THE ARTIST, MYTH AND SOCIETY IN THE CONTEMPORARY SPANISH NOVEL, 1945-2010

A Dissertation in

Spanish

by

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ABSTRACT

Since the Early Modern period, artists have drawn, painted, and sculpted their way through the pages of Spanish literature. Seventeenth-century Spanish theater reveals both practical and aesthetic value for such characters; while authors, particularly playwrights, utilized artist characters for literary ends, they concurrently allied themselves with real artists fighting for greater social recognition for their work and allowed their artists characters to express those concerns on the page as well as on the stage. The development of the artist novel and the Künstlerroman (the novel of artistic development) in the nineteenth century reflected not only the achievement of social recognition sought by artists of prior generations, but also the development of the Romantic “charismatic myth of the artist,” which would go on to characterize general societal perception of artists (and their literary representations) for the next century. While the artist figure never disappears from Spanish literary production, the scholarly study of such figures wanes in current contemporary investigation. However, the sheer number of contemporary novels featuring artist protagonists suggests a startling phenomenon which deserves critical recognition. My dissertation aims to fill this lacuna by asking how the representation of the artist has necessarily changed, both in the repressive atmosphere of Franco’s Spain and the Spain of the Transition to democracy, which experienced a veritable explosion of freedom and excess, and subsequently, of a profound disappointment with the new social systems.

My dissertation explores, in short, the literary representation of the contemporary Spanish art world and demonstrates how the authors of modern Spain have confronted the myth of the artist carried over from the Romantic period. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of the “cultural field,” I examine the ways authors confront the notion of the artist as genius who
creates not for material gain or recognition, but because he or she is moved by some unseen force of Art. The demythification of the artist is most often achieved textually by the author’s exposing of the complex systems which undergird the art world, thus destroying the notion of “disinterestedness” and a “pure aesthetic” which ostensibly drives artists to create. I explore several variations on this theme as the Spanish authors represent them. In Chapter 1, I look closely at the representation of bohemian artists as frauds in post-war three novels of female development: Carmen Laforet’s Nada (1944) and La isla y los demonios (1952), and Carmen Martín Gaite’s Entre visillos (1958). The idea of the bohemian artist as a different kind of person and a true “free spirit” is dismantled as the young female protagonists find in the artist’s studio and in their company that the same closed-minded attitudes towards women, and even towards art, that they find in the wider world are found in the studio as well. Chapter 2 is a study of the contemporary artist novel or Künstlerroman as embodied by Ángeles Caso’s El mundo visto desde el cielo (1997) and Julio Llamazares’s El cielo de Madrid (2005). These novels portray the artist protagonists’ attempts to enact the charismatic myth of the artist even when the realities of the postmodern art word and the changing face of Spanish society in the Transition and post-Transition deny them that option. Chapter 3 examines two contemporary Künstlerinnenromane, or female artist novels: Almudena Grandes’s Castillos de cartón (2006) and Clara Usón’s Corazón de napalm (2009). In these novels, the feminine protagonists face a very different set of challenges than their male counterparts studied in Chapter 2. Rather than the dilemma of living out the myth or not, the female artists struggle to accrue cultural capital and become professionally and commercially successful, all the while battling the social pressure to marry, have children, and conform in traditional ways that do not correspond to the “artistic personality.” I explore these societal pressures through a post-feminist lens while considering
their implications for the female artist protagonists. In Chapter 4, I consider the representation of the art-historian protagonist in *la novela histórica culturalista*, a heretofore unexplored aspect of the artistic field as depicted in the Spanish novel of the twenty-first century. Though there are actually a surprising number of this type of novel from which to choose, I study Eduardo Mendoza’s *Riña de gatos, Madrid 1936* (2010) and Lourdes Ortiz’s *Las manos de Velázquez* (2006), both of which feature art historian protagonists who study Diego Velázquez.

The recognition of the societal forces which shape the artist and his or her work is one of the central tenets of my project, as those forces contribute integrally to the demythification of the artist which all of the authors in question in some way undertake. While they reveal the inner workings of the cultural field, the novels as cultural artifacts become yet another voice in that field which constructs our understanding of artists. Through their reflection on the economic, cultural, spiritual, and personal effects that the art market in Spain has on the artists in their novels, they are also able to add their own voice to the many others that help to construct the contemporary vision of the artist. At the same time, they are able to comment, by extension, on the changing socio-economic conditions in Spain, as well as their own participation in the *literary* cultural field. Balanced between attention to canonical authors (such as Carmen Laforet, Carmen Martín Gaite, Eduardo Mendoza, Almudena Grandes, and Julio Llamazares) and rising stars, my work complements current scholarly trends in Spanish literary studies and proposes a fresh look at the way contemporary Spanish authors view the role of art and artists (both visual and literary) in their society.
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Introduction

On January 20, 2014, the New York Times ran a story about the perils and pitfalls of trying to determine an artist’s “authenticity.” The author of the piece, Sharon Otterman, explains that certain lofts in SoHo and NoHo are reserved for artists only, and those who wish to live and work there must submit documentation to prove their identity as such. Their applications are reviewed by a committee of fellow artists and critics who determine which candidates are worthy of the space—and the title “artist.” In order to better understand how the selection process takes place, the Times “submitted a Freedom of Information request for all of the rejection letters” recently issued (A17). An examination of the rejections gives us a “glimpse of how the city answers the age-old question of what is art” (A17). Often, the city’s response to that quandary is at odds with that of the artists applying for the space. The committee defines an artist as someone who can demonstrate “a serious consistent commitment to fine art” and “evidence of ‘substantial element of independent esthetic judgment and self-directed work’” (A17). These characteristics prove difficult to evaluate, however, as one of the artists whose application was rejected found. The committee denied her the loft space because, they said, she appeared to make a living primarily from selling jewelry and because she had never had a solo show of her sculpture that she did not qualify as an artist.¹

This example is illustrative of what Allison Bain identifies as a real problem facing artists today: “Without clear institutional and definitional parameters to distinguish professional artist from hobbyist, the qualifying term “professional” in the arts, is, for all intents and purposes, an

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¹ The sculptor, Jill Platner, told the Times that in an attempt to prove her legitimate status as an artist, “had sent [the committee] images of her work, recommendations, a fine art résumé, and an essay describing her art form” (A17). Given that she had never exhibited on her own, though, the committee decided that she was more dedicated to her jewelry business than to sculpture, and thus did not have need for a loft space.
empty signifier” (34). Often, she asserts, artistic occupational identity is formed by “myths and stereotypes, […] ready-made stories of the self that become a vital source of information about what it means to be a professional visual artist (25-26). These same myths become the markers by which artists are recognized as such, both in and out of the art world. The responses generated by the aforementioned New York Times story on Twitter reveal as much; one commenter angrily wrote that “artists don’t need someone—or society—to tell them they’re artists.” Such a statement reflects internalization of the “myths of marginality, alienation, ‘outsider’ status, and creative freedom” that Bain believes “remain potent” today, but such beliefs are anachronistic when the “reality of the marketplace currently dictates a different set of demands” (29). The debate over “artist-only” space highlights the fact that the artist’s professional identity is a question that intrigues us today and that is intimately entwined with questions of money and motivation.

Literature has been one of the primary places where the myth of the artist as genius, bohemian, and counter-cultural rebel has been cultivated. The heroic and mythologized representation of artists transcends national boundaries, sharing at its core an image of the artist rooted in Romanticism. Spanish authors have been drawn to the figure of the artist as a literary character for centuries. Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón de la Barca wrote comedias in which artists, especially painters and sculptors, played both major and minor roles. Fin-de-siècle authors like Emilia Pardo Bazán and Vicente Blasco Ibáñez penned Künstlerromane featuring artists whose identities were steeped in the Romantic tradition. And today, though Spanish authors are increasingly turning to the intersection of literature with other forms of media—film,

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2 This commenter, Drew Vawter (@drew_vawter), also scoffed at the “uptight pedants determining who is an #artist.”
television, the Internet, and audiovisual culture in general—visual artists have not lost their appeal as fictional protagonists.\(^3\) In fact, the past few decades have witnessed a renewed interest in the artist-as-character that has not gone entirely unnoticed in the criticism, but the repercussions of which have not been fully explored. In a lone chapter of his 1992 book, *La senda extraviada del arte*, Spanish art historian Francisco Calvo Serraller notes the growing presence of artists in fiction both in and outside of Spain: “El asunto es el siguiente: desde hace aproximadamente diez años se han multiplicado las novelas cuyo protagonista es un pintor o en cuya trama el arte ocupa un papel muy relevante” (49). Calvo Serraller provides a rather extensive list of novels in a variety of languages with artist protagonists, a list that has only grown in the twenty years since his study was published.\(^4\)

Literary critic Mercedes Rodríguez Pequeño and author-turned-critic Laura Freixas have offered similar observations more recently. The former notes in the introduction to a 2009 book that in the last few decades of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first, “reconocemos una clase de obras que […] toma como referente temas, personajes, acontecimientos o ambientes del mundo del arte,” followed by another extensive list of relevant texts (7). In 2010, Freixas commented in an article published in Barcelona’s *La Vanguardia* newspaper on the rather sudden appearance of female artists in the realm of literature and film: “de unos años pocos a esta parte, ha surgido en la literatura y en el cine un personaje que antes

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\(^4\) The novels Calvo Serraller mentions include earlier texts translated to Spanish in the 1980s, such as William Gaddis’s *The Recognitions* (1955, released by Alfaguara in 1987) and Ken Follett’s *The Modigliani Scandal* (1976, released by Plaza y Janés in 1988). In addition to several novels about historical artists—two about El Greco by Jesús Fernández Santos and Vintila Horia, one about the Fortuny y Madrazo family by Pere Gimferrer—and another about a fictional Catalanian painter by Max Aub—Calvo Serraller cites over twenty novels about artists either written in or published in Spain in translation between 1987 and 1990 alone.
no existía: la pintora” (no pag). These article-length studies mentioned above are ultimately more enumerative than analytical, and they left me wondering what prompted so many authors to choose visual artists as their protagonists, how those authors situate their work in relation to the tradition of the *Künstlerroman* (from both in and outside of Spain), and what differentiates their contemporary artist protagonists from those that came before them. What we learn from these three critics’ observations is that the artist as either historical or entirely fictional character is prevalent in literature written and read in Spain, but further conclusions about the discursive function of such characters in the contemporary period remain to be drawn.

In the past several decades, there has been a sustained interest in verbal-visual and art-literature relations in the Spanish context, and my own interest in the theme of the artist character has arisen organically from my curiosity about these subfields. Much critical interest in art and literature has taken the form of studies on ekphrasis in works of the Early Modern, Modernist, and contemporary periods. Frederick de Armas’s edited collection, *Ekphrasis in the Age of Cervantes* (2005), consists of essays on the role of visual art in theater, poetry and prose of the Spanish Early Modern Period. While there is no comprehensive study of visual arts or ekphrasis in the literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Spain, there are a number of book-length studies and many articles which explore this theme in the oeuvre of individual authors, such as Aida Trau’s *Arte y música en las novelas de Blasco Ibáñez* (1994) and Gayana Jurkevich’s *In Pursuit of the Natural Sign: The Poetics of Ekphrasis in Azorín* (1999). In the realm of contemporary literary criticism, Margaret Persin’s 1997 book, *Getting the Picture*, explores the use of ekphrasis in Spanish poetry from Manuel Machado to Ana Rosetti and Jenaro Talens, and more recently, Elizabeth Drumm’s book, *Painting on the Stage* (2010) examines the recreation of paintings in twentieth-century Spanish theater. The majority of these studies use
ekphrastic theories which focus on the ability of words to recreate pictures, the strategies used to accomplish this re-creation, and its effects—in short, the rhetorical nature of verbal-visual interactions—to guide their analyses. By making “verbal representations of visual representations”—to use James Heffernan’s definition of ekphrasis—the cornerstone of their studies, these authors are drawn to texts in which artist characters need not be present for art to appear in the text (“Ekphrasis” 299). While this ekphrastic and rhetorical approach is useful and warranted in studies of the texts these authors have selected, a survey of a large number of contemporary texts featuring visual artist protagonists suggests that authors’ interest in visual art and literature goes beyond ekphrasis.5

Where an ekphrastic approach is not viable or not appropriate, but where artist characters are present, an alternative research model can be found in studies of the artist novel or Künstlerroman. This avenue of analysis has been explored less frequently in the field of Spanish literature, though a 2009 dissertation by Francisco Plata, La novela de artista: El Künstlerroman en la literatura española finisecular, stands as a testament to a nascent interest in the theme. Plata expresses surprise in the introduction to his dissertation that no one has undertaken such a study of the Künstlerroman in modern Spain before, given that
dicho género novelístico fue cultivado por la mayoría de los autores españoles del momento, desde Benito Pérez Galdós a Benjamín Jarnés, pasando por Emilia Pardo Bazán, Azorín, Pío Baroja, Miguel de Unamuno, Ramón de Valle-Inclán, Gabriel Miró y Ramón Pérez de Ayala, entre otros. (2)

5 There are certainly Spanish prose texts from the contemporary period in which the rhetorical and discursive functions of ekphrasis could be examined. These are texts featuring visual art as a significant component of the text, but in which artist characters are not present or play minor roles. These include Francisco Ayala’s short-story collection, El jardín de las delicias (1971), Luis Goytisolo’s La cólera de Aquiles (1979), Carme Riera’s Una primavera para Domenico Guarini (1981), or Paloma Díaz-Mas’s El sueño de Venecia (1992).
The lack of scholarly precedent in the Spanish context means that Plata and others interested in the genre must look instead studies of other national literary traditions. Maurice Beebe’s seminal work from 1964, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts: The Artist as Hero in Fiction from Goethe to Joyce*, remains the most conventional source for scholars interested in this topic, though a number of critics since have modified and modernized Beebe’s postulates.\(^6\) I will return to the concept of the *Künstlerroman* in Chapter Two, as two of the texts I have chosen for this study—Ángeles Caso’s *El mundo visto desde el cielo* (1997) and Julio Llamazares’s *El cielo de Madrid* (2005)—are classifiable as contemporary manifestations of the genre. However, the *Künstlerroman* model is not applicable for all of the texts I have chosen. In short, applying an ekphrastic model of interpretation to the ten novels selected for this study would be limiting because the role of art in the texts is embodied by artist characters rather than by rhetorical descriptions of paintings. However, the analytical model used by scholars of the *Künstlerroman*, is neither wholly appropriate, given that many artist characters appear in texts unable to be characterized as “artist novels.” Therefore, to address critically the kind of artist novels being published in Spain today, a new research paradigm is required which borrows from, but builds on, prior studies of the artist novel and ekphrasis.

**The Artist as Character in Contemporary Spanish Fiction**

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\(^6\) The two primary limitations of Beebe’s study are rooted in his androcentric biases and the credence he gives to certain myths about the artist. With the exception of a brief digression to address Madame de Staël’s *Corinna* (1807) and George Sand’s *Consuelo* (1842), the texts he chooses to study are exclusively written by men, an issue Linda Huff addressed in her 1982 book, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman*. What is more, Beebe classifies de Staël and Sands’s texts as “art novels” which are “less portraits of artistic temperament than guidebooks to the art capitals of Europe” (71). As Evy Varsamopoulou has noted, Beebe’s “arguments, but also […] his very vocabulary echo romanticized masculine Romantic theories of creativity” (xviii). However, as Varsamopoulou observes, another anachronistic feature of Beebe’s argument lies in his belief in “a metaphysical category of the artist as a certain type of human being, set apart from the mundane lot by virtue of a creative, semi-divine essence” (xvii).
There are two primary manifestations of visual-artist-as-character in contemporary Spanish fiction: the historical artist and the fictional artist. The first of these is found in the historical novel featuring fictionalized (though not entirely fictional) artist protagonists, in which authors recreate the life of a famous or forgotten artist to cast them in a new light or to rescue them from oblivion. Rodríguez Pequeño uses the term “novela histórica culturalista” to refer to such novels in which the authors attempt “la recuperación del pasado artístico y cultural, ante la reflexión sobre la tarea creadora, y el alcance del arte, proceso mediante el cual los referentes culturales no restringen sino que amplían al mostrar más cosas de las que dice la historia” (17).

While these novels are set in a variety of historical periods, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are clearly author favorites. In her study of changing representations of the Golden Age in Peninsular literature from 1960 to the present, Isabel Touton observes that “la pintura del Siglo de Oro, sobre todo […] Velázquez […] y en menor medida, […] la de El Greco” has become a staple in late twentieth and twenty-first century historical novels set in the period (198). She notes that authors “[convierten] a menudo los pintores en los personajes de ficción” (198). Jesús Fernández Santos’s El griego (1985), Arturo Pérez Reverte’s El sol de Breda (1998), and J.L. Martín Nogales’s La mujer de Roma (2008) are but three examples of this recent tendency to cast sixteenth and seventeenth century painters as protagonists. In Chapter Four, I will return to the novela histórica culturalista and the depiction of Golden Age art in contemporary literature as I examine Lourdes Ortiz’s Las manos de Velázquez (2006) and Eduardo Mendoza’s Riña de gatos, Madrid 1936, texts which combine contemporary and Early modern themes. Aside from Golden Age artists like Velázquez, Goya is another privileged focal point of Spanish authors. Carlos Rojas’s El valle de los caídos (1975), Antonio Larreta’s
Volavérunt (1980), and Almudena de Arteaga’s Capricho (2012) all feature him as a character.\(^7\) More infrequent are historical novels about famous Spanish avant-garde artists of the early twentieth century; one recent example is found in Baltasar Magro’s La luz de Guernica (2012), in which Picasso is a protagonist.

