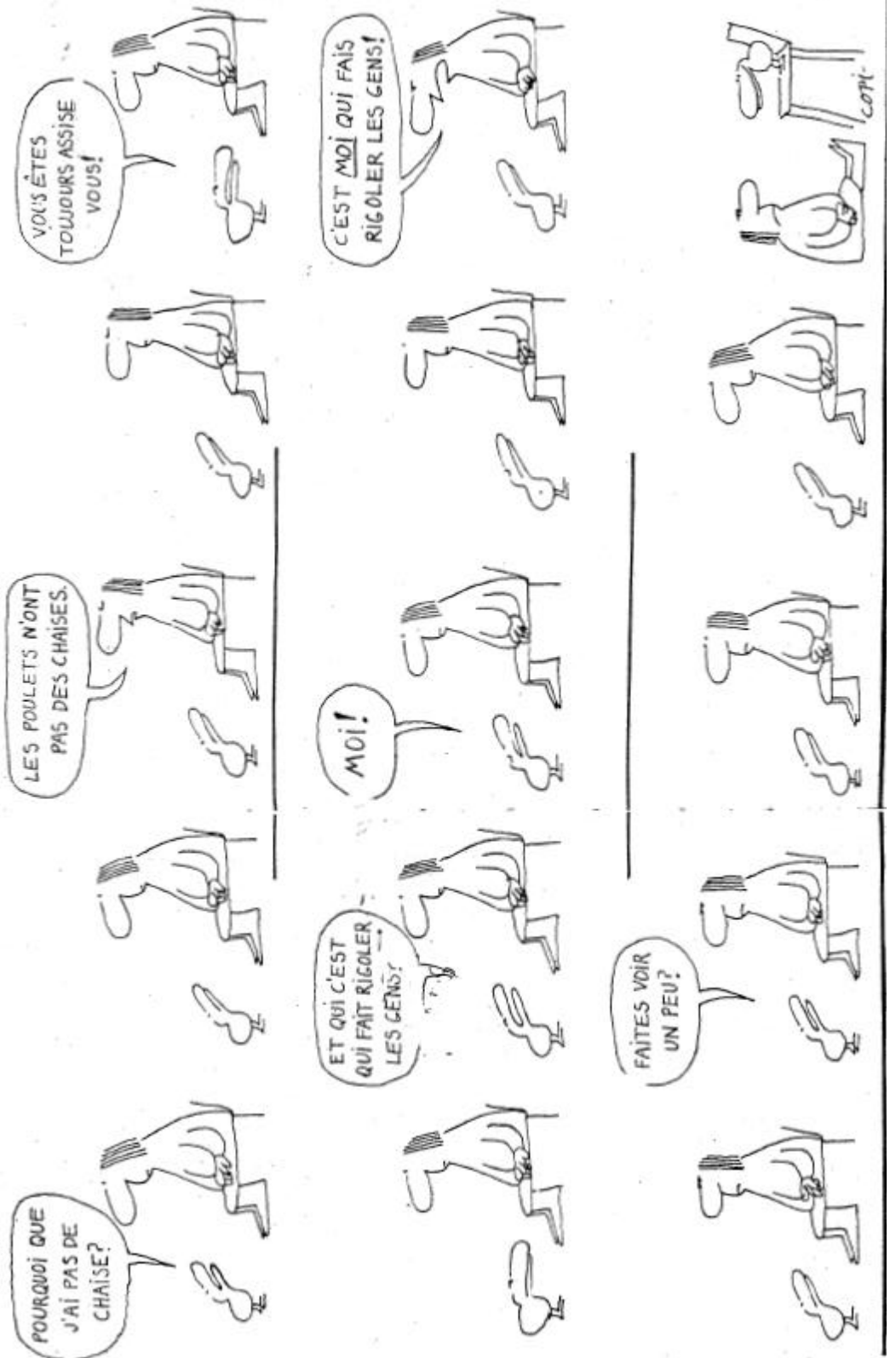
*Sexual memory* speaks about the subjects or events that together confound traditional ways of engaging the past and narrates that which is not clear at all. In fact, *sexual memory* allowed me to ask my initial question and a question that inspired this dissertation. It allowed me to ask: “Just how do marginal subjects engage the past?” But, more importantly, *sexual memory* also allowed me to put it into words, and express in narrative form what is essentially inexpressible. It allowed me to find meaning in Puig’s silences, in between Copi’s textual lines and in Moreno’s insinuating poetic verse. In fact, as *sexual memory* allowed me to speak about marginality, it allowed me to speak about all that falls outside the norm. From it, I was able to write a dissertation about “nothing”, tell the tale of the invisible and narrate the goings on in history’s empty

spaces. *Sexual memory* also allowed me as a graduate student in Atlanta to speak about cultural phenomenon in Argentina. It allowed me to speak about something that is not articulated clearly and definitely not heard, nor seen at a distance. In fact, what I have termed *sexual memory* allows me now to say that this relationship between these authors and its importance at a cultural level remains unclear. But, it also allows me to say with confidence, that this is the way it should be.