Novels about female artists, from this period and others, are also in vogue in Spanish-language narrative, a trend Frexias attributes to the gains achieved by academic feminism. She observes that, because of a feminist drive to “exhum[ar] biografías de mujeres artistas”—women like Sofonisba Anguisola, Judith Leyster, Marjua Mallo, or Leonora Carrington—popular interest in these women has spiked (“La mujer artista,” no pag). Freixas cites Linda Nochlin’s now-canonical article, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?,” as the piece which “[dio] el pistoletazo de salida […] en 1971” to this trend (no pag). Novels like Ana Rodríguez Fischer’s Objetos extraviados (1995) about Mallo, Carmen Boullosa’s La virgen y el violín (2008) about Anguisola, or Zoë Valdés’s La cazadora de astros (2007) about Spanish surrealist Remedios Varo purport to tell the untold stories of these female artists, to try to make them household names on par with Picasso or Dalí. And yet, despite the authors’ ideological intentions, many of the novels about women artists fall into the trap that Nochlin warned against decades ago. She notes that “the feminist’s first reaction is to […] dig up examples of worthy or insufficiently appreciated women artists throughout history; to rehabilitate rather modest, if interesting and productive careers” (264). However, she notes that such an approach does not go far enough: “[these attempts] do nothing to question the assumptions lying behind the question

\(^7\) Antonio Larreta was actually born in Uruguay, but published Volavérunt during his thirteen-year exile in Madrid, where he took refuge from the military dictatorship in his home country. This novel about Goya, painting, and intrigue won the Premio Planeta in 1980. For more on Larreta’s exile and work in Spain, see Hortensia Campanella’s 1982 article, “Antonio Larreta in exile” in the Index on Censorship.
‘why have there been no great women artists?’ On the contrary, by attempting to answer it, they tacitly reinforce its negative implications” (264). At the same time, the wide commercial appeal of these quasi-feminist novels about women artists has driven their rapid proliferation.\(^8\)

The motives for writing and publishing books on historical authors cannot be viewed simply as an altruistic attempt to rescue great authors from popular oblivion. It is evident that the late twentieth century saw art and themes related to it become a fashionable topic, especially as it met with the historical novel that so rapidly became popular—and profitable—in the same era. As Calvo Serraller asserts with regard to novels about artists, “el arte en la actualidad se vende bien” (53). Art-as-best-seller takes several different forms, among them what Martin Steenmeijer calls the *thracul*, or “thriller histórico religioso aventurero cultural,” epitomized by books like Javier Sierra’s *La cena secreta* (2006), which, much like Dan Brown’s best-selling *The Da Vinci Code*, centers on hidden messages in Leonardo da Vinci’s art (89).\(^9\) Another recent Spanish novel written about Da Vinci’s life and work, *La sonrisa de la Gioconda: Memorias de Leonardo* (1999) by Luis Racionero, exemplifies one more tendency among the novels about art and artists. This novel is one of the “meros reportajes” or “docudramas,‘ dramatización o ficción a partir de documentos reales o totalmente verosímiles,” popular among those who write about artists that Calvo Serraller criticizes (53). He observes that, “los hay, eso sí, peores y

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\(^8\) Akiko Tsuchiya has observed that some contemporary Spanish female authors utilize “gender-inflected notions” and terms to “consciously package [feminist] concepts for consumption” (241). Tsuchiya does not refer specifically to novels about artists, but this sort of “light” or “pop feminism” pervades many of the novels about females artists mentioned above.

\(^9\) Maarten Steenmeijer explains that the commercial appeal of the *thracul*, novels like *La cena secreta*, is attributable to their “hybrid character […] the manner in which they combine the cultural tradition of the Old World, and the narrative strategies borrowed from popular culture such as the detective novel and certain Hollywood cinema” (88). For reasons I will explore in Chapter Four, many authors of historical novels, especially those set in or recounting the story of characters from the Early Modern period, take great pains to distance their work from the *thracul*. 
mejores, en cuanto a la calidad de la información que manejan o a la de su planteamiento literario” but concludes that only a select few are able to transcend the information one could find in “las publicaciones periódicas de masas” (53). Many of the novels about historical artists, such as the one by Racionero mentioned above, become so mired in the historical that they are barely discernible as fiction.

What is most remarkable and distinguishing about these art-historical novels is their tendency to uphold a certain anachronistic, though popular, vision of the artist. A substantial number of these texts sustain what Calvo Serraller calls a kind of “mitificación literaria de los artistas” and attempt to explore—reverently—the genius’s mind and process, to tap into their hermetic identities (52). As Paul Franssen and Ton Hoenselaars have noted, the artist-as-literary character has held such strong appeal for so long because readers and authors alike are drawn to their “adventures of the mind, not the body” (18). They acknowledge that when one considers the artistic profession it alone does not appear to provide much plot material: “on the whole, the lives of soldier, politicians, adventurers, discoverers, spies, social reformers, serial killers, womanizers, or mystics would seem to make better stories than the lives of people whose main professional activity is to sit at a desk all day or night, writing” (18). We could easily add, by extension, that those professions and identities enumerated above are also more exciting than the painter tethered to his or her easel daubing paint on a canvas, retouching shadows, finding the perfect hue or the right line.

Not all artist protagonists are barred from adventurous or dramatic exploits—love affairs, political censorship, and art theft often feature prominently in these texts—but the appeal of creating and reading about such characters lies more in what Franssen and Hoenselaars call the
Those creative and intellectual escapades are usually intimately connected to what Calvo Serraller calls artist characters’ habitual “identidad indescifrable por partida doble” (52). The artist, because he or she is considered to be a special individual, is depicted as someone whose creative processes and vision of the world are more intuitive, progressive, or simply different, than those of the everyman; or, as Calvo Serraller puts it, their identities “resultan opacas hacia fuera” (52). He adds that artists frequently are depicted as “los que menos saben lo que hacen y lo que son,” though their lack of control over this “hermetic” identity is usually considered “moralmente positivo” (52). In other words, the artist’s difference and incomprehensibility to the average person comes from their inability to harness their creative identity entirely, from passive acceptance of their role as a vehicle through which art flows. This is often considered a positive quality because it reveals a lack of cynical calculation, or “interestedness,” but rather discloses a sort of naïve, and thus genuine, response to art that makes both the artist and his work inaccessible to the masses. These very same qualities have made artist characters intriguing to both authors and readers, whether in historical or wholly fictional manifestations. Though authors have been depicting artists in literature since the Early Modern period, the fictional or fictionalized artists embodying these characteristics are barely two centuries old. However, the mythologized version of artist activity has taken a powerful hold over the popular—and, to some degree—the scholarly perception of artists and creativity.

10 Calvo Serraller asserts that, in novels about artists that are “típico[s] best-seller[s],” the plot often revolves around money more than it does around art. He cites Ken Follet’s The Modigliani Scandal as an example, noting that “con o sin Modigliani, el arte verdaderamente es hoy motivo de interés como escándalo, y escándalo […] porque cualquiera lee en la actualidad prensa periódica o ve la televisión, financiero” (57). Juan Carlos Arce’s Los colores de la guerra (2002) about art theft during the Civil War, as well as Manuel Vicent’s La novia de Matisse (2002) about a Spanish art dealer who must recover valuable stolen paintings exemplify this tendency in the Spanish context.
The radical overturning of this conception of artistic activity in novels about fictional artists is what draws me to the texts I have chosen for this project. They form part of the second modality that the interest in visual artists has assumed in contemporary Spanish literature, that is, the use of wholly fictional artist characters, either in artist novels (*Künstlerromane*) or as supporting characters in novels of other types. In large part, the critics who have touched on this theme in their scholarship have been most interested in novels about historical artists, though there is a growing corpus of novels—as of yet, largely unstudied—that feature fictional painters and sculptors. My study is the first of its kind to examine the fictional artist protagonist in contemporary Spanish narrative: in the following pages, I will explore how the nine authors I have selected effectively demythify the artist in their novels. This demythification consists of the authors’ insinuations—or, at times, outright assertions—that contemporary artists’ “hermetic” identities are (unconsciously or, more commonly, consciously) constructed. What is more, the artist characters’ motivations for making art are not mysteriously dictated by the noble power of Art, but rather are rooted in base “interests” like money and prestige, even if they openly disavow or are unable to recognize this connection.

In their fiction, these authors disrupt the traditional ontology of the artist through a revelation of the structures that underlie the art world and the rules that govern it; in other words, they expose the inner workings of what Pierre Bourdieu has called the “cultural field,” or what Lawrence Alloway refers to as the “network.” As Bourdieu explains it, the notion of the “field”—which I will explain in greater detail below—problematicizes the “glorification of ‘great individuals,’ unique creators irreducible to any condition or conditioning,” which is nowhere “more common or uncontroversial” than in the arenas of art and literature (29). Alloway makes a similar point when he notes that the artistic system depends on the artist, not only because of “his
initiating act of production,” but also because of his “privileged social role” characterized by “existential and seer-like attitudes” (“Network” 30). Alloway asserts that in order to understand art in the second half of the twentieth century, we must consider the changed systems of distribution and interpreting of art works, in order to modify “the notion of esoteric art and everyday life in opposition” (“Network 30). In effect, the authors whose work I examine in this study depict in their novels—much more than their Romantic or Modernist predecessors ever did—the economic and cultural web in which their artist characters are enmeshed, along with and its agents: dealers, gallery owners, museum curators, art historians. Their artists are not alienated, and as much as they may wish to be apart from the network, it conditions them just as much as their work conditions it. In short, through these contemporary portraits of artists, the authors unsettle the notion of the mysterious creator who owes his legacy to Romanticism. Their novels exemplify a mode of art novel that competes with the one about historical artists described above. Being that their texts are rooted in the contemporary period, the authors are less inhibited by mythologized depictions of “great” artists and are freer to depict certain diachronic changes that have taken place in the art world. These include shifts in art production and reception in Spain (especially in the post-Franco years) and abroad, the cynicism and irony that characterizes postmodern art, as well as the dismantling of master narratives that typifies postmodernism and leaves little room for the idealization of the artist along those nineteenth-century lines.

The Charismatic Myth of the Artist

In order to better understand the literary and social effects of exposing the cultural field’s logic and inner workings in their novels, it is essential to outline briefly the origin of the “charismatic myth of the artist” (that same indecipherable and hermetic identity that Calvo
Serraller describes, though here labeled in Bourdieu’s terms). Additionally, we must explore the way Bourdieu’s concept of the field counteracts it, and the practical reasons for which the charismatic myth has become increasingly unviable in a postmodern art world. Calvo Serraller observes that before the nineteenth century the role of artists in literature was limited, largely because “la profesión de artista carecía de prestigio legionario y, sobre todo, de significación ejemplar para ocupar un papel de protagonismo en unos relatos de carácter eminentemente moralizador, como eran las novelas” (51). While he appears to dismiss the significant number of artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century *comedia*, it is true that the artist’s profession as a “legendary” or mythologized one is the result of Romanticism and the social paradigm shifts that accompanied it. It was only in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that the artist as individual, subjective creator gained prominence, transcending the role of workshop director that characterized the Renaissance: a notion which, in turn, had replaced the role of anonymous medieval guild member before it. For many playwrights, the choice to include artist characters in their *comedias* was connected to an activism of sorts, an attempt to promote the notion that painting was a liberal rather than a manual art. As Javier Portús explains, the authors played an important role in the painters’ quest to have their profession and its products recognized for their intellectual value, rather than just for the “valor [del] material con el que estaban realizadas o el esfuerzo físico que requería su ejecución” (88). This defense of their fellow creators took on three different forms. In addition to the “participación activa y comprometida en los pleitos que afectaron los pintores,” they depicted ancient painters like Apelles in their *comedias* in order to underscore the respect paid them by monarchs of old to defend the utility of painting for religious and political ends (Portús 89). The very fact that *usefulness* was a key tenet of the

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11 The concept of “useful” art was intimately tied to proving the “liberal” nature of painting.
authors defense of painting marks the chasm between the conception of painting held in the Early Modern period and the one that would develop over the next few centuries, eventually spawning the “charismatic myth of the artist.”

The changes in the way the artist was perceived would not have been possible without what Bourdieu calls the “autonomization” of the fields of art and literature (113). The artists described in the Early Modern comedias painted primarily to serve the Church and the Crown, and to their work was entrusted the grave responsibility of saving souls and glorifying political institutions. However, by the late eighteenth century art had begun to free itself in many European countries from “aristocratic and ecclesiastical tutelage as well as from its aesthetic and ethical demands” (Bourdieu 112). At the same time, a more diverse market for buying and selling art developed, and an “ever more diversified corps of producers and merchants of symbolic goods” emerged (112). The new freedom accorded to artists was essential to the development of the concepts of “pure” or “disinterested” art. European thinkers like Karl Philipp Moritz and Immanuel Kant were among those who promoted notions of aesthetics that emphasized artistic purity. In 1785, Moritz argued that works of art were “produced simply to be contemplated ‘for their own sake,’” —that is, ‘disinterestedly,’ purely for the enjoyment of their internal attributes and relationships” (Woodmansee 11). Just five years later, Kant advocated a “disinterested” aesthetics in his Critique of Judgment. As Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy note, Kant attempted to resolve the central “‘problem’ with aesthetics”: “how can judgments

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Given that a largely illiterate public depended on images as a way to learn Biblical truths, the painter had a responsibility to depict them as faithfully as possible. As Jonathan Brown notes, the painter’s effective “power to move men to good or evil, and hence to salvation or damnation” meant that they had a “strict duty to be accurate and orthodox in representation of sacred things” (57). However, only a learned man could be faithful in his representations, and artists like Francisco Pacheco helped propagate the idea of the painter who was “as much a scholar as an artist” (Brown 62).
which are essentially subjective, in that they provoke feelings for individuals, also relate to a
commonality of assent over value?” (39). For Kant, the answer could be found in the concept of
purity, namely that “a judgment can only be considered aesthetic when it is disinterested, that is,
free from any desires, needs, or interest in the actual existence of the objects apprehended which
might distort that ‘pure’ appreciation” (Grenfell and Hardy 39). It is this notion of artistic activity
which would come to form one of the most lasting cornerstones of the artist’s identity.

It is no coincidence that these ideas developed in tandem with art’s dependence on the
market. As Oskar Bätschman observes, new challenges arose from artists’ liberation from
Church and State, namely that “freedom from service at court and financial insecurity had thrust
artist into a new dependence on the wealthy patron or the market” (68). As art became treated
more and more like any other commodity, artists felt the need to distinguish themselves from
other producers and their work from mere products. Bourdieu explains that symbolic goods, like
paintings or works of literature, “are a two-faced reality, a commodity [and] a symbolic object”
(113). The theory of “pure art” arose from the disassociation of “art-as-commodity from art-as-
pure-signification, produced according to a purely symbolic intent for purely symbolic
appreciation, that is, for disinterested delectation, irreducible to simple material possession”
(114). This meant that “true” artists defined their own identity in stark contrast to the artists who
produced for the market, that they resisted what Bernard Smith calls “the sinister temptation of
an industrial society which promised a material paradise of cheap goods in return for a new kind
of slavery” (25). Smith asserts that, at this juncture, the “pure” artist was thrust into the position
of tragic hero, the last bastion of creative handicraft in the face of mass production—a heroism
which corresponded to the rise of the artist as literary protagonist.
The reaction of artists to the market resulted in what Bourdieu calls the “inventions of Romanticism” which came to form the basis of the charismatic myth of the artist that still holds sway today: “the representation of culture as a kind of superior reality, irreducible to the vulgar demands of economics, and the ideology of free, disinterested ‘creation’ founded on the spontaneity of innate inspiration” (114). The results of this kind of creation were “unique products of ‘creative genius’ [posited] against interchangeable products, utterly and completely reducible to their commodity value” (114). It follows, then, that the only people qualified to judge the value of artworks were other artists; in other words, Bourdieu notes, “the autonomy of the ‘creator’ is affirmed, as is his claim to recognize as recipient of his art none but an alter ego, another ‘creator’—whose understanding of art presupposes an identical creative disposition” (114). This reaction was a way for artists to shield themselves from rejection of their work by the bourgeois buyers; by accusing the public of not sharing their inspired enlightenment, they could take their failure to succeed on the market as a sign of success. The end result of these shifting conditions and attitudes was the development of the charismatic myth of the artist, what Sigrid Royseng, Per Mangset and Jourrn Spord Borgen describe as the notion that artists are “people with extraordinary talents possessing the ability to create unique and sublime works of art […] [which] should be carried out in a disinterested manner with a pure aesthetic vision as the only guiding light” (1).

This vision of artist activity has been supported, promoted, and idealized by all members of the art world at all levels, though not unproblematically. Bourdieu’s notion of

12 Art history is one sector of the field that has long been affected by the charismatic myth. Griselda Pollock commented that the preoccupation with great individuals has resulted in the writing of “psychobiography” rather than art history. Bette Kauffman describes “psychobiography” as “an essentially circular process of constructing the artist (personality, psyche, biography) from the artworks, then defining meaning in art works as ‘solely…the expression of the creative personality of the artist.’” (99). Kaufmann goes on to note that this practice discounts social, personal, and historical factors in the process of making art, placing the
the cultural field and the rules that guide its dynamics help to contextualize the charismatic myth, locating its historical origins, and demonstrating that disinterestedness is nothing more than a chimera. Bourdieu—and, as I will demonstrate, the authors I have chosen for this study—reveal that there are always “interests,” even if the interest is in disinterestedness.13

**Pierre Bourdieu and the Cultural Field**

Bourdieu describes the field—whether literary, artistic, or other—as a “relatively autonomous social universe,” one that functions, at least to a degree, by its own unique rules (256). The field is composed of positions and the agents who fill them, though the positions themselves “can be analyzed independently of the characteristics of their occupants” (Grenfell and Hardy 29). As Grenfell and Hardy note, the fields are “networks of positions objectively held. They are constituted by the logic of the field, which also positions who and what is to be found within it” (29). In order for agents—cultural producers like artists and authors, as well as other meaning-makers in the world of culture, like art historians or gallery owners—to occupy a position in a given field, they must possess the right kind of cultural and symbolic “capital,” which will lead them to success and profit of economic and symbolic nature, both in and out of the space of the field. The capital is always, like economic capital, unevenly distributed, and given that the number of positions is objectively delineated, the prospective occupants must struggle and compete with others for them. Once attained, the struggle continues to maintain that artist instead in an “‘ideologically pure’ space of the artistic personality” (99).

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13 Bourdieu avers that, even those who most vehemently profess to be disinterested have an “interest in disinterestedness” because of the very nature of the field’s organization. He notes that the “upside down economic world” that is the literary and artistic world predisposes those who enter it to “demonstrate […] authenticity by the fact that [their work] brings no income” (40). However, this is not to say that such an attitude brings no economic returns. On the contrary, “there are economic conditions for the indifference to the economy which induces a pursuit of the riskiest positions in the intellectual and artistic avant-garde, and also for the capacity to remain there over a long period without any economic compensation” (40).
position. For this reason, Bourdieu defines the field as “a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles” tending to transform or conserve this field” (30). It is the objective network and structure of positions which “subtends and orients the strategies which the occupants of the different positions implement in their struggles to defend or improve their positions” (30).

Bourdieu’s concept of the field thus demythifies artistic activity and the notion of great individual creators by demonstrating that they are, in fact, part of something much larger, a network of production and belief which conditions the art they make.

As Randal Johnson explains, Bourdieu’s theories are designed to invalidate, or at least to provide a nuanced vision of the Kantian aesthetics discussed above which form a cornerstone of the charismatic myth. Johnson notes that Bourdieu’s work on the cultural field “constitutes a forceful argument against both Kantian notions of universality of the aesthetic and ideologies of cultural and artistic autonomy from external determinants” (2). To be clear, the cultural field does not condition absolutely the art any given artist produces. As Kathryn Everly notes, in Bourdieu’s system, artists “are the result of the meeting of two histories: ‘the history of the position they occupy and the history of their disposition’ (14). Bourdieu addresses artists’ individual dispositions through the concept of “habitus:”

a system of ‘durable, transposable dispositions, […] principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.’ (Johnson 5)

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14 Bourdieu once explained in an interview that, while artists may not be simply naïve vessels or channels through which Art flows, “this does not mean that […] [they] are aware of everything they are doing, which would amount to making of them cynics or imitators” (“The Intellectual Field” 19).
The habitus thus refers to personal and historical factors that condition the way the artist understands the world, but also the field and the objective positions to which he or she aspires. As George Hagman asserts, there are factors in three different realms which influence the kind of art artists produce and which we could see as part of each artist’s habitus: “each artist brings to his work intrapsychic (individual), intersubjective (relational), and metasubjective (cultural) dimensions of his or her own subjective life” (25). By acknowledging these personal, social, and historical factors that condition an individual artist within a given position, Bourdieu is able to account for artistic subjectivity, “without falling into the idealism of Romantic conceptions of the artist as creator which still informs much literary and art criticism today” (Johnson 2). The Spanish novelists I examine here depict artists as members of a network rather than as creators who alone determine a work’s form and meaning, and who alone hold the key to understanding the image. Instead, artistic creativity and the works of art described in the texts are mediated by the artists’ field positions, as well as by the other host of other position holders who give the work additional layers of meaning. By refusing to euphemize the influence of these additional facets of the field, the Spanish authors I have chosen for this study are able to demythify the members of the art world they portray, thereby distinguishing their works from those of the past, and also from those contemporary works that continue to glorify “great” historical artists.

Before a closer look at the individual instances and specifics of this demythification I will address in the chapters, it remains to be seen why contemporary authors have begun to turn away

15 Johnson explains that Bourdieu’s theories attempt to bridge the gap between subjectivism and objectivism in the cultural field. On the one hand, it counteracts subjective, “idealistic and essentialist theories based on the charismatic ideology of the writer as ‘creator’” (4). On the other, unlike objectivism, which explains “the social world by bracketing individual experience and subjectivity” to focus instead on “objective conditions which structure practice independent of human consciousness,” Bourdieu sees that the reality of artist’s life and work is shaped, at least to a degree, by their own conception of the world (4).
from the charismatic myth. While the answer may not be the same for each individual author, I propose that there are two significant and interrelated reasons for this shift. Firstly, since the 1950s—and even more so since the 1980s—the direction contemporary art has taken has made notions of disinterested genius harder to sustain, especially as self-promotion and skyrocketing profits have become the norm. (I will take up this point in Chapter 3, where I study examples of the way the charismatic myth of the artist has been problematized by changes in concepts of artistic production.) These shifts have also promoted alternative images of the artist, which Royseng, Mangset, and Spord Borgen call the “cultural entrepreneur,” the artist entertainer,” or simply, “the post-modern artist.” American artist Jeff Koons or British artist Damien Hirst (whom the protagonist of Clara Usón’s Corazón de napalm venerate as a model) is just such a cultural entrepreneur; Hirst’s highly coveted pieces like For the Love of God—a cast of a real human skull emblazoned with diamonds—or The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living—a real tiger shark suspended in formaldehyde in a tank—have fetched millions at auction. In Spain, artists like Miguel Barceló have followed a similar path, one in which the “interpenetration between the world of art and the world of money” is more and more visible (P. Smith 61). When authors represent fictional contemporary artists who ostensibly inhabit this artistic scene, they appear to take two approaches which, in the novels I have chosen, divide along gender lines. The male artists refer to the charismatic myth with nostalgia, knowing it was never really viable, but idealizing a “historical” moment in which it was. On the other hand, the novels by women and about female artists tend to embrace more openly this new mode of artistic production and distribution and to reveal that artistic identities are constructed rather than received as an unchallengeable destiny. This largely appears to be the case because the
charismatic myth has never been available to women as a model to follow, given that, as Bette Kauffman notes, “the role of [mythic] ‘artist’ […] is a male role” (95).

Secondly, the relationship between art and money, which reveals at least a modicum of conscious calculation and an absence of “purity” on the part of the artist, is heightened in Spain by the state’s involvement in the arts at a variety of levels. As Jorge Luis Marzo notes, a debate which arose in the early years of the Franco period to determine “cuál era el papel real del arte a fin de establecer lo ‘propio’ de España en el conjunto de la producción cultural occidental” emphasized the sustained efforts of the government in the promotion of Spain’s greatest artists (14). The Franco government’s position towards the arts, Marzo asserts, was that “el arte español es el directo resultado del continuado esfuerzo del poder por promoverlo, acogerlo, y darle sentido nacional” (14). The Caudillo and his ministers cited as examples the illustrious monarchies of the past, “[que habían] sostenido el arte más excelsso, [y] había[n] creado las colecciones y los museos nacionales” (14).16 During the first years of the Franco regime especially, this “interest” in promoting arts and artists that reified a particular version of Spanishness lead to censorship of those whose vision diverged from that of the State. However, even after the Franco period had passed and artists were once again free to create without inhibition, their options for exhibiting were largely state-run. Paul Julian Smith notes that “unlike in the United States (where commercial galleries […] fed the boom), in Spain most sponsorship [of artists] was public (whether from the nation-state or the new autonomous governments)” (67). Smith suggests that, while this public sponsorship of new museums, like the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia—whose very name highlights its connections to the state—

16 The other characteristics attributed to “properly” Spanish art by the Regime include “su despolitzación,” “el individualismo del arte español,” “el carácter universal del arte español,” and “el realismo del ‘auténtico’ arte español” (Marzo 13-14).
offered artists and art lovers in Spain opportunities that for decades had been denied them, it also “instituted a new and perilous illusio, in which artistic autonomy (pure painting) coexisted uneasily with political patronage” (67). The combination of the state’s hand in promotion and exhibition spaces with the changing notion of the artist’s role in society and his relationship to self-promotion and money provides ample reasons for contemporary Spanish authors to depict an art world in which the charismatic myth is no longer a viable model for artists to follow. They do this in a variety of ways and for different ends in their individual texts, as I explore in greater detail in the following chapters.

Chapter Summary

The novels I have selected to analyze in this project cover a wide generic and chronological range, but their demythification of artist characters they portray is the common thread that runs through them all. They incorporate the figure of the artist in a variety of genres—the post-war novel of female development, the Künstlerroman, the postfeminist novel, the novela histórica culturalista—though all of the novels I address here fall into the realist mode. Some of the texts feature artists and the stories of their careers and frustrations as the central plot point—like Julio Llamazares’s El cielo de Madrid—while in others, such as Carmen Martín Gaite’s Entre visillos, the artist is a supporting or minor character whose role has significant repercussions on the protagonists. In texts like Lourdes Ortiz’s Las manos de Velázquez, ekphrasis is an important feature of the novel’s structure, while in others, like Almudena Grandes’s Castillos de cartón, its presence is slight. For this reason, it was clear to me that neither the model of the Künstlerroman nor the ekphrastic analytical model would be appropriate for approaching all these texts. Examining them through the lens of Bourdieu’s theories was ultimately a more productive method because it allowed me to analyze a wide range
of texts belonging to different eras and novelistic genres which otherwise may have been
difficult to compare. By studying the methods and effects of revealing the cultural field in these
novels, we are able to see the way these novels are connected to a postmodern Spanish reality
and aesthetic marked by desencanto, globalization, and “dissatisfaction with a free-market and
liberal democratic system” (Agawu-Kakraba 2). At the same time, examining these characters
and their situations in light of the contemporary cultural field helps us to understand how they
have modified the Romantic trope of the artist hero for the modern age.

In Chapter One, I examine two now-canonical texts of the Post-Civil-War period,
Carmen Laforet’s Nada (1945) and Carmen Martín Gaite’s Entre visillos (1957), as well as
Laforet’s lesser-studied La isla y los demonios (1952). These novels’ protagonists are
paradigmatic chicas raras, those “strange” girls so frequently depicted in Spanish fiction, as
Martin Gaite herself notes in her collection of essays on narrative theory, Desde la ventana
(1987). However, in these three novels, the young protagonists—Andrea, Marta, Elvira (and, to
an extent, Tali)— share more similarities than their tendency to “pon[er] en cuestión la
‘normalidad’ de la conducta amorosa y doméstica que la sociedad mandaba acatar” (Martín
Gaite, Desde 99). All of the girls also form friendships with one or more “bohemian” male
artists, to whom they are drawn for platonic, and often intellectual, reasons. The friendships they
develop with these men often undercut the possibility of a traditional romance plot, and help
solidify the notion of chica rara identity. At the same time, the artist characters are used to make
caustic critiques regarding Spanish society and women’s place therein, as “Bohemia,” with its
progressive, free-thinking inhabitants, is revealed to be a myth. I demonstrate in this chapter that
the inclusion of creative and “bohemian” characters has a twofold significance: firstly, the
overwhelmingly ironic portrayal of artists reveals a languishing art scene and a lack of freedom
to create in Spain in the early years of the Franco regime; secondly, though the interaction the young *chicas raras* have with the bohemians initially seems to promise each girl the kind of liberating relationship she craves, it ends up illustrating of the acute impossibility of finding a space of belonging outside the confines of the domestic sphere.

I return to novels by women and their debunking of artistic myths as social critique in Chapter Three, but first, in Chapter Two, I turn to the topic of the *Künstlerroman*. While not all of the novels I study in this dissertation are properly defined as artist novels, Julio Llamazares’s *El cielo de Madrid* (2005) and Ángeles Caso’s *El mundo visto desde el cielo* (1997) are contemporary versions of this genre. However, in these *Künstlerromane*, the artist is no longer tragically heroic, no longer a demi-god with a special sensibility. Instead, trying to uphold such an identity is seen as futile and humiliating; heroic tragedy is reduced to farce. The artist protagonists have radically different responses to this new artistic role. Julio of *El mundo visto desde el cielo* gives up everything—love, child, and (to a degree) the money and fame his dealer helped him procure—in order to embrace the myth. He believes that rejecting these distractions will allow him to return to “pure” art which, in turn, will save him from the “contamination” of interests, money, and the desire to please a specific public that has made him lose his way. But, Art no longer holds that power, as Julio ultimately recognizes, and the novel ends with him feeling disappointed and regretting his choices. On the other hand, Carlos of *El cielo de Madrid* acknowledges and embraces his participation in a network of cultural production, thereby stripping himself of the mythical artistic identity of artist heroes past. While there is surely an element of pain in Carlos’s recognition that neither the art world nor the identity he cultivated since childhood is not what he imagined, his dissociation from the myth allows him eventually to take comfort in things denied to artists in the *Künstlerroman* of the nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries: family, stability, money without remorse—in short, everything Julio denies himself. In the process of redefining the artist character—his goals, his ideals, his personality, and his interactions—Llamazares and Caso essentially redefine the parameters of the artist novel in the contemporary period.

While the male artists struggle to reconcile fame and money, and even romantic relationships, with their stereotypical artistic personalities, the female artists depicted in the novels I study in Chapter Three—Clara Usón’s *Corazón de napalm* (2009), Almudena Grandes’s *Castillos de cartón* (2004), and Nieves Herrero’s *Todo fue nada* (2005)—never become successful enough to have to face those troubles. Even though it is easier than ever for women to pursue careers as artists—they can go to art school and are less inhibited by domestic responsibilities—it is still more difficult for them than it is for their male counterparts to acquire symbolic capital and the corresponding economic and cultural profits. The protagonists inhabit a “postfeminist world,” one marked by and changed forever by feminism, though they cannot be considered feminist. In this chapter, I explore the effects of postfeminism on the traditional female artist paradigm. While all of the female artist characters embody postfeminist characteristics, they diverge in their responses to the charismatic myth. Usón’s novel confronts the charismatic myth head-on, and her protagonist, Marta, makes decisions about her art based solely on the money and fame she stands to gain. Though she eventually becomes successful, it is only after she enters into a typically postfeminist relationship with a man who inhibits her creativity and convinces her to capitulate to a bourgeois existence and housewife and mother. It is on this point that I establish postfeminist links with Grandes and Herrero’s texts. In *Castillos de cartón* by Grandes and *Todo fue nada* by Herrero, the charismatic myth is embodied, almost to the point of caricature, in a male artist character, whom the female protagonists revere.
unconditionally. Consequently, the myth is considered something so far out of the women’s reach that they give up on the possibility of becoming a Great Artist. These novels’ twenty-first century protagonists may have similar opportunities as their male counterparts, but the results of their artistic endeavors are much more disappointing. They remain separated from their male counterparts on the one hand, by their inability to accrue symbolic and cultural capital within the field (something Usón’s novel explicitly dramatizes) and, on the other, by their willingness to give up art for love.

In Chapter Four, the last two novels I address—Lourdes Ortiz’s Las manos de Velázquez (2006) and Eduardo Mendoza’s Riña de gatos, Madrid 1936 (2010)—are not artist novels. Their protagonists are art historians, both of whom have made their careers writing about Velázquez. I decided to end this study of the cultural field in novels about artists with texts that explicitly dramatize the impact of the other meaning-makers in the field on the artist’s work. These novels take cues from historiographic metafiction, and could be classified under the umbrella of novela histórica culturalista—the term coined, as mentioned above, by Mercedes Rodríguez Pequeño. However, they are also rooted in an in-depth, contemporary vision of the art historian’s profession. Through the art historian’s personal struggles that impact their views of history, the authors reveal that history is never fixed and always subjectively mediated, even by those who purport to be its objective chroniclers. By featuring historians focused on Velázquez, the novels participate in a larger trend of the Spanish historical novel in they reconsidering the Golden Age, divesting this period of the taboo once associated with it because of its connections to Francoist iconography and the Leyenda Rosa. Finally, the novels inquire into Velázquez’s life and attempt to humanize the great artist, but at the same time, they depict the art historians’ parallel attempts to accrue symbolic capital and advance in their disciplines. They thus reveal important aspects of
the cultural field, demonstrating that artistic meaning is not autonomous, but produced by a host of “meaning-makers” who are, like artists, part of the “field of forces” and “field of struggles.”

Obviously, the charismatic myth of the artist does not disappear completely from these novels. The authors construct their characters against it or around it, while largely demonstrating that it is fundamentally untenable in contemporary Spanish society. As Calvo Serraller has noted, artists became a privileged topic among nineteenth-century authors precisely when the former began to lose their “utilidad social” (51). By telling artist stories, the authors were able to address questions of ethics and aesthetics, and question the role of all things beautiful and “impractical” in a world run by commerce. Novelists played a fundamental part in the creation of the “aureola mítica” that formed around the artists, and through their works, the authors “buscan lo excepcional para mejor comprender y explicar el común” (51). The sheer number of novels about artists published in the contemporary period demonstrates that these figures remain of interest to authors, but the reasons for that attraction seem to be changing. Rather than seeing the artist as the exception through which we can better understand or critique the rules, the authors I study show the artist as decidedly unexceptional. Their creativity may reflect personal points of view, but their artistic activity fits into and is conditioned by a larger scheme of cultural production—a field, or network. What is more, they are not god-like creators, but rather, they are depicted alternatively as frauds and proud or reluctant opportunists. At times, they even strike us as people with inclinations that are unambiguously bourgeois, breaking down the opposition between art and the conventional that has marked the artistic personality for so long. I will explore in the following chapters how this new artistic identity is characterized by artist protagonists who refuse to euphemize the “interests” that motivate them to create. A more detailed look at these authors’ iterations of the artist character reveal surprising and revolutionary
reevaluations of the typical “artistic personality,” which in turn alters the paradigms of the artist novel for the contemporary period.
Chapter 1: “Bohemia’s a Fallacy in Your Head.” The *Chica Rara* and the Bohemian Artist in
Spanish Postwar Feminine Fiction

“Bohemia, Bohemia’s
A fallacy in your head.
This is Calcutta.
Bohemia is dead.”
-La vie bohème”, *RENT*

“Sin vida galante, no hay bohemia.”- Pio Baroja, “La bohemia madrileña”

It may be nearly impossible to separate the myth surrounding *la vie bohème* from its reality. Is saying “bohemian” simply another way to say “artist?” Or, as the song from the hit musical *RENT* would have us believe, is it “starving for attention, hating convention, hating pretention, and hating dear old mom and dad?” While most would probably argue that living the bohemian life is about both artistic creativity and the art of eccentric living, perhaps a better question would be how the definition of a cultural phenomenon reimagined and reinterpreted countless times since it emerged in nineteenth-century Paris has evolved. Were those unconventional Parisians to encounter the bohemians of Madrid at the turn of the twentieth century, those of Greenwich Village after World War I, or even those of “bohemian London” in the 1990s, it is likely they would struggle to see their own identities reflected in these permutations of the bohemian ideal. One place in which we would *not* expect to find any mention of *la vie bohème* is early-postwar Spain—unless, of course, one focuses only on the element of poverty often considered characteristic of Bohemia. Though Spanish authors had utilized bohemian characters in their novels and plays since the mid-nineteenth century for various ends, they appeared almost exclusively in male-authored texts.\(^\text{17}\) My comparative look at

\(^{17}\) Allen W. Phillips cites *Luces de bohemia*, Valle-Inclán’s now-classic drama from 1920 and Ramón Pérez de Ayala’s *Troteras y danzaderas* (1913) as two of the best examples of literary representations of Bohemia in Spain. His 1988 essay “Apuntes para el estudio de la bohemia en
three novels by women from the postwar period—Carmen Laforet’s prize-winning *Nada* (1944) and her second novel, *La isla y los demonios* (1952), as well as Carmen Martín Gaite’s first long novel, *Entre visillos* (1958)—examines how one particular, perhaps surprising, trope makes a repeated appearance, one holding important implications for the novels’ narrative structures and their ideological messages. In all three texts, young female protagonists who exhibit tendencies of the *chica rara*—a designation, to which I will return later, coined by Martín Gaite to describe a particular type of “strange” female character typical in novels by Spanish women—come into contact with one or more male “bohemian” artists to whom they are drawn for purely platonic, and often intellectual, reasons. The friendships they develop with these men often undercut the possibility of a traditional romance plot, and, at the same time, the artist characters are used to make caustic critiques regarding Spanish society and women’s place therein. While art and artists are not the central focus of the novels per se, the fact that bohemian artists appear in diverse and repeated forms suggests that—like the use of the *chica rara* figure, the foreign character, or the orphaned daughter—this is a trope that held a particular appeal for women writers of the postwar period, and one deserving of closer scrutiny.¹⁸

Though their texts may be representative of the return to realism that characterized the literature of the Spanish post-war period, these authors refused to embrace purely traditional literary modes. Perhaps their most innovative move consisted of breaking with a hallmark of women’s writing—the ending of the text which, though not always happy, was always

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¹⁸ Patricia O’Byrne identifies the use of these and other tropes, such as the incorporation of characters suffering mental illness or the literary punishment of the perpetrators of morally contentious crimes, as a way for postwar authors to confront issues important to them while avoiding the looming threat of censorship (205-210).
predictable. Traditionally, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis explains, “the rightful end of women in novels was social—successful courtship, marriage—or judgmental of her social and sexual failure—death” (1). Women’s fiction in Spain in the postwar period was dominated by the *novela rosa* and, as Carmen Martín Gaite has suggested, even though female characters were able to have jobs, walk the streets unchaperoned, or even carefully test the waters of rebellion, their end was invariably one any informed reader could anticipate from the start:

El lector estaba tranquilo desde que abría el libro hasta que lo cerraba, seguro de que ningún principio esencial de la femineidad iba a ser puesto en cuestión y de que el amor correspondido premiaría al final cualquier claroscuro de la trama, haciendo desembocar la vida azarosa y presuntamente rebelde de aquellas heroínas en el oasis de un hogar sin nubes. *(Desde la ventana, 90)*

It is precisely this traditional romance plot and the predictable characters, dialogues, and denouements which accompanied it that authors like Laforet, Ana María Matute, Dolores Medio, and Martín Gaite herself helped to revise in the postwar years through the use of non-traditional protagonists, unconventional plots in which those protagonists actively eschew romantic relationships and marriage, and unexpected endings in which many loose ends of the plot are not resolved. Instead, these novelists practice what DuPlessis has called “writing beyond the ending.” DuPlessis explains that one project embraced by women writers of the twentieth century across national literary traditions is to “solve the contradiction between love and quest and to replace the alternate endings in marriage and death that are their cultural legacy from nineteenth-century life and letters by offering a different set of choices” (3-4). In the Spanish case, these “different” choices arise not only from a different kind of protagonist embodied in the *chica rara* as Martín Gaite describes her, but also from contact with “different” kinds of
supporting characters, figures who emerge in unexpected spaces. It is at this juncture that the bohemian artist makes his appearance.