Understanding is not everything. Or better still, understanding everything is not all that it is cut out to be. Understanding everything is but a claim and an epistemology that insists on deciphering and decodifying in order to locate meaning in order itself. However, recognizing that meaning lie in confusion and in the code that difference presents us with gives us the power to say “I don’t understand”. To not understand now becomes a positive posture that recognizes one’s discursive location with respect to another. The silence that comes with “not knowing” tells its own story and becomes a part of every subject’s daily affairs. In this light, the difference between marginality and the normative limits that create it shows itself to be nothing more than a measure of what can be expressed and understood in narrative terms. Speaking about Puig’s silence, Copi’s intertextual message and Moreno’s poetics of interpretation becomes now a means of expanding how we define social hierarchy itself. These subjects who were blinded by the history told by dominant discourses are now able to engage the past via a hindsight that embraces its blurred historical vision. Sexual memory, then, is a way of seeing into the past when the eyes themselves are not enough. When hindsight is not 20/20, sexual memory gives power to the naked body to speak of the marginal acts and the subjects that engage in them. With sexual memory, difference lies merely in the way we speak and the

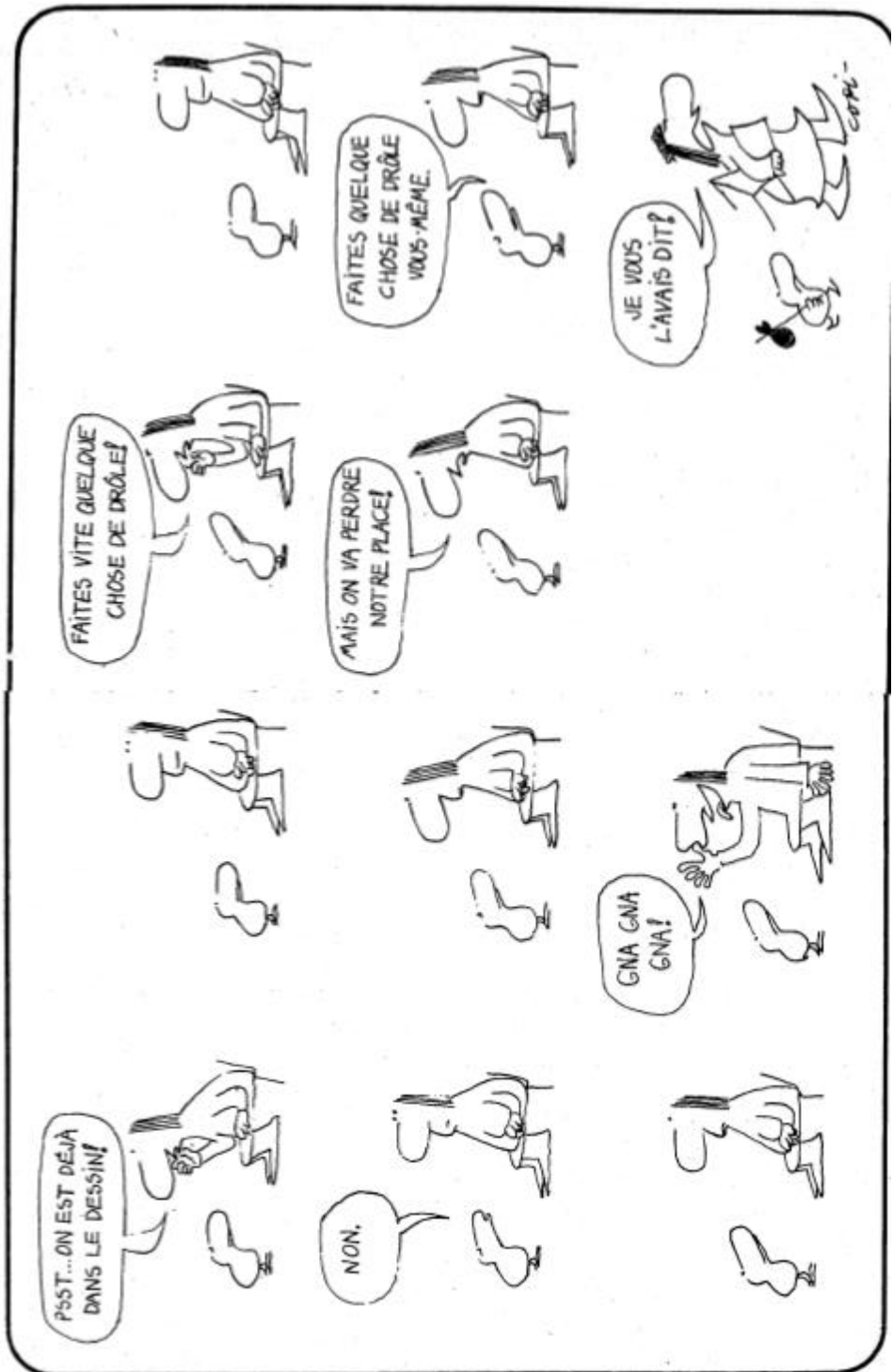
way history takes hold of our present. After all, there are no limits when naked bodies tell their own stories.