The inclusion of these creative and “bohemian” characters has a twofold significance: firstly, the overwhelmingly ironic portrayal of artists is revealing of a languishing art scene in Spain in the early years of the Franco regime; and secondly, the interaction which young chicas raras have with bohemians is indicative of the acute impossibility of finding a space of belonging outside the confines of the domestic sphere, a theme that permeates these novels in multiple ways. On the one hand, the revelation of these “bohemian” artists as frauds points to the fundamental impossibility of the existence of a true Spanish “bohemia” in the 1940s and 1950s, and thus refers to real social and cultural conditions of the postwar. On the other hand, it becomes a literary trope that helps to reinforce, in a rather pessimistic way, the impossibility for chicas raras like Andrea of Nada, Marta of La isla y los demonios, and Elvira of Entre visillos to find acceptance and alternative modes of femininity outside of the home.\(^{19}\) As a result of this lack of acceptance, a demythification of the figure of the artist, who always appears mythologized in the initial instance, forms an integral part of the adolescent protagonists’ development (or lack thereof). In the following pages, I will first trace a brief history of the notion of “Bohemia” and “bohemians” in Spain, since this is the term which the majority of the narrators in the texts under consideration here employ to describe the artists. Drawing from Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Gluck, and Elizabeth Wilson’s critical interpretations of French bohemia and the subsequently formed “bohemian myth,” I will examine the constructed nature of the

\(^{19}\) Ana María Matute’s first novel, Los Abel, a Nadal Prize contender in 1947, is another novel in which the young chica rara, Valba, has sustained contact with artists. One of those artists is the protagonist’s own brother, who does not allow her to enter his studio space for more than a few moments. Later, Valba also encounters a much older, failed painter with whom she becomes briefly enamored, and with whom she experiences her first romantic disillusionment.
bohemian persona and consider the ideological implications of including bohemian characters in literature. Finally, I will examine each author’s work in detail in order to determine the way Laforet and Martín Gaite incorporate the bohemian artist and supposedly bohemian spaces into their work as an integral part of their depiction of growing up female in a reactionary society with few viable alternative models of conduct. Rather than revealing systems that undergird the art world in order to dismantle the myth of the artists (as the authors of the contemporary texts in Chapters Two, Three, and Four do), these female authors reveal instead that beneath an artistic veneer, there is nothing but an elaborate farce.

**Bohemia: The Fine Art of Living**

The notion of “Bohemia,” as we understand it today, has historically specific roots in nineteenth-century Paris. The models of Bohemia that manifested themselves in Spain in the late nineteenth century and beyond were interpretations of these French models in the social and political context of Restoration-era Spain. Allen W. Phillips describes the period in which Spanish Bohemia flourished—in his estimation, between 1880 and 1920, though its roots can be traced back several decades earlier—as characterized “por su complejidad ideológica y estética” (“Algo más” 327). Yet, despite cultural and political differences from France, there were signs of the times which transcended national boundaries. The economy of art in Western Europe had changed drastically, and the bohemian’s very existence was dependent on the new relations of production and consumption which developed in the Romantic period. As the bourgeois class’s buying power grew, its members sought to flaunt their newfound wealth through the purchase of beautiful things, including art in all its forms. The production of art for individuals (as opposed to its production for a collective political or religious group) and the subjective interpretation of art that came about with it meant that absolute assessments of art’s value also disappeared.
Whereas, in the past, paintings’ religious, political, or social functions were less frequently a matter of debate and often determined their worth, the nineteenth century forever changed the way art was bought, sold, and valued both as culture and as commodity.

Art’s transformation into a commodity subject to fluctuations of the market forever changed the role of art, the artist, and the perception in society of both. Wilson notes that in the mid- to late nineteenth century, art began “to be produced speculatively in the hope that it would sell. The artist not only had to prostitute his art to the logic of profit, but was expected to entertain an audience which (or so at least he felt) lacked discrimination” (17). This strong sense of antagonism between the supposed “purity” of art and a market subject to seemingly arbitrary instabilities, as well as the growth of an uncultured but moneyed bourgeoisie, helped give rise to the figure of the bohemian, whose identity was grounded in opposing bourgeois sensibility in all its forms. Bourdieu’s classification of Bohemia as “a genuine society within society,” populated and propagated by those “aspiring to live by art,” signals an important facet of the bohemian existence: the rejection of bourgeois values (Rules, 55). The term “bohemian,” originally associated with the geographic region of “Bohemia” and its inhabitants came to apply to artists precisely because of their countercultural lifestyle. Staunchly opposed to the values of the property-owning middle class which was determined to acquire goods, the bohemians were nomadic, moving from place to place, job to job, and lover to lover. It was precisely their “wandering from attic to attic, and moonlight flits to avoid paying rent made them seem like the popular stereotype of gypsies,” and which linked them to “Bohemia” (Wilson 21). In many

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20 As Beebe notes, though the bohemians rejected certain facets of bourgeois society, they never completely retreated to a place of isolation. As the young artists moved to the new “Bohemias,” they sought “convivial companions, to join coteries, and to establish and environment congenial to [their] temperament” (78). Thus, Beebe suggests, the bohemian never really alienates himself from society, but rather “substitutes one kind of society for another” (78).
respects, the actual production of art came to be the least of many bohemians’ concerns. Even more important than the paintings or works of literature created was the bohemian \textit{lifestyle}. Wilson explains that the bohemians “brought an artist’s sensibility to bear on all those aspects of life that were peripheral to art: dress, surroundings and relationships” (24). In her view, this mode of living was yet another way for the artists to defy the mediocrity of a bourgeois world, as they “challenged the bourgeois notion that art was a realm apart” (24).

This bohemian lifestyle—eccentric dress and behavior, relaxed sexual norms, nostalgia for bygone eras, and in many cases, poverty—is still popularly associated with artists today and is an important component of the myth surrounding contemporary artists. The young bohemians made “the art of living into one of the fine arts,” to borrow Bourdieu’s words, and thus, every move they made was a calculated attempt to live \textit{differently}, to stand out, and even to shock (56). Their “difference” was rooted in a distinctively ambivalent image which Wilson describes, on the one hand, as that of “a romantic genius elevated above the common run” and on the other, a man having “a fascination with the everyday, the obscure, the forbidden, and the sordid” (24). However, this creation of a countercultural set of values and codes of conduct was more than puerile rebellion. Bourdieu makes clear that one of the major functions of this new bohemian lifestyle was “to be its own market” (58). This market was one whose participants did not receive their dividends in cash, but rather in symbolic capital: “the rewards of this privileged market […] have at least the virtue of assuring a form of social recognition for those who otherwise appear […] to challenge common sense” (Bourdieu 58). The bohemian artist, then, lived in a world in which success became defined as failure in the eyes of mainstream society.

And what of Spain? How did the Spanish case, always so idiosyncratic, compare to the broader European manifestation of this social and artistic trend? Spanish Bohemia was late in
appearing and, thus, differed substantially in practice from its French model. Some scholars doubt the existence of Bohemia in Spain, but numerous critics have attempted to prove in the last several decades that there was, in fact, a Spanish Bohemia no less valid, though surely different, from the French version.\textsuperscript{21} As José Esteban and Anthony Zahareas note in their introduction to the collected writings of some of Spain’s most prominent literary bohemians, many Spanish artists made their way to Paris between 1820 and 1840 since the Spanish capital was not conducive to the development of such a subculture (9). The repressive nature of the newly restored regime of Fernando VII and the constant threat of censorship in the form of the inquisitors led many creative Spaniards to abandon their country, if temporarily, for the City of Lights. Esteban and Zahareas assert that it was not until the last two decades of the nineteenth century that an appreciable bohemian subculture was identifiable in Spain.\textsuperscript{22} Artistic and political concerns melded in these artists’ life and work. Attempts to distance themselves and their art from the growing, though still relatively weak, bourgeois class plagued by \textit{cursilería} were often joined with renewed cries for political reform.\textsuperscript{23} Álvarez Sánchez notes that, though their art forms may have differed, all of the \textit{fin de siècle} Spanish bohemians were united in their “rechazo

\textsuperscript{21}Álvarez Sánchez, a staunch defender of the existence of Spanish bohemia, notes that its detractors cite social conditions in Spain which were not auspicious to its development: “Se establece una asociación directa entre la ausencia de bohemia en Madrid y la propia decadencia y pobreza de la sociedad española, a diferencia de la francesa, cuya prosperidad permite que afluencen movimientos de este tipo que además cuentan con el reconocimiento del gran público” (268).

\textsuperscript{22}Álvarez Sánchez calls Bohemia “la faceta más llamativa y sugerente del Modernismo”, but notes that while both movements critiqued a mediocre bourgeois sensibility, some \textit{modernistas} “se jactaba[n] de odiar la bohemia por considerarla obsoleta y vulgar” (261).

\textsuperscript{23}Neither were politics absent from French bohemia. Wilson notes that politics were most important for the bohemian identity in Restoration France (post 1815), “when demographic change and political impotence acted to marginalize whole sections of bourgeois youth” (22).
a la vieja España representada por las formas políticas manifiestamente anquilosadas de la Restauración dirigida por Cánovas, al igual que regeneracionistas y noventayochistas” (261). He clarifies that while some subgroups of Spanish bohemians were more interested in “el refinamiento estético,” others were more socially-minded, and they strove for, “una auténtica identificación con el mundo obrero” (262).24

By the 1920s, Spanish Bohemia as these scholars describe it was in its death throes. The first World War and the Russian Revolution changed the face of Bohemia in the rest of Europe as well. In Spain, the huelga general of 1917 and the rise of the “Generation of 27” changed the artistic scene in such a way that the precepts of Bohemia as they had existed in previous decades began to fade away (Álvarez Sánchez 273). As Franco seized power in 1939, further changes on the Spanish art scene ensued which virtually ensured the disbanding of avant-garde groups—and the dissolute, disordered lifestyles their bohemian predecessors had left them as a legacy—for at least fifteen years. Cautious artists finally began to regroup and once again challenge the artistic and social status quo by the late 1950s, but in the interim, strong censorship and other important social and economic factors kept a true bohemian subculture from flourishing in Spain. Valeriano Bozal explains that during the early years of the Franco period the most important art collectives were those ideologically aligned with franquismo, but that, curiously, it is nearly impossible to speak of any kind of defined “arte del Movimiento.” He notes that what these collectives effectively achieved had more to do with keeping any kind of vanguard art from flourishing than with establishing an art of their own:

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24 The first of these subcategories would include such familiar names as Alejandro Sawa and Ramón del Valle-Inclán, while in the second, one would find artists and social critics like Ernesto Bark and Joaquín Dicenta (Álvarez Sánchez 262).
limitaron cualquier ‘veleidad vanguardista’, factor que determinó la hegemonía de las formas académicas y la consideración de lo renovador y moderno en relación a tales formas. […] Actuaron como freno y punto de referencia, no lograron el desarrollo satisfactorio de un arte de Movimiento. (35-36)

The poverty, repressive censorship, lack of opportunities, and even the fear of violent reprisals which sent many prominent Spanish writers and artists into exile meant that the artistic vanguard was silenced, albeit temporarily. As Aranzazu Asunce Arenas notes, the members of the Spanish avant-garde were those who epitomized the bohemian existence, with their “non-conformist lifestyle that was opposed to high culture as well as commercial, bourgeois, and mainstream values” (4). As the war and the dictatorship brought an end to the avant-garde, the bohemian lifestyle also faded away for a time.

The shape Bohemia took in literature was quite different from the way it manifested itself in real life. Many contemporary critics of the bohemian movement suggest that literature played an indispensable role in propagating this version of Bohemia. In France, Henri Murger’s play *Scènes de la vie bohème* (1849), adapted from the sketches he began to publish in a piecemeal fashion in 1845, is credited with the most important dissemination of the bohemian ideal. Mary Gluck defines Murger’s representation of the bohemians as “ahistorical figures, embodying transcendental artistic values” (351). Murger’s bohemians are light-hearted, and Phillips

\[\text{It is important to underscore the fact that artistic activity did not stop in postwar Spain, though institutional support of artists did diminish significantly. However, private exhibitions and sales continued at rates higher than those of the pre-war days. Lafuente Ferrari speaks of a “verdadera inflación de pintura,” and of “coleccionistas improvisados y improvisados pintores” (cited in Bozal 40). However, Bozal qualifies this statement of artistic success, noting that the art being bought and sold was not breaking much new artistic ground. Its primary buyers were members of the petit bourgeoisie “que se enriquecía con el comercio y la situación española en el marco de la Segunda Guerra Mundial” and were interested in pieces that served decorative purposes (41).}\]
describes the scenes the author crafts as “la recreación esencialmente romántica de esa vida alegre, de fiestas y amores fáciles, [en la que] apenas existían la sordidez y la verdadera miseria” (“Algo más,” 332). Murger’s work had wide-reaching effects outside of the literary realm, as it made Paris’s Latin Quarter, a once-disreputable neighborhood, into a desirable destination. Maurice Beebe asserts that Scènes de la vie Bohème “was to turn Bohemia into a mecca for bourgeois visitors and art-loving exiles” (77). In Spain, Murger’s closest imitator was Enrique Pérez Escrich whose semi-autobiographical novel, El frac azul: Episodios de un joven flaco (1868), first introduced bohemianism to Spain in the Spaniard’s native tongue and in their own context (Phillips, “Apuntes” 394). 26 Though it would take decades for this trend to root itself firmly among the Spanish intellectuals in Madrid, Pérez Escrich’s book, largely forgotten today, played a significant role in making the bohemian lifestyle appear attractive.

Thus, in the case of France, and later, of Spain, the literary representations of la vie Bohème inspired many artistically-inclined, rebellious youths to a new way of life, at the same time that it helped generate both vocal critics and voyeurs. Bourdieu has observed that the incorporation of the bohemian character as a literary figure was of chief importance to its performance in real life. He explains: “novelists contribute greatly to the public recognition of this new social entity […] and to the construction of identity, values, norms, and myths” (56). However, their matter-of-fact, normative and normalizing descriptions of these marginal figures “aim to make us see and believe, to make the social world be seen in conformity with the beliefs

26 Pérez Escrich references Murger openly in his text, calling him “el rey de los bohemios” (cited in Phillips, “Apuntes,” 395). The text is moralizing, and takes the form of an admonition to an aspiring young writer, Arturo, who hopes to go the way of the bohemian Elías, the novel’s protagonist. Arturo ultimately rejects “el frac azul” that represents the bohemian lifestyle, a choice which, as Phillips notes, “permite su eventual salvación” (397). Just as his predecessor Murger saw Bohemia as a temporary state, so Pérez Escrich seemed to understand it as a joyful experience reserved for the young and which one should eventually outgrow.
of a social group that has the singularity of having a quasi-monopoly on the production of discourse about the social world” (56). Put another way, the manner in which authors like Murger, Balzac, Flaubert and others presented the bohemian lifestyle standardized it as a mode of behavior that was inherent to “artistic” living when, in reality, it was part of a consciously adopted and carefully cultivated stance. The female novelists of twentieth-century expose their bohemian artists as frauds and hypocrites, which in all cases is used to underscore the social and cultural limitations of Francoist Spain. The artists’ behavior is not normalized, their thinly-veiled connections to the bourgeois world are revealed, and the quality and motivations for their artistic practice are put in doubt.

At this juncture, it is important to return to the Spanish context as we prepare to examine the novels by Laforet and Martín Gaite. Scholars studying the social and cultural manifestations of Spanish Bohemia have observed that “false” versions of bohemians abounded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As we will see, these are the bohemians that populate the pages of Laforet and Martín Gaite’s novels. Álvarez Sánchez and Esteban and Zahareas point to two different types bohemianism considered “inauthentic.” Esteban and Zahareas mention the lack of acceptance among the self-proclaimed bohemians towards those who simply lived in an eccentric manner without any sort of creative or intellectual activity to back it up. They explain that the “authentic” bohemian’s marginality cannot be gratuitous: “la verdadera bohemia no es vivir de una manera andrajosa y de extrema penuria (esto puede ser una de sus consecuencias),

I recognize the somewhat contradictory nature of this assertion that there exists a “false” bohemia since bohemian living can itself be considered a performance and therefore not an “authentic” mode of living. However, among those who believed themselves to be bohemians, there was a line between “true” and “false” Bohemia. As Phillips suggests, it is almost impossible for modern readers to distinguish between an “authentic” bohemian and a “false” one (“Algo más,” 335).
sino una condición spiritual, un aristocratismo de la inteligencia” (12). Álvarez Sánchez refers to the same kind of behavior with the terms “golfemia” and “hamponería,” identifying this version of false bohemia as “una vida teóricamente de inspiración bohemia en la que subsisten de la caridad y el gorroneo, publicando poco o nada, y por supuesto, sin esperanza alguna de alcanzar la gloria soñada en un primer término” (265). The second type of false bohemia is what Álvarez Sánchez calls “dandismo aristocrático,” that is, the bohemian lifestyle adopted by “señoritos burgueses” (270). He explains this kind of activity as “una especie de moda pasajera y caprichosa […] que, como medio para huir de su tedio vital, prueban las mieles de la bohemia para alegrar su existencia” (270). These two types of “false” bohemia are integral to the depiction of three young women’s disappointing experiences and frustrating attempts at liberation in the novels in question. The depiction of a 1940s Spanish bohemian as it appears in the novels by Laforet and Martín Gaite reflects the depressed state of the art world in Spain through its ironic depictions of pseudo-bohemian characters. Since they are openly exposed, they mark a different kind of approach to the literary bohemian reflective of the era in which they live. They reject the “construction of identity, values, norms, and myths” that novels propagated in the past with respect to the bohemian and they use this revelation to divulge important truths about the socio-cultural environment their protagonists navigate (Bourdieu 56).

**Not Your Ordinary Girl: The chica rara and Postwar Spanish Novels of Female Development**

In order to understand the importance of the bohemian characters found in the novels of female development, it is necessary to understand their literary and thematic commonalities. In a 1999 article, O’Byrne laments the difficulty of classifying women’s novels written after the Civil
War, which she describes as “challenging—albeit at times timidly—the boundaries of acceptable female behavior while exposing the hypocrisy of post war society with regard to women” (199).

O’Byrne settles on the term “novela neorrealista femenina” to define the novels, since it acknowledges that “women were subject to the same literary influences as their male counterparts [while] it recognizes the specificity of their subject matter” (199). Under the umbrella of this category, she includes novels written by Laforet, Matute, Martín Gaite, Carmen Kurtz, Dolores Medio, and others.28 While it is not my objective here to evaluate the adequacy of this particular term or to propose a new one, it is essential to my project to recognize that the novels I examine participate in a shared literary tradition on some level, in spite of their structural and narrative differences.29 It is generally agreed that these novels represent a cautious attempt to revise or at least critically document the situation of women in Spain in the early years of the postwar, though the degree of that revision is often a matter of debate.

When compared to the novelas rosa being published by many other female authors of the period, the most innovative aspect of the novels by Laforet and Martín Gaite are the kinds of female protagonists they feature. Martín Gaite’s classification of these feminine protagonists as “chicas raras” is indispensible for my purposes in this study, as all of the girls who come into

28 A plethora of other related terms have been used to describe these novels, including some fairly generic ones. Janet Pérez (1983) simply deems these texts “producción novelesca femenina.” Geraldine C. Nichols (1992) and Stephen Hart (1993) use similar terms—“narrativa femenina” and “twentieth-century feminine fiction”, respectively, to describe these novels, though they also include novels from later generations in this category. While Francisca López (1995) uses a similar term, her classification is temporally limited, since she calls them “novelas femeninas de posguerra.” In a more recent article, Maryellen Bieder (2005) also uses the “post-war” marker to label the texts she studies, calling them part of the “narrativa de posguerra.”

29 Nada is generally accepted as an example of tremendismo, defined by Barry Jordan as having a “focus on the individual,” which leads its texts to be “subjective and only very tenuously critical,” while still expressing a “profound desengaño o desencanto” (Writing, 9). On the other hand, Entre visillos better fits the category of social realism, as will be discussed below.
contact with the bohemian painters have been considered as such.\textsuperscript{30} In fact, it is precisely their exceptionality which draws them to the bohemian spaces in which they seek refuge. According to Martín Gaite, Laforet’s Andrea is the original “chica rara” and many of the personality traits and habits that mark her as “different” are shared by other female protagonists of the same period. These characteristics can be summed up in five basic points. Firstly, the chica rara has been imbued by her creator with “dotes de testigo,” marking a break with the traditional patterns of the novela rosa. Martín Gaite suggests with respect to this notion that “lo innovador de Nada está en que Carmen Laforet ha delegado en Andrea para que mire y cuente lo que sucede a su alrededor, en que no la ideado como protagonista de novela a quien van a sucederle cosas” (93). The second characteristic is the chica rara’s life lived from a space of marginality. She is a girl “consciente de su excepcionalidad, viviéndola con una mezcla de impotencia y orgullo” (100). Thirdly, these young women have few female friends and prefer the (platonic) company of men. Fourthly, they abhor the confines of the home and always long for the freedom provided by the outside world. This desire for freedom is always countered by “las personas de otras generaciones quienes tratan de persuadirla para que no busque fuera de los muros de la casa patrones de conducta subversiva” (104). Finally, the chica rara is never in pursuit of a “normal life,” though, as Martín Gaite notes, this normality can be “un alivio, un tramo de desahogo en el camino lleno de escollos de crecimiento a lo largo del cual se aprenden otras cosas más rotundas” (107). Without these characteristics unique to the chica rara protagonists, the girls of

\textsuperscript{30} In Desde la ventana, Martín Gaite refers principally to Andrea of Nada, but she also cites Valba from Los Abel, as well as Tali and Elivra from her novel Entre visillos as other manifestations of the “chica rara” paradigm. In a 2003 article, Nuria Cruz-Cámara also refers to Marta from Laforet’s La isla y los demonios as a chica rara.
Nada, La isla y los demonios, and Entre visillos would have been much more unlikely to meet their artist friends or to confront them with the openness in which they do.

The structure of these novels as Bildungsroman or novels of female development is often cited to corroborate their authors’ attempts to revise or critically document the role of women in Spanish society. As Franco Moretti explains, in telling the story of a young man or woman’s journey from childhood or adolescence to adulthood, the Bildungsroman—also called “the novel of formation, education, or initiation”—brings to light “the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and socialization” (15). López adds that often, the growth of the protagonist is marked by “una serie progresiva de desilusiones por parte del héroe al enfrentarse con las restricciones que los condicionamientos socio-culturales le imponen” (58). In the novels of female development of the Spanish postwar tradition, the adolescent protagonists realize that, as they come of age, the freedom they experienced as children will soon dissipate and be replaced by the monotony and tedium that characterizes the adult women’s lives that they have the chance to observe. In nearly all cases, the young woman realizes that the only way she will be able to achieve self-realization is by abandoning her family and home. As López asserts, the conflicts most often seen in these novels come from a clash between “el deseo de la mujer de realizarse por medio de fuertes relaciones personales y los valores vigentes en su sociedad que le confieren un estatus de necesaria inferioridad en el desarrollo de esas relaciones” (61). In the case of Laforet and Martín Gaite’s novels, one of the personal relationships each chica rara tries to cultivate is with a bohemian artist. However, in each case, though the bohemian is billed as a person who is not controlled by social convention, it is revealed that the same power structures which underlie social and gender relations elsewhere permeate this relationship as well.
In the last few decades, the usefulness of the term *Bildungsroman* has been questioned by critics, especially as it relates to novels such as *Nada* and Matute’s *Primera memoria* (1959). In large part, this questioning is related to the protagonists’ *chica rara* identity. A typical *Bildungsroman* has a hero (or heroine) who experiences, evaluates, learns, and grows and there is nothing “heroic” about the *chicas raras*, more inclined to observe than to act. The series of stages which the hero of the *Bildungsroman* generally follows are at times absent from these texts, as the *chica rara* tends to become involved, almost as if by inertia, into the lives and problems of others. As a result, their development into mature adults is often put into question. While real development in the *Bildungs* tradition may not be discernible, the series of disillusionments that López describes as emblematic of the *Bildungsroman* befall all of the *chica rara* protagonist and are linked to their relationships with bohemian artists. Their ways of dealing with and recovering from disenchantment varies between the texts, at times revealing at least a modicum of personal growth in the process.

The quintessential characteristic of the *chica rara* is her desire for freedom—to live, to dress, to move, to dream. Her own tendency to inhabit the margins and to shun the kind of proscriptive “normal life” makes the attraction to those who appear to live “bohemian” lifestyles that much more powerful. However, as the following analysis will demonstrate, the contact each *chica rara* sustains with “bohemian” artists is both promising and frustrating in turn. The promise is based on the myth of the bohemian artist that the male characters have assimilated, but as soon as the myth is revealed diegetically as a fiction, disillusion and frustration set in and become an important part of the girls’ maturation process. Though the *chicas raras* seem to be

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31 In his article on *Nada*, Jordan acknowledges that, while there is superficial adherence to the model of a *Bildungsroman*, at its core, the novel is about “the nonfulfillment of Andrea’s dreams” (108). López also refers to the fact that in *Nada*, as in Matute’s later *Primera memoria*, there is no significant development that takes place (60).
the women best equipped to “make it” in Bohemia, two primary factors stand in their way: firstly, they find that Bohemia is not amenable to women, and secondly, the “bohemians” they meet are generally skilled in a pantomime of the bohemian lifestyle, but for reasons unique to each text, they are revealed to be “false” bohemians. In the following pages, I will examine the relationship of the *chica rara* and the pseudo-bohemians as presented in *Nada*, *La isla y los demonios* and *Entre visillos*. In doing so, I will show how the artist is used in these novels as a marker of counter-cultural difference and freedom that is not only denied to the young women who idolize them, but that exists at all in only the most superficial form in post-war Spain.

**Carmen Laforet’s *Nada and La isla y los demonios***

The extensive scholarly response generated by Laforet’s Nadal-winning novel *Nada* in the nearly seventy years since its publication is divided into several currents of analysis. In a recent article, Andrew A. Anderson identifies the two principle analytical branches. The first centers on “Andrea’s psychology and her maturation (or lack of the same) over the course of the twelve months covered by the novel’s action,” while the second highlights “a cluster of feminist topics again focused on Andrea, her position in the family and society, her agency, attitudes, and aspiration” (541). To Anderson’s general summary of the critical trends, I would add those studies concerned with the reliability of the first-person narrator (and the attempts to determine from what future vantage point Andrea-as-narrator is recounting her story) or the novel’s form, exemplified by Anderson’s own 2011 article. What is more, in several more recent publications, there has been a renewed attempt to link *Nada*—typically considered a virtually apolitical text—to its socio-political context. I hope to link *Nada* to other aspects of Laforet’s literary

32 Representative of the first category, perhaps most notably, is Jordan’s aforementioned 1992 article which challenges the notion that Andrea’s story is one of development, as other critics like Marsha Collins and Roberta Johnson had previously asserted (and as others, such as Alicia
production, following the lead of Gustavo Pérez Firmat and Mark Del Mastro, who have also displayed particular interest in *La isla y los demonios* as it relates to *Nada*. When considered together, these novels provide us with a compelling look at the way artists and art have been incorporated into Laforet’s “feminine” fiction. In both novels, the contact which two creative, imaginative young girls have with artists—interactions they expect to be a source of stimulation for their own creativity—is fraught with disappointment.

Laforet’s own life experiences put her in a special position to write about art and artists. As Roberta Johnson explains, art was a constant presence in the young Laforet’s life. Her grandfather was a painter and drawing instructor who taught all of his children, including Carmen’s father, to paint and draw at a young age (15). In an article published in *El País* shortly after her mother’s death in 2004, Cristina Cerezales Laforet recalled: “Ella me contaba que de niña quería ser pintora porque en su casa sólo oía conversaciones de arte y de artistas, y les parecía, tanto a ella como a su familia, la vocación más natural” (no pag.). While Laforet never fully dedicated herself to painting as other members of her family did, she did retain an interest in the visual arts throughout her life, and always supported her children’s artistic ambitions. Due to her own contact with artists in her formative years, it should not come as a surprise that artists would find their way into her fiction, though it is worth noting that her female protagonists are

Andreu (1997) continue to maintain). One example of the feminist reading can be found in Mariana Petrea’s 1994 article in female emancipation in *Nada*. Ruth El Saffar (1974) and Barry Jordan (1993) have provided studies on the role of the first person narrator, and exemplifying the more recent trend of political studies is Fenny Ebels’s 2009 article on the way art and politics are linked in *Nada*. 
generally interested in the literary or dramatic arts and never exhibit an interest in the plastic arts.  

Andrea of Nada and Marta of La isla both see themselves as authors, though Marta is more vocal about her desire to write. This desire for creative expression is part of what drives both girls away from their homes and into the bohemian studio. Andrea’s tight control over the narration in which she reveals few details about herself allows us observe her appreciation of others’ creativity, though we rarely see her outwardly expressing such inclinations. However, various critics have described her explicitly as an artist. As Ruth El Saffar has observed that the author-Andrea who relates the story of her Barcelona year is “fully conscious of her role as an artist and she carefully builds the attitudes and ideas she intends to convey in the work” (121). Pérez Firmat has made similar remark, noting that Nada is a literary account rather than the informal or inchoate or unselfconscious [sic] recollections of a character who does not adopt a writerly stance. There is here none of that artifice that consists of placing the narration in the hands of an incompetent narrator—a child, an illiterate, an aphasic. (28-29)

Pérez Firmat suggests, therefore, that in order to see Andrea as an artist it is necessary to meld Andrea-protagonist and Andrea-narrator, something her own narrative technique often discourages.  

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33 The artists in Laforet’s novels are overwhelmingly male and her only painter-protagonist is also a man. Martín of La insolución (1963), the last full-length novel published during her lifetime, is described by Pérez Firmat as “a male adolescent who undergoes a sexual and artistic awakening”(35). Pérez Firmat has also observed that Martín is the only one of Laforet’s protagonists with creative inclinations who is able to successfully dedicate himself to art.

34 Pérez Firmat has noted that the very title of the novel is a reflection on the way Andrea views the act of writing. He suggests that “the choice of title is part of the protagonist’s propensity to elide or downplay the act and fact of writing” (31).
*Nada* begins with the eighteen-year-old, orphaned protagonist Andrea’s arrival in Barcelona, where she will spend the next year in the house on Aribau Street with a motley crew of relatives. The novel’s opening paragraphs are marked by a hopeful tone—Andrea is leaving behind the provincial world she has thus far inhabited and is about to start her life afresh in the city. It takes but the first few pages of the novel, however, for the reader to surmise that Andrea will not find fulfillment within the walls of her new home. Her aunt Angustias restricts the freedom she seeks in the city by limiting unaccompanied excursions; her grandmother, suffering from the effects of senility, hunger and desperation as a result of the war, does little but awaken pity in Andrea; and her uncles’ violent conflict creates an air of tension in the home that puts all of its inhabitants constantly on edge. In spite of the imminent threat of violence that constantly hovers over the family, Andrea initially hopes to find an ally and an intellectual companion in her uncle Román, who is a troubled artist, among other things. Of the family members living there, Román seems to be the most liberated, but also as the most dangerous. Del Mastro observes that Andrea is both repelled by and attracted to Román: “[Andrea] is uncomfortable with her uncle’s furtive manner, […] but she is intrigued by his artistic and sexual freedoms, qualities that she admires” (“Cheating Fate” 58). Andrea’s interest in and relationship to artists begins with Román, especially when she sets him in contrast to his brother Juan, who also attempts to live by his art with little success. Pablo Veiga Córdoba describes Juan as “un personaje con una función […] mítica” whose role in the story is to “dar cuerpo a una imagen ideal, a uno de los sueños románticos de Andrea: el ideal de artista, en este caso un pintor” (140). That ideal is quickly betrayed, however, especially when Andrea begins to compare Juan and Roman’s life and work.
As Wilson has noted, the bohemian identity “is always dependent on its opposite” (2). Whether the bohemian is considered positively or negatively is always contingent on the person or group of people to whom he or she is being compared. Wilson provides several examples of these common value judgments: “Sometimes the bohemian (good) is contrasted with the bourgeois (bad); at others it is the artist (good) who is set up against the bohemian (bad); or again it might be the “true” bohemian (good) who is opposed to the phony bohemian (bad)” (2). While the opposites to which the bohemians are compared take individual shapes in each novel, the bohemians themselves are always seen, at least at first, as the “good” pole of this Manichean dichotomy. In general, the bohemian ideal appears to offer a liberating and refreshing alternative to the repressive, loveless, or tedious environment the girls inhabit. There are several artist characters whom Andrea-narrator contrasts in this way in Nada. For example, Román is contrasted throughout the novel, on the one hand, with Juan—a starving artist in every sense of the word—and later with the bohemians who congregate in Guixols’s studio. Román becomes the “true” artist to whom the others are compared, allowing Juan’s “golfemia”—his “slackerdom”—and the “dandismo aristocrático” of the young bohemians Andrea will meet to stand out even more clearly.

If it is true, as Veiga Córdoba asserts, that Andrea “vive estéticamente,” then it is easy to understand how she is impacted by the spaces in which she finds herself (140). The first point of comparison between Juan and Román are their spaces of artistic creation. Juan’s studio is described as a cluttered, dark, and uninviting place: “siguiendo la tradición de las demás habitaciones de la casa, se acumulaban allí, sin orden ni concierto, libros y papeles y las figuras de yeso que servían a modelo a los discípulos de Juan” (35). The evidence of his painterly hand can be found in the “duros bodegones […] en tonos estridentes” that litter the room (35). This
space provides a marked contrast with Román’s comfortable room—the only one in the house not pervaded by an overwhelming sense of degeneration—where he plays music that enchants Andrea. At first, Andrea is unaware of Román’s adroitness in the visual arts, but she is pleasantly surprised to learn that he, too has dabbled in painting.

Logically, Andrea also begins to compare the two men’s artistic production. On Andrea’s first visit to the studio, Juan attempts to paint his wife Gloria in the nude, and Andrea is able to witness first hand that her uncle is less than dexterous with a paintbrush. Juan cannot possibly live up to her ideas of a “authentic” artist since it seems that painting does not come naturally to him. Andrea explains: “Juan pintaba trabajosamente y sin talento […] En el lienzo iba apareciendo un acartonado muñeco tan estúpido como la misma expresión en la cara de Gloria al escuchar cualquier conversación de Román conmigo” (36). Andrea has never seen Román’s painting, but she believes her uncle when he tells her: “También he empezado a pintar de afición…Lo hacía mucho mejor que Juan, te lo aseguro” (39). This is enough to persuade Andrea that Román could live up to her ideal of a “true” artist, and she notes that she began to think of Román as “un fondo inagotable de posibilidades” and “un artista maravilloso y único” (40).