Images

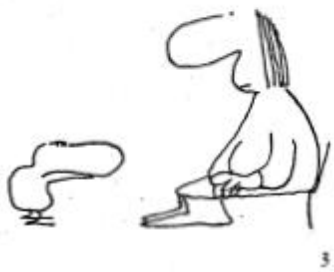
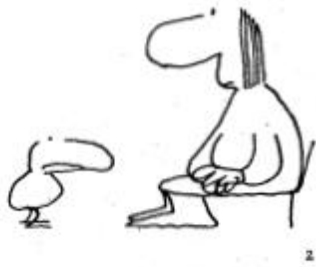
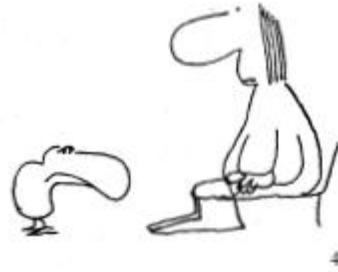


(Plate 1)



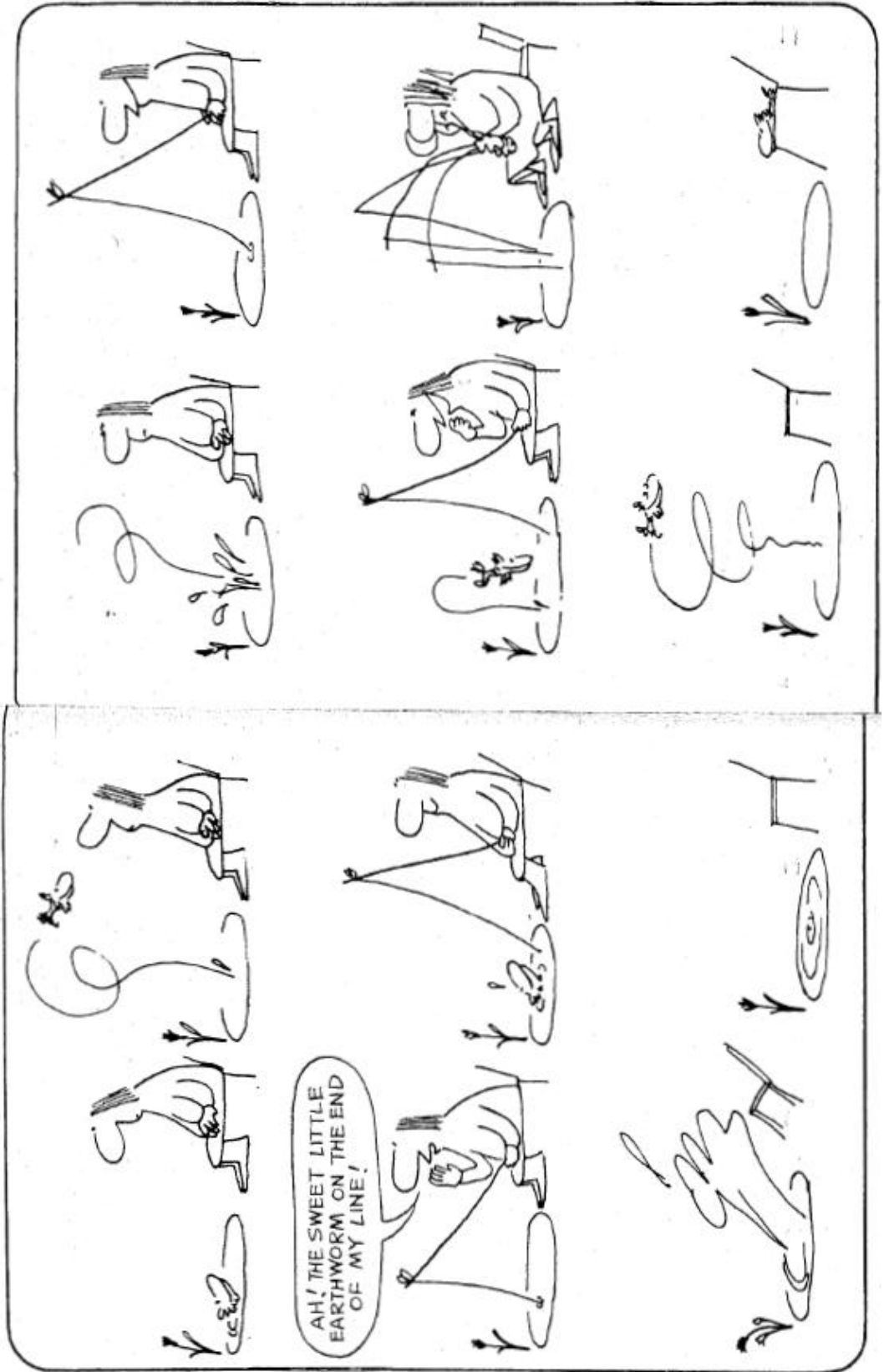


(Plate 2)





(Plate 3)



(Plate 4)

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