Though Román may be a fantastic artist, in Andrea’s estimation, we begin to discover that art in the family house becomes yet another weapon in the power struggle constantly being waged between Juan and Román. As Marsha S. Collins has observed, this tension between the brothers takes the form of “triangular desire,” with Gloria being the prize both men are fighting for (301). For Collins, Juan’s sustained desire to be a painter, though he is clearly lacking talent, “can be seen as a desire to imitate Román’s genuine talent and receive the praise and prestige

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35 Gloria’s name and her place in the triangular relationship underscore the fact that the fight between the brothers is more about their own vanity than about Gloria as a lover or wife. Juan struggles for the “glory” in his art and in his marriage, but Román displays to him that he could just as easily have both Gloria and the “glory” of being a great artist to spite him.
that his brother had in the past’’ (301). Meanwhile, Román continues to entice Gloria by appealing to her vanity and offering to paint her in the nude in the same way her husband does. The fact that art is thus turned into yet another tool of domination—one of many used by the inhabitants of the house—is enough to send Andrea in pursuit of a more truly liberating artistic experience elsewhere, namely in Guíxols’s studio where the young bohemians congregate.

Laforet’s experience with the art world once again comes into play in her descriptions of the bohemians’ studio. Laforet herself attempted to eschew connections between Nada and her own autobiographical reality, as she notes in 1983 article for El País:

Recuerdo que, a mis veintitrés años, cuando me decían que Nada, mi primera novela, era un libro autobiográfico, me sentía ofendida en mi egolatría de creadora. Estaba bien segura de que […] aquella novela era una fabulación de personajes y de ambientes de los que había expurgado mi particular intimidad. (no pag)

However, despite these protests, Laforet and her biographers have discussed her participation in a tertulia of young artists in her university years, which resonates with the scenes depicted in Nada. Anna Caballé and Isabel Rollón place these first meetings in the fall of 1940, the year in which Laforet met Ramón Eugenio Goicoechea—Ana María Matute’s future husband—and his painter friend, Ramón Rogent, whom the authors aver served as Laforet’s inspiration for the character of Guíxols in the novel (117).

Laforet speaks of the pride with which she was

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36 Caballé and Rollón have attempted in their biography to match other characters in Nada with their historical counterparts that also attended this tertulia. They link Pujol with the painter Javier Vilató Ruiz, Picasso’s nephew who also painted there frequently, thus justifying Andrea’s description of his work as “imitando punto por punto los defectos de Picasso” (118). “El poeta soriano Julio Garcés” is identified as at least one source of inspiration for Pons’s character (118). They also suggest that Goicoechea takes shape in the novel as the figure of Iturdiaga (120).
accepted into this circle, noting in the El País article: “me sentía orgullosa de pertenecer a una tertulía de chicos que hacían su servicio militar en recuperación artística. En sus horas fuera de servicio podíamos reunirnos nada menos en el palacio de la Virreina, barroco puro” (no pag., emphasis in original). It would be difficult to refer to these young and, in general, wealthy employees of the State in the early postwar years as “true” bohemians per the definitions offered above, though the descriptions that accompany them do suggest their reenactment of certain bohemian behaviors. Andrea may not be an autobiographical representation of Carmen, but it is clear that her experiences with her artistic friends impacted her portrayal of the bohemian studio en Nada. However, it remains to be seen how her reinterpretation of this scene becomes an integral part of Andrea’s development and her chica rara’s perception of the world.

Andrea’s visit to the bohemian space takes place in the second part of the novel after Angustias has already departed for the convent and can no longer control Andrea’s every move. Left to her own devices, the characteristics that make Andrea a chica rara lead her to search for personal fulfillment in other social circles. The recognition of her own marginality—she does not exactly fit in with her (predominantly male) university peers—and her tendency to prefer male friendships to female ones, both heightens her expectations for the visit to Guixols’s studio and helps to procure her an invitation to one of the gatherings there. In Pons’s stumbling offer to bring Andrea to the studio, the reader learns that this is not a space typically amenable to women:

Oye, Andrea, escucha…No te lo había dicho antes porque no teníamos permiso para llevar a chicas. Pero yo he hablado tanto de ti, he dicho que eras distinta…

37 In her description of Andrea as the original chica rara, Martín Gaite observes: “Es precisamente su hermetismo, su ausencia total de coquetería, esa marginalidad de personaje casi inexistente, lo que en cierra a algunos compañeros de la Universidad la curiosidad y el interés hacia ella. La encuentran diferente de las demás, aunque no saben bien por qué” (Desde la ventana, 98-99).
Thus, the characteristics that make Andrea “odd” when compared to other women her age are precisely those which draw the attention of Guixols and his friends. Andrea does not immediately share with the reader her thoughts about receiving an offer never made to other women, and instead, as if by the sort of existential inertia that seems to push her through the rest of her experiences in the novel, she acquiesces to Pons’s request. Nevertheless, her brief tongue-in-cheek comment that follows is revealing of the stance she eventually takes towards the young men she will soon meet. Andrea declares: “[Pons] ni siquiera había soñado que yo pudiera rechazar la tentadora invitación. Naturalmente, lo acompañé” (143). From this statement, it is difficult to know if the invitation is really as tempting to Andrea as Pons has tried to make it seem, but her appreciation of the space becomes genuine—albeit temporarily—when they actually arrive.

It is not hard to understand why a *chica rara* like Andrea would find comfort initially in a space such as the one she finds in Guixols’s studio. Pons prepares her, nervously, for her visit, by explaining who his friends are, or at least how he perceives them. Pons believes that Andrea’s “difference” will make the studio a place where she can feel comfortable:

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38 It is significant to note that in Laforet’s experience with her artist friends in the Palacio de la Virreina, other women were occasionally admitted in various capacities. While it is true that women served as models, Caballé and Rollón propose that Linka Babecka—the friend who provided the model for Ena in the novel—frequently accompanied Carmen to the studio space. What is more, the large studio was shared by a female painter, Ángeles Tey, suggesting that women were offered at least slightly more options to participate in the real tertulia than the novelistic representation lets on.
Se trata de Guíxols, de Iturdiaga principalmente…, en fin, ya los conocerás.
Todos son artistas, escritores, pintores…, un mundo completamente bohemio.
Completamente pintoresco. Allí no existen los convencionalismos
sociales…Pujol, un amigo de Guíxols… y mío también, claro…, lleva chalina y
cabello largo. […] Nos reunimos en el estudio de Guíxols, que es pintor… un
muchacho muy joven…, vamos, quiero decir joven como artista, por lo demás ya
tiene veinte años, pero con un talento enorme. (143)
In this passage in which Pons attempts to impress Andrea enough to convince her to accompany
him to the studio, he reveals that, in his estimation, his bohemian friends represent a marriage of
all the best stereotypically bohemian qualities—artistic inclinations and talent, mixed with a
contempt for bourgeois norms and social conventions. As Collins has observed, it is true that this
masculine studio space does offer Andrea “some margin of freedom” when compared to the
house on Aribau Street, but as time goes on Andrea’s appraisal of the bohemians changes
markedly (302). The gradual permutation of her attitude reveals, if not marked development, at
least a heightened awareness of the world in which she lives. In order to observe this change, we
must examine the two described visits to the studio and Andrea’s reaction to the young men
around her.

At first, the space of the studio itself is attractive to Andrea, and it must be considered in
relation to Juan’s studio, detailed at the beginning of the novel. In fact, we learn that Andrea
compares all of her experiences in this art studio to the ones she has seen at home. Guíxols’s
studio is described as “un cuarto grande, lleno de luz, con varios muebles enfundados—sillas y
sillones—, un gran canapé y una mesita donde, en un vaso—como un ramo de flores—, habían
colocado un manojo de pinceles” (144). The light and the open space provide a marked contrast
to the dirty, cluttered, dark space that is Juan’s studio in the house. As Andrea begins to observe Guíxols’s paintings, she cannot help but compare these art works, “marinas sobre todo,” to her uncle’s “duros bodegones” and his fumbling attempts at mastery: “Sin querer, comparé su pintura con la de Juan. La de Guíxols era mejor indudablemente” (146). After making this explicit comparison between Juan and Guíxols’s art, Andrea proclaims: “A mí, aquel ambiente ‘bohemio’ me pareció muy confortable” (146). This assessment is meaningful for several reasons. First, it confirms Wilson’s assertion that literary depictions of the bohemian are always dependent on their opposite, in this case exemplified by Juan and his feeble attempts at painting. When compared to Juan’s “golfemia,” these young men are cast in the narration as the “good” bohemians. Juan is, without of doubt one of those who is unable to “alcanzar la gloria soñada” with his painting, and who must subsist thanks to “la caridad y el gorroneo” (Álvarez Sánchez 265).

Moreover, it is significant that the economic dimension of the bohemian lifestyle comes into play in this chapter. Juan’s wife’s duplicitous dealings behind his back to sell his paintings and make a living makes him an even more pitiful character when compared to Guíxols and his friends. Gloria eventually admits: “Le decía a Juan que vendía sus cuadros en las casas que se dedicaban a objetos de arte. Los vendía en realidad a los traperos, y con los cinco o seis duros que ellos me daban, podía jugar por la noche en casa de mi hermana” (229). On the other hand, Guíxols “tenía suerte, y vendía bien sus cuadros, aunque aún no había hecho ninguna exposición” (146).39 Though the bohemian stereotype often implies the swapping of economic

39 Bozal explains that in the immediate postwar period, the only people buying paintings belonged to “una pequeña burguesía no excepcionalmente cultivada y liberal, para nada admiradora de vanguardias y originalidades” (41) Instead, he suggests the desired the kinds of paintings Guíxols paints and sells: “[la pequeña burguesía estaba] deseosa de un entorno
capital for symbolic capital, that is, living in an “economic world reversed,” Gluck explains that the “true” bohemian, at least in its nineteenth-century context, was considered “a successful professional and artistic entrepreneur who had learned to create publicity for his products and negotiate the cultural marketplace for his own advantage” (352). Here, it appears that what makes Guíxols a “good” bohemian when compared to Juan, at least in part, is his ability to meld creativity and entrepreneurship. Or, at the very least, his market success does not affect the others’ perception of his bohemian ways.

Through this examination of the two alternative possibilities for Andrea to spend time with artists, it is not difficult to understand why she would prefer to spend time with Guíxols and his friends. Though she enjoys being in their studio, her opinion of the bohemians is not uncritical, as some scholars have suggested. For example, El Saffar comments that “the chapter devoted to the young bohemians […] serves no other function than to reveal more unsuccessful efforts at fulfillment and creativity and Andrea’s inability to fully grasp these failures” (122). Though Andrea expressly declares she is comfortable in the studio space, the comments she makes and the events she chooses to highlight later reveal an increasingly critical assessment, which becomes more acute the longer she is there. The evolution of Andrea’s response to the bohemians could be seen through the lens of the current debate among the novel’s critics about protagonist’s development as a subject. While it appears generally accurate to say that Nada is not a traditional Bildungsroman, I believe it is equally untrue that Andrea leaves Barcelona having learned nothing about the world—and herself—in the process. Though ultimately, as Jordan suggests, “Andrea’s liberation and personal fulfillment are not earned through struggle but bestowed upon her from above” (108), a marked process of understanding takes place thanks

confortable, decorado con paisajes y marinas, orgullosa del retrato, mirándose en las naturalezas muertas” (41-42).
to Andrea’s frequent visits to the studio. Through her experiences there, Andrea learns to see through the veneer the men have consciously cultivated and to turn her search for fulfillment elsewhere, though it is doubtful that she finds it.

In the description of her first encounter with the bohemians, Andrea-narrator emphasizes her skepticism typographically by referring to the space as “un ambiente ‘bohemio’” (146). From her current vantage point in the future—how far into the future and from what space of enunciation we are unable to know—Andrea now knows well enough to use the word bohemian loosely. In light of this assessment, it is important to examine the kind of interactions she chooses to spotlight. First, Andrea learns that Pujol, Guixols, Iturdiaga, and even Pons, are the sons of rich industrialists, engaged in what El Saffar calls “infantile rebellion against fathers on whom they are nonetheless entirely dependent” (122). The bohemian principle of living against the grain and defying bourgeois mediocrity is revealed as hypocrisy. Though Pons has told her that the studio is a place free of social conventions, she comes face-to-face with chauvinistic attitudes from the moment she enters. After she is introduced to Pons’s friends, Guixols turns to her, saying: “Bueno, ahora vamos a merendar si Andrea tiene la bondad de hacernos unos bocadillos con el pan y jamón que encontrará escondido detrás de la puerta” (146). Though Andrea’s “difference” has been enough to procure her an invitation to the studio, it is clear that the men are still inclined to force Andrea into stereotypical gender roles. In this sense, the “convention-less” place ultimately serves to replicate the same patterns of subjugation found elsewhere. Andrea-narrator’s focus on the studio and the happenings within it reveal what

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40 Having family wealth on which to rely in the case of slow sales is a source of profound embarrassment to those who consider themselves bohemian. This is seen in Pons’s reaction as he tells Andrea about his own comfortable financial circumstances: “Pons pertenecía también a familias conocidas en la industria catalana […] según me enteré mientras él enrojecía hasta las orejas” (146).
even the “bohemians” cannot see. According to Edward Soja, spaces have the power to occlude our view of the social structures that underlie them: “space can be made to hide consequences from us how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life” (cited in Spain, 28). Andrea’s revelations indicate covert, but deeply engrained, learned behavior that conditions such “free spirits” as Guíxols and his band of admirers to act as they do.

Though the chapter ends with a reassertion on the part of Andrea that she enjoys being in the studio space—the very assertion that leads El Saffar to suggest that Andrea cannot fully grasp the young men’s inauthenticity—her next experience in the studio tells a much different tale. In the last encounter Andrea has with the artists, it is clear that she has understood them to be “false” bohemians, but for different reasons than those that condemn Juan to the same fate. Andrea even breaks out of her characteristic passive silence to critique them when she cannot bear their hypocrisy anymore. Iturdiaga begins to criticize Ena’s (boy)friend Jaime for being the son of a rich man—“un niño mimado […] sin iniciativas a la que en la vida se le ha ocurrido hacer nada” (178). Andrea dares to turn the question back on him, also the son of a rich man, who, it would appear, is doing little with his own life: “Y ¿cuándo vas a empezar a estudiar para el examen de Estado, Iturdiaga?” (178). Andrea’s uncharacteristic, passive-aggressive comment is enough to earn her a haughty look from the unpublished author, but it exposes Andrea’s unwillingness to accept the kind of treatment she has received in the studio in which there are, supposedly, no social conventions. The final straw that causes Andrea to realize that she is unwelcome and uncomfortable in the artists’ studio brings us back once more to the comparison between the bohemians and Juan. On the day of her last visit there, Pujol arrives with a prospective model for Guíxols, “una gitana sucísima […] con la boca enorme, llena de dientes
blancos” (180). As the reader recalls, during Andrea’s first visit to Juan’s studio, Gloria is posing nude as her husband’s model. His studio is uninviting, not only because it is cluttered and dark, but because it is clear that women are not invited there as collaborators, but as objects of Juan’s artistic gaze. Stripped to her most elemental self, Gloria is more beautiful than Andrea has ever seen her, but Juan is incapable of representing her in that way. While Andrea knows that Guíxols would be much more capable of turning the young woman Pujol has brought him into a beautiful painted figure, the studio experience has now come full circle, reminding her of the atmosphere of objectification found in Juan’s sector of her home. The feeling of “descuidada felicidad” evaporates, leaving her to realize that “mi presencia estorbaba mucho para su conversación y por eso [Pujol] me guardaba rencor aquel día que él hubiese querido lucirse entre sus amigos” (180). Andrea never again mentions the bohemian studio in the rest of her narration, and she moves on, searching for fulfillment elsewhere. As an artistically-inclined chica rara, she is drawn to artistic talent and what is described to her originally as a group of marginal figures. However, with time she discovers the fraudulent nature of the bohemians which lies not so much in their wealth, but in their hypocritical and chauvinistic attitudes.

The same is true for Marta of La isla y los demonios, though she meets her bohemian artist under different circumstances. Nevertheless, the similarity of the encounter—one marked by excitement and promise, ironic hints at disappointment to come, and ultimately, complete disillusionment—is enough to suggest a trend in Laforet’s novelistic conception of “bohemian” artists. The disenchantment and frustration Andrea experiences in Nada are even more acute for Marta in La isla y los demonios. Published nearly a decade after her prize-winning debut novel, La isla features a young, creative female protagonist forced to mature throughout the novel. Whereas Andrea’s literary inclinations are discernible only in the act of writing we read, the
omniscient narrator of *La isla* uses the language of the charismatic myth—art as incurable malediction—to describe Marta’s desire to become a writer, noting that she “pasaba con síntomas de gran virulencia el sarampión literario” (16). The novel is set during the Spanish Civil War, but takes place in the Canary Islands—a region virtually untouched by fighting—and thus keeps the war at a prudent remove. However, it is the war on the mainland that forces Marta’s relatives to flee to Las Palmas, bringing with them the bohemian artist she will soon meet and begin to idolize. Unlike other sixteen-year-olds in her community, Marta shows no interest in clothes or boys, something for which her sister-in-law Pino and her aunt Honesta constantly chide her, and instead prefers to spend her time writing stories alone in her room. Like Andrea, Marta’s *chica rara* personality drives her to seek liberation and a place of freer expression with the bohemians.  

Additionally, though the process of development and its ultimate results may be questionable in *Nada*, in *La isla*, the *Bildung* is patently clear. A significant aspect of Marta’s maturation is the painful process of demythification of art and artists that takes place before her eyes. In this novel, we are presented with a similar situation as in *Nada*, but with much more pessimistic consequences for the *chica rara’s* future.

Marta is another example of the *chica rara* character type. She feels trapped within the walls of her home—“dentro de los muros de la casa esta placidez y tranquilidad desaparecían” (23)—and, like Andrea, prefers the exhilarating freedom of the streets—“Para mí es algo tan

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41 Nuria Cruz-Cámara has noted that the characteristics that most definitively identify Marta as a *chica rara* are “su negativa de casarse o su falta de interés por el tema” (99), her relationship with interior spaces, especially “el espacio familiar [que] se experimenta como un encierro y como el mayor obstáculo par alas ansias de independencia” (100), and her desire for close alliances with men in non-sexual relationships (105).

42 Even Marta’s last name—Camino—seems to suggest the trajectory of *Bildung* on which she embarks in the novel. In a much less ambiguous way than in *Nada*, we see Marta transition into adulthood by the last chapter.
estupendo andar sola por las calles, verlo todo…” (127). Unlike many other chicas raras, Marta does have what the narrator refers to as “la panda de amigas,” friends from school who read Marta’s stories and who seem to share her love of literature—or at least like listening to the stories she writes—but it is soon revealed that Marta and her friends do not see eye to eye when it comes to boys, fashion and women’s place in society (68). When Marta excitedly tells them about the prospect of leaving the island for Madrid where she could further develop her craft, one of the girls advises her: “Lo que tú debías hacer es buscar un buen chico y casarte. Tú no eres fea, ¿sabes?” (70). These are hardly Marta’s concerns, however, and from this moment on, she feels a rift growing between herself and the “pandilla.” As in Andrea’s case, Marta’s difference is precisely what will push her towards the artists. For these reasons, the visit of her artistic family members is a source of joy and excitement. Her imagination runs wild in the days before their visit, and her idea of them is based on common stereotypes of artists that she hopes to one day embody herself. As she thinks about the people she considers “seres mágicos”—her uncle Daniel, a composer, her aunt Matilde, a poet, and their daughter Honesta—she begins to dream of the implications that their visit will have on her life. Del Mastro draws a parallel between Andrea’s hopeful arrival in Barcelona and the arrival in Las Palmas of Marta’s relatives, noting that these protagonists both “approach optimistically new opportunities for establishing their identities” (47). However, this proves much more difficult than first imagined, and “in each book unsatisfactory experiments of identity disillusion a hopeful girl” (47). Part of this disillusionment is rooted in Marta’s original conception of what the relatives, as artists, should be. She considers her own authorial inclinations, as well as those of Daniel and Matilde, in charismatic terms, seeing art and literature as an inescapable vocation that determines her destiny, and she imagines that her “bohemian” relatives will understand her unique sensibility.
As it is used in the text, the term “bohemian” becomes a way of signaling the tension between Marta’s longing for freedom and the repressive world of her home, a repression embodied in the figure of her half-brother, José. According to José, the visiting relatives “eran unos desordenados y unos bohemios” (26). Her brother’s words drip with contempt, and they drive Marta to consider what the word “bohemio” means to her: “‘Bohemios’, ‘vagabundos’, estas dos palabras detrás de aquella, ‘artistas’, para la chiquilla tenían sugestiones extraordinarias” (26). The behavioral characteristics which drive the solidly bourgeois José to disparage his relatives are the same which, to Marta, are wonderfully appealing for the liberating possibilities they suggest. However, she is quick to note that the it is the act of creation that separates artists from vagrants—in other words, what separates “arte” from “golfemia.” This was a lesson Marta learned from her own father, also considered with scorn by José: “Su propio padre había sido así, un bohemio, un vagabundo, o por lo menos así lo había oído calificar ella; solo que Luis Camino no había sido artista, y por lo tanto, no estaba justificado ni enaltecido por esos títulos que José aplicaba con desprecio” (26). Daniel and Matilde’s “disordered” life clashes with the societal norms by which Marta feels inhibited, and this is enough to prove to her the legitimacy of their art and ennable the term bohemian her brother uses to label them.

It does not take long, though, for Marta to realize that her illusions will be dashed. Her family members are not the people she imagined; Daniel is feeble and timid, Matilde is rigid and authoritarian, and Hones is vapid and superficial. Nothing about the reality matches Marta’s previously-formed notions, and the narrator admits: “[Marta] tuvo al abrir los ojos una sensación agridulce al pensar en sus parientes. Le hacía ilusión que estuvieran allí, y al mismo tiempo le parecía que algo, alguna promesa, se había frustrado con la llegada de ellos” (50). Marta recognizes that “[ella] las había creado [a estas tres personas] en su propia fantasía,” but this
does not stop her from trying to break through to them and to try to tap into the genius she believes them to possess. However, her attempts are met with indifference or derision. When she attempts to talk to Matilde about her stories, the older women reacts angrily, accusing the girl of being self-absorbed and superficial, asking Marta: “¿Quieres que me extasie delante de una adolescencia llena de problemas falsos y literarios?” (72). She finally has to realize that she will need to look elsewhere to fulfill her desires for creative collaboration. The charismatic myth of the artist may not have materialized in Daniel and Matilde, but Marta is relieved to find that she has another via open to her in the figure of Pablo, the painter friend of the family whom Hones describes as “un pintor célebre… en realidad, genial” (16). The narrator observes: “Todos los héroes la habían rechazado uno a uno…en verdad, los parientes no resultaron como los había imaginado, pero Pablo, sí” (168). In a way similar to that of Nada, the young chica rara first attempts to find understanding and acceptance among her family members and then, having been disappointed, ventures outside the family circle.43

Pablo, a painter whom we never see paint in the novel, arrives with Daniel, Matilde, and Honesta to the island fleeing the war and the pain caused by the recent separation from his wife, rumored to be a sympathizer of “los rojos.” Just as the relatives’ bohemian ways dramatized tension between Marta and José’s differing views, her brother’s interpretation of Pablo conflicts with Marta’s own idealized vision. According to José, Pablo is “de los que no se encuentran bien en ninguna parte; algo marica lo encuentro yo al hombre… sí, es un tipo raro” (125). However, Marta does not consider these qualities in a negative sense; rather, she decides that “Pablo era un

43 Del Mastro has observed something similar within his analytical parameters of adolescent female identity development, though his focus is more on the female figures of Angustias and Pino, in Nada and La isla, respectively. He suggests that as both women are paralyzed by the values they have been taught to respect, they wish to pass that same sense of immobility on to the young girls in their care (47).
hombre libre que iba o venía según se le antojase” (125). As we have seen, this prospect of freedom is very attractive to Marta, but what draws her to Pablo even more is his willingness to listen—without the scorn or indifference of other adults—to Marta’s ideas about literature and life. He becomes the interlocutor for whom she has always longed. Unlike the bohemians in Nada, Pablo does not have a studio in Las Palmas, instead living in a provisional pensión. However, the space in which he spends time with Marta is still crucial to understanding the potentially liberating impulse he provides. Most often, Marta and Pablo meet outdoors, near the seashore or in other open spaces. Pablo even appeals, at first, to her desires for freedom by suggesting that she leave the Canaries for the mainland: “Tú debías salir de la isla. No estás hecha para estar metida entre cuatro paredes. Tú tienes algo de vagabunda” (128). As a result of this attention, Marta begins to idolize Pablo, calling him “un ser de inteligencia extraordinaria, capaz de leer en su cerebro” (94) and “poco menos que un santo” (225). Her active idolization of Pablo, combining elements of the charismatic myth of the artist and the bohemian myth as we have seen them presented here, makes Marta’s ultimate disillusionment all the more painful.

And this disillusionment comes swiftly. In one breath, Pablo advises Marta to leave the island and to find a different life, but on other occasions, his comments are of a different ilk. The narrator explains that Pablo’s views on women are rather disturbing to Marta: “[Pablo] daba negros consejos sobre lo que las mujeres deben hacer para que los hombres puedan vivir a gusto. Las mujeres deben estar metidas en casa, sonreírles a ellos en todo, no estorbar para nada, no manchar jamás su pureza, no producir inquietudes” (129). Of course, as we have seen, marriage and societally-sanctioned “proper” feminine conduct are not appealing to Marta, and

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44 On a later occasion, Pablo gives Marta similar, personalized, advice: “Querida Marta…¿Y si yo te aconsejara que dejases todo eso? Debías quedarte aquí, casarte, tener hijitos en tu tierra y ser feliz” (234).
thus, such comments from Pablo are disheartening. In this way, Pablo’s overt chauvinism is comparable to the comments made by Guixols and his friends when Andrea visits their studio. And, like Andrea, though such notions may leave her disconcerted momentarily, Marta is not immediately deterred and continues her friendship with Pablo. Her image of Pablo, based on a mythic understanding of the artist and his capabilities, is strong enough to withstand even comments such as these. Even after he tells her they can no longer see one another because it is not socially acceptable for a man his age to be seen with an unaccompanied adolescent, Marta is hurt but not dissuaded, even venturing out on her own to follow him to a remote beachside town where he has gone to paint.

It is in this final encounter that Marta’s disenchantment with Pablo and with the life of art he represented for her takes place, when she realizes that the painter is not, and cannot be, the person she thinks he is. When Pablo sees her in what he thinks to be his isolated escape, he tells her: “Tengo miedo por ti porque eres una chiquilla loca, Marta Camino. No sé lo que esperas encontrar en el mundo” (234). Marta’s response is indicative of the point to which the charismatic myth of the artist is engrained in her mind, blinding her to Pablo’s reality: “Quiero encontrar gentes como usted; gentes maravillosas, distintas, a las que no les importen las conveniencias sociales, sino el espíritu… Gentes de ideas elevadas… y otras tierras, otras caras desconocidas” (235). Though Pablo has amply proven that social conventions are certainly important enough to stop his friendly encounters with Marta and to advise her to take the most traditional path despite her creative proclivities, Marta is still inclined to see Pablo as the myth of the bohemian would have her see him. Whereas in Nada, Andrea comes to this conclusion on her own, Marta needs to be explicitly told, in this case by Pablo himself, who is astute enough to recognize that the myth is nothing more than fiction: “Pablo se enfadó. ‘No hay gentes
maravillosas. Yo no soy maravilloso ni elevado. No te das cuenta de lo ridículo que me haces sentir” (235). In this moment, though she has had plenty of opportunities to see it before, Marta is brought face-to-face with the reality that Pablo himself must deliver to her. It is no coincidence that this awakening comes just before the death of Teresa, Marta’s mother, which pushes her headlong into adulthood.

A significant part of Marta’s development and maturation comes from the disappointing results of her relationship with Pablo, and it is clear that by the novel’s end, she leaves the Canary Islands a changed woman. However, whether her desires for freedom, creative expression, and the like are part of that change is a matter for debate. Marta’s final act in the novel is to burn the stories she has written, allowing her writerly aspirations to go up in flames with her texts: “Arrugó los papeles, que quedaban allí; de nuevo frotó una cerrilla para prenderlos. Las leyendas que no quiso leer nadie, se quemaron, crepitando, humeando, como la víctima de sacrificio a un dios pagano. Al fin, quedaron sólo unas cenizas retorcidas. Marta las aventó” (322). Marta does leave the island for Madrid with her relatives at the war’s end, but it appears that in order for her to make that transition, she must leave her creativity behind. Because of Marta’s final self-sabotage, Pérez Firmat has called La isla y los demonios “not a novel of an artist’s growth and maturation but a portrait of sacrifice of vocation, the abdication of authorship, which is what Marta must relinquish if she is to leave adolescence behind” (34). Marta ultimately capitulates to the societal pressure to conform that she has resisted throughout the novel. She recognizes that her concept of vocation has no place in the world she inhabits, and she becomes a woman as she leaves her bohemian inclinations behind.

In a trajectory that mirrors Andrea’s in Nada, Marta eventually leaves the Canary Islands for Madrid, but the reader is given no indication of how she fares there. However, the suggestion
is that Marta will take a more traditional path that clashes with the *chica rara* personality of her youth. This is insinuated when Marta begins to contemplate her relationship with Pablo and what it means for her future:

Realidad, Marta Camino, ¿qué esperas de este hombre, de este amigo. No te va a dar nada. No lo amas. Nunca te abrazará, nunca te dará hijos. Te hace soñar en otros países, te hace soñar en la vida y del arte. Pero, ¿qué es eso? La vida para una mujer es amor y realidad. Amor, realidad, palpitation de la sangre. […]

Tienes dentro de ti muchos hijos que han de nacer; eres como una tierra nueva y salvaje y debes esperar como la tierra, quieta, el momento de dar plantas” (140).

In this way, Marta’s experience is much like Andrea’s, whose future is uncertain, but whom we suppose has encountered disappointment. In a sense, Laforet “writes beyond the ending,” in these texts, employing a narrative strategy that fulfills what DuPlessis deems the critical expression of “dissent from dominant narrative” (5). The narrations do not end with marriage, courtship, death, or punishment of Andrea and Marta’s rebellions. While this ending may not portend happy futures for the girls, neither do they augur definitively unhappy ones.

Still, as he compares the novels’ endings, Del Mastro notes that “the narrative structures of both novels deliver their respective protagonists to parallel states of frustrated efforts, unaccomplished identities, and stagnated associations with others” (51). Del Mastro believes that both Andrea and Marta’s dreams for a better life in Madrid allow them to overcome these shortcomings, though “this escape is possible only if the protagonists’ efforts to befriend the most beneficial

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45 El Saffar suggests that there is nothing in the rest of the novel that allows us to believe that Andrea goes on to find happiness in the future: “The happy ending and the illusioned Andrea join to produce an effect inconsistent with basic themes of the noel. This level of bad faith suggests that writing, like living, is always threatened with inauthenticity” (128).
outlets—Ena and Pablo—are ultimately successful” (51). If the girls’ liberation is truly dependent on these two characters—who both prove themselves in multiple occasions to be less than reliable—their futures look bleak. Both girls are disappointed with their bohemian experiences and both novels suggest that the freedom supposedly offered by the bohemian lifestyle is untenable, especially for women, in the Spain of post-war era. In Carmen Martín Gaite’s *Entre visillos*, the novel to which I will now turn, the woman who associates with the bohemians is Elvira, a *chica rara* who has grown up without the support she needed to develop her counter-cultural inclinations, and, unlike Marta and Andrea, she is no longer able to see through the performance of bohemianism. In this case, it takes an outsider, someone not enmeshed in the provincial society the narrators describe, to see both not only that the young bohemian men are frauds, but to see what Elvira could have been.

**Carmen Martín Gaite’s *Entre visillos***

Before we can accurately compare the use of bohemian characters in Laforet’s and Martin Gaite’s novels, it is essential to recognize the significant differences between the kinds of texts in question. Unlike *Nada* and *La isla is los demonios*, *Entre visillos* does not closely follow just one protagonist, but rather, it features many, primarily female, characters. Elizabeth Scarlett describes this shift in narrative focus as a movement away from “the ‘egographic’ novels of the forties, centered around a single protagonist and often written in the first person” toward “the

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46 As El Saffar has observed, Ena is not a necessarily the most reliable source of Andrea’s future contentment. Though she has had a very disappointing experience in Barcelona, Andrea once again looks with expectation to the future in Madrid, but this time “her happiness is premised on the supportive friendship of Ena, whose capacity for cold destruction has already been revealed” (127). Similarly, Pérez Firmat characterizes Pablo as “a neurotic and failed artist” (32), and though Pablo does ultimately support Marta’s decision to leave the island, it is clear that he will not be her source of support on the mainland, as the narrator reveals that they never speak again.
distance of a third-person narration that encompasses a wide cross section of society” (149). Some critics have spoken of a “collective protagonist” in such novels, though Martín Gaite has rejected such a classification of her own novel:

A pesar de que son muchos los personajes que aparecen en la novela, no creo que Entre visillos pueda catalogar entre las narraciones llamadas de ‘protagonismo colectivo.’ El ojo del narrador de verdad que se concentra a veces sobre una multitud anónima, pero se da preferencia a la dinámica de grupo. (Pido 250)

An ideological shift accompanied these new narrative modes, one which Scarlett defines as moving from “the individual anguish of existentialism to a greater sociopolitical commitment” (149). This push towards a “social realism” is evident in the novel of the 1950s, but as López observes, this trend is still one that resists classification due to the varied narrative techniques employed and issues addressed by individual authors. According to López, the common thread between all the so-called “novelas sociales” has to do with their intended effect on the reader:

Lo único que parece estar claro es la intención por parte de sus cultivadores de concienciar al lector de la desolada realidad socio-económica del país y su convicción de que esa concienciación supone un primer paso para transformar la “realidad” que se representa en la novela. (92)

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47 Scarlett includes Entre visillos in the category of “social” or “neorealist” novel along with Camilo José Cela’s La colmena (1951), Jesús Fernández Santos Los bravos (1954), and Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio’s El Jarama (1956) (149). The narrative techniques employed in Entre visillos differs significantly from these novels, however, blending an omniscient narrator in third person with several first person accounts, sometimes of the same events, in Tali’s diary and the chapters narrated in first person by Pablo. As López asserts, this narrative technique is “un ejemplo del deseo […] de abrir brechas en el discurso mitico del realismo social” (97). Though Pablo and Tali’s positions as “outsiders” in the community lend a certain degree of objectivity to their points of view, these first person narrations interrupt and undercut the idea of this novel as an objective camera-eye view, more clearly expressed in a novel like Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio’s El Jarama.
The ideological commitment of Martín Gaite’s text is linked to raising consciousness vis-à-vis restrictive gender roles for women in Spanish society. She has explained her use of multiple “main” characters this way: “En la novela está presente toda la gama de los papeles asignados a la mujer española en los años cincuenta y marcados por su dependencia familiar o sentimental con respecto al hombre y con respecto a las reglas marcadas por la sociedad” (Pido 248). Martín Gaite admits that the novel was written as an open denunciation of this society which she had experienced, and she describes Entre visillos as “una especie de rechazo de este mundo provinciano que [yo] huía” (quoted in O’Leary and Ribeiro de Meneses 17). Though the novel may present a wide range of female roles, all of the women share a common dissatisfaction with their environment. Critics have highlighted various ways their discontent—and Martín Gaite’s scathing critique—has manifested itself. For example, Brown has studied the way non-conforming characters highlight the absurdity of all that is considered normal in the provincial capital. Collins emphasizes the Foucaultian “disciplinary society” depicted in the novel in which the women are always under someone’s watchful gaze, and thus, unable to move, act, or even think freely. Finally, Scarlett and Bellver both study the use of space in the text, suggesting that the enclosed, claustrophobia-inducing interior spaces which the women almost always inhabit echo at once their acute lack of privacy—of a “room of one’s own,” so to speak—and the women’s figurative suffocation under repressive social mores.

As in Nada, a bohemian artist’s studio, set up in this instance in a large hotel room, is one of the spaces the characters frequent. However, it is Pablo and Elvira’s relationship with the young artists which is most relevant for my reading of the novel. Martín Gaite maintains that the interactions between characters have a fundamental role in this novel, stating that “la intención es que se pueda conocer la psicología de cada uno [de los personajes], precisamente a través de
su relación con los demás” (Pido 250). Thus the interactions between Pablo and Elvira and the “bohemians” can reveal much to the reader about their biases and social conditioning, both products of the environments in which all have been raised. I begin by examining Pablo’s character and his relationship with Yoni, Emilio, and the other self-proclaimed artists, as it is his first-person narration which initially introduces us to this bohemian world. Martín Gaite’s inclusion of a male narrator to whose perspective we are privy differs from the other novels previously discussed, texts in which the narrative perspective is uniformly feminine. As we have seen, the *chica rara* posture allows Andrea and Marta to see and experience—-and, however timidly, critique—markedly masculine realms to which their peers would be denied access.

Pablo serves a similar function in his role as outsider. The novel is temporally framed by Pablo Klein’s arrival and departure from the unnamed provincial city, generally assumed to be Salamanca, where he has been hired to teach German at the local school. For reasons never explained in the novel, Pablo had lived in the Spanish city with his father, a painter, when he was a child and has returned, curious to see if and how the place has changed.48 Pablo’s point of view as a foreigner allows him to reveal the affectation and farce around which the city operates. He does not feel bound by the same strict social codes as the other characters who have spent their lives there, and his actions raise some eyebrows—especially his willingness to dine in public with the scandalous “animadora del casino,” Rosa—at the same time that it makes Pablo a dangerously interesting figure many of the younger townspeople want to meet. Brown asserts that it is Pablo’s point of view which provides the most novel’s critical voice, as he is “free to

48 According to Elvira and Teo’s mother, “el pintor viudo” who raised Pablo himself, was “un pintor extraordinario” in her own late husband’s estimation (130). She explains to her children: “Andaban detrás del señor para que hiciera una exposición de sus cuadros en el Casino. […] Por fin me parece que no quiso” (130).
enjoy whatever this particular life has to offer, [but] finds too few options from which to choose” (168). 49 His critical eye cast toward the bohemians is the first step towards their demythification in the novel.

Pablo’s first contact with the artists is facilitated by Emilio, the fawning young man who does all in his power to befriend Pablo. In the same way that Pons invites Andrea to the studio, Emilio extends what is he hopes is a tempting offer to their meeting place. Pons uses the term “bohemio” to describe the environment of Guixols’s studio, and while Emilio does not use that specific word, the description has much in common with Laforet’s portrayal of the studio space. Emilio tries to convince Pablo that the studio is a place free of social conventions and brimming with creativity, one of the few spaces in the provincial city in which there are “círculos agradables, gente con la que se puede tratar, discutir” (60). Emilio tells him that it is Yoni’s personality that makes it such an exceptional place: “Sobre todo por Yoni, te encantará. Ha viajado mucho. Es de lo más libre y original” (62). The similarities between this invitation and the one Pons extends to Andrea are clear: the studio is described as a place free of the same kind of stifling social convention that weighs so heavily on the rest of the people and places the characters know. In large part, it is Andrea and Pablo’s perceived alterity which procures them an invitation to these normally private spaces.

Just as Pons suggests that Andrea is receiving her invitation because she is unlike other girls, Emilio considers Pablo “una persona rara” and, for this reason, invites him to the studio (62). The critical eye Pablo will cast on the bohemian space is prefigured from the beginning of

49 Martín Gaite, in agreement with the opinions of many critics, has spoken of Pablo as a positive agent whose unique perspective helps to raise the reader’s consciousness, as he, “como forastero en la ciudad, ignora [el repertorio] de máximas y puede ponerlas en cuestión con una libertad y impunidad que no están al alcance de Natalia, de Elvira, ni ninguna de las otras chicas a las que conoce y trata en la ciudad” (Pido, 249).
his conversation with Emilio. Pablo allows us to see Emilio’s desperate cultivation of an intellectual and artistic personality, insinuating that he attempts to befriend Pablo because he believes him to be an artist or writer himself. Pablo observes Emilio’s disappointment when he tells him that he is, in fact, just a man interested in languages, noting: “le decepcionó bastante cuando le dije que no era [escritor]” (61). Emilio, on the other hand, boasts of his own creative inclinations, telling Pablo, “Yo soy ante todo poeta,” though he is also “preparando unas oposiciones a Notarías” (61). Pablo, even in this initial encounter with Emilio, lets the reader know that conversations with him are not fulfilling and that he longs for an end to the banal chatter: “Lenguideció la charla y de pronto me pareció que no tenía ningún sentido nuestro paseo, que todo había sido forzado y postizo” (62). The “forced” and “false” nature of the conversation is a manner of foreshadowing what the visit to the studio will be like for Pablo, who, in spite of his frustration with Emilio, promises to one day join him there.

Emilio’s conversations with Pablo indicate the pervasiveness of the bohemian myth in the public imaginary, and it becomes clear that Yoni and his artistic friends embody it. As Wilson reminds us, the bohemian myth “revolves around a central problem of authenticity” and ultimately “exposes the uncertainty at its core” which it seeks to conceal (7-8). Martín Gaite utilizes and dramatizes the question of authenticity, embodied by these characters, to reveal the artificial nature of even those facets of society that pretend to be most liberated, highlighting further the repressiveness of the environment. Yoni and his friends are engaged in the performance of bohemianism, and it appears that actually creating art is the least of their concerns. Pablo’s description of the studio is brief, but it reveals many of the same aspects uncovered when Andrea visits Guixols’s studio in Nada. First, Pablo notes that for the others, especially Emilio, Yoni embodies the charismatic myth of the artist in all its forms: “Me habían
hablado mucho de las reuniones que daba un tal Yoni en el ático del Gran Hotel, y lo mismo que Emilio, hablaban de esto chico como un semidiós” (133). However, when Pablo arrives, he observes that while the studio space is comfortable and, like Guixols’s studio, less cramped and cluttered with bric-a-brac than many of the novel’s other spaces, it is also “un poco buscadamente original” (133). This same cultivated originality is found even in the artist’s very name, “Yoni,” and Pablo learns that “se hacía llamar así porque había vivido diez meses en Nueva York con un tío” (133). Pablo’s outsider viewpoint allows him to reveal the contrived nature of the bohemian space and attitude in a way the Spanish characters are unable to do.

Finally, Pablo’s interaction with the young artists reveals another commonality between Martín Gaite’s and Laforet’s bohemians—“Yoni era hijo del dueño del Gran Hotel” (133). Just as Pons, Iturdiaga and their friends in Nada were the sons of rich industrialists, masquerading as starving artists, Yoni’s freedom to live as he pleases is not derived from his art, but rather from the money offered by his father, whom Yoni refers to as “el viejo cerdo” (134). Wilson has noted that poverty is a customary, though not essential, component of the bohemian myth; having money was acceptable, “provided the bohemian treated [wealth] with contempt, flinging money around instead of investing it with bourgeois caution” (6). Yoni’s lavish lifestyle and elaborate parties are a prime example of this attitude towards money that is in concordance with his personification of the bohemian myth.\footnote{Bourdieu explains that previously held economic capital is often a determining factor in an artist’s success. Though wealth may be incompatible with the charismatic or bohemian myths, Bourdieu suggests that it is a very real part of success in the actual world of art: “Economic capital provides the conditions for freedom from economic necessity, a private income being one of the best substitutes for sales” (68). This freedom consequently allows the wealthy to take the kinds of risks that often lead to shifting positions within the cultural field. Bourdieu notes that “because economic capital provides the guarantees which can be the basis of self-assurance, audacity and indifferent to profit […] we find that as a rule those richest in economic, cultural, and social capital are the first to move into new positions” (68).}
Both *Nada* and *Entre visillos* depict the experience of an outsider, a non-conformist, a marginal figure—made marginal by gender or by place of birth—in the artist’s studio and use that same eccentricity as a way to bring to the fore the contrived nature of the space and those who inhabit it. In the case of all three novels discussed here, the truth revealed by the outsider’s perspective is often related less to aesthetic concerns about art itself, but rather to the fact that gender roles in a supposedly “unconventional” place are strikingly similar to those found in the more conventional or traditional realms. In *Nada*, Andrea’s *chica rara* perspective allows her to see that though Guixols and his friends accept her, magnanimously, into their studio space, they still treat her as men treat women elsewhere—she is put in charge of preparing the food and her presence becomes bothersome when the men wish to flaunt their sexual prowess with other, more conventional women. In *Entre visillos*, women are welcomed into Yoni’s studio, but only when he gives one of his famous parties. Pablo has revealed the bohemianism of Yoni as his friends as an affectation, so when townspeople see it as more socially “dangerous,” at least more so than the casino or the public square, it further compounds the image of the town as repressive and even backward. When invited to one of these parties, Mercedes and Julia hesitate before accepting, and their aunt, Concha, expresses her reservations about sending her nieces—women nearly thirty years old—to the Gran Hotel: “¿Cómo te va a gustar [en el Hotel]? Toda gente joven, solos allí, como cabras locas, sin ninguna persona de representación, metidos entre cuatro paredes” (158). Bellver has observed that the girls, ranging from adolescent in the case of Gertru and more mature in the case of Tali’s sisters, Julia and Mercedes, “would seem to invade male space when they attend the gatherings at the studio of Yoni, the dilettante artist, but in reality female are admitted to this bohemian space, only as ancillary figures for moments of pleasure” (41). Even during the party, the same norms that rule the girls’ daily lives are present; Gertru is
led away by Yoni’s sister to admire another woman’s kitchen appliances, Mercedes is horribly
troubled by the *qué dirán* when she is accidentally locked out on the balcony with a man, and
Julia spends the evening playing mind games with the young man who has expressed interest in
courting her. Whereas Andrea felt at least a modicum of momentary freedom in Guixols’s studio,
neither Gertru, Julia, nor Mercedes are able to let their guard down in the same way. However,
there appears to be one exception to this rule: Elvira Domínguez, whom Yoni has professed to
admire for her “falta de prejuicios” (134).

On the one hand, it would appear that Elvira’s acceptance in Yoni’s studio is similar to
Andrea’s in *Nada*. Both girls are seen by the men as “different” from other women in some way
and both exhibit certain *chica rara* characteristics. However, the situation in *Entre visillos* is
given a ideosyncratic spin; here, the bohemian artists appear to accept Elvira—a female painter
who, unlike Andrea and Marta, is past the stage of transition into womanhood—into their circle.
Their acceptance of her and her uncritical faith in them is utilized, however, to underscore the
limited nature of Elvira’s supposed rebellion. Unlike Andrea and Marta, Elvira has internalized
the repressive social norms of the society in which she lives, she never allows herself to feel
completely comfortable in the studio. In fact, as O’Leary and Ribeiro de Meneses have
concluded, Elvira is “a *chica rara* who failed to break away and she is stunted by her own failure
to break free” (29). She still desires the solitude and independence that *chicas raras* do, but she
has allowed the pressure to conform from her mother and friends to keep her from pursuing
them. Pablo’s exposé of the bohemian *performance* suggests that all of Elvira’s thwarted

51 This is one example of many found in the novel of what Bellver defines as an example of
Foucault’s “disciplinary society,” that is, a “normalizing gaze... that makes it possible to qualify,
to classify, and to punish” which constantly follows the characters (74). The women in particular
are constantly burdened by the terrible pressure to avoid becoming the subject of the bitter gossip
that maintains the status quo.
attempts at non-conformity take place within relatively safe parameters. In this way, her attempts to demonstrate to others that she is a liberated woman, distinct from those around her, are further undercut. She is bored in the company of the vapid women surrounding her, speaks frequently of feeling suffocated in the walls of her home (a feeling only intensified by the period of mourning for her father in which the reader finds her at the beginning of the novel), and displays an interest in expressing herself creatively. She also outwardly spurns Emilio, who desperately seeks her hand in marriage, though it is suggested that the specter of spinsterdom looms as large over Elvira as her peers, regardless of how different as she professes to be from them.

Her contradictory personality comes to light in her contact with Pablo, whose directness seems to put her constantly on edge. Pablo is intrigued by Elvira from their first meeting, when he first recognizes at least a spark of something that would differentiate her from the other women he has met. Yet, Pablo’s outsider’s perspective is actually an impediment to getting to know her; Pablo attempts to understand her desperation, Elvira explains: “Si usted no vive aquí […] no puede entender ciertas cosas” (55). Even more than because of his perspective as a foreigner, it is Pablo’s androcentric viewpoint that also keeps him from fully understanding or sympathizing with Elvira. When, referencing a Juan Ramón Jiménez poem, Elvira speaks to Pablo about “el encarcelamiento de la carne” and “[el] desdoblamiento entre el cuerpo y el alma,” she covertly references her own plight, though Pablo dismisses her comments as nonsense (137). López explains that this passage is significant because it is a way for Elvira to express the two contradictory sides of herself: “Mientras el alma (la imaginación) puede volar, las convenciones que afectan los movimientos del cuerpo se hacen más llevaderas” (98). Pablo accuses her of being self-centered and seems to believe that, if she tried hard enough, she could transcend the circumstances that keep her imprisoned, something the text demonstrates is much
easier said than done. As López points out, Pablo’s incomprehension of this society sometimes causes him respond with anger or frustration rather than compassion towards the women (and men, in some cases), imprisoned by these norms. His interactions with Elvira are prime examples of this. While the narrative eye appears “to view conformist women with compassion rather than disgust,” Pablo at times cannot hide the revulsion he feels when he is with Elvira (Scarlett 153).

Pablo barely listens as Elvira tries to speak to him about poetry, hoping to find an interested interlocutor in him, and López notes: “Pablo no entiende que para una mujer de provincias en la España de los años 50, una mujer que, además, intenta subvertir una serie de mitos que la afectan personalmente, creer en esa dicotomía puede ser vital” (98). When Pablo attempts to help her, Elvira responds with emotional outbursts, rooted in what O’Leary and Ribeiro de Meneses call “her inability to convince [Pablo], and indeed herself, of her freedom of mind and spirit,” noting that this feeds into “and justifies another cliché about female irrationality” (29). On the one hand, therefore, Pablo’s role as outsider serves to demonstrate the affectation and “falsity” of the bohemians, but on the other, his role as a man does not allow him to understand the factors that keep Elvira trapped in her place despite her own desires to flee.

Elvira is unable to defend herself or her art in front of Pablo, and the reader discovers that she has renounced any attempts at seriously devoting herself to art, instead becoming a simple dabbler. She tells Pablo, “yo no pinto bien, ni lo pretendo. Soy aficionada solamente” (142). Undeterred, Pablo maintains that he wants to see Elvira’s work, but she refuses: “se puso a darme explicaciones de lo malos que eran y también de las sensaciones que tenía cuando los pintaba, que se atormentaba pensando que aquello que veía ya no volvería a tener la luz que tenía en aquel momento” (143). Later, when her mother urges her to show some houseguests a portrait of her father, Elvira responds that it is unfinished, adding: “Bueno mamá, pero que aquí a que lo
acabe… no trabajo nada. [...] Es todo malo” (198). As Roberta White has noted, female painter-protagonists are often presented, in contrast to novels with male painter characters, “as liminal and [their] work as unfinished” (15, emphasis in original). In novels which portray female artists to represent women overcoming artistic and social obstacles, White suggests that this liminality is not necessarily negative. On the contrary, it might portray her in a “state of transition or emergence” and her unfinished work might be representative of a “state of becoming” (16). However, it is clear that Elvira’s circumstances keep her from such a state of development. Elvira has stagnated, and while her soul might reach for the sky, as the Jiménez poem she reads describes, the physical reality of her situation and all that she has mentally internalized about propriety and women’s place in society keeps her from achieving such a state.

By end of the novel, Elvira’s fate appears sealed; she will remain immobilized, caught between the woman she wishes she were and the woman society has conditioned her to be. She continues to be characterized by contradiction. She is romantically interested in Pablo because of his otherness, but she agrees to marry the sycophantic Emilio, the civil servant-poet, who promises to buy her large house outside the city. She enjoys toying with Emilio by not respecting the established courtship rituals, but she becomes increasing frustrated with Pablo for not enacting those same rituals. In the final chapter, Elvira makes one last cautious attempt at rebellion, but Pablo sees through it. He encounters Elvira alone with Yoni at his sculpture exhibition, and the former’s flippant, almost brash, attitude reads as an attempt to prove to Pablo that by virtue of her friendship with Yoni, she is a liberated woman. Pablo observes, “Le hablaba

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52 Christopher Schulenburg takes Elvira at her word when she criticizes her art work, though we have no objective assessment of the actual artistic products. He calls her paintings “work[s] of dubious quality” and mentions her “obvious artistic faults,” though there is nothing that would mark them as “obviously” of poor quality (30).
[a Yoni] muy familiarmente, como si quisiera hacer arde de su amistad con él” (250). The three of them leave the exhibition together, Yoni warns Elvira that someone could be watching and judging: “Le dijo Yoni a Elvira que si la veían acompañada de dos hombres que no eran Emilio, y en pleno luto, que la iban a criticar,” to which she responds, “Que digan misa. [...] ¿Tú quieres que les dé más que hablar todavía? ¿Que me coja de vuestro brazo?” (250-51). For Elvira, being seen this way with the two men is an exhilarating way to laugh in the face of the societal mores that have constricted her for so long. She professes to care very little about the thoughts and opinions of others, but as Collins notes, “[Elvira] contributes to her own imprisonment because like other women she has unconsciously internalized the external grid of repression” (72). Therefore, her pseudo-rebellions are really not very rebellious at all, rather “her flirtations with non-conformity are, upon examination, all within safe parameters” (O’Leary and Ribeiro de Meneses 28).

So what does this tell us about the bohemians in Entre visillos? Their appreciation of Elvira’s work and the rebellion she perceives in her relationships with them is strongly undercut by Pablo’s narrative voice. If the bohemians are frauds in the sense that their “rebellion” is really affectation—they are rich young men with time on their hands, money to burn, and tentative creative inclinations rather than “real” artists like Pablo’s own father—it then follows that neither is Elvira a non-conformist for spending time with them. Though they praise Elvira’s

53 Pablo mocks Elvira’s banal attempts at scandalizing by scandalizing her. He taunts her, telling her that if she is really a free woman, she should come up to his room for sex. As White has observed, the creative woman “attracts the male gaze” and “in that moment is transformed from observer to observed, from subject to object” (16-17). The act of painting is thus trivialized, thereby dismissing women’s creative drive as well. This is also made clear earlier in the text when Elvira tries to talk about literature and even the artistic quandaries that plague her and her painting, Pablo is thinking only of kissing her: “Algo empezó a decir de La nausea, un libro de Jean-Paul Sartre, y todavía siguió hablando un poco y mirándose las manos sobre las rodillas, hasta que yo se las cogí. [...] Se hacía la desenvuelta, pero vi que tenía miedo de que la besara. La besé” (143-44).
“falta de prejuicios,” Pablo lets us know that all of the young artists have “prejuicios.” The same kind of dandismo aristocrático, as Sánchez Álvarez calls it, which can be found in Nada, appears here. Yoni and his friends are examples of this manifestation of Bohemia, in that they share with “la auténtica bohemia el hecho de rebelarse frente a la rutina y la trivialidad burguesa. Hacen gala de una estética bohemia y simulan practicar las actividades típicas del movimiento, pero no experimentan realmente el ‘malheur’ que reclamaba Baudelaire” (Sánchez Álvarez 270). That Elvira cannot make it in Bohemia, and that she cannot sufficiently rebel, is significant for two reasons. First, it is crucial to point out that Bohemia has never been particularly amenable to women. Wilson notes that the women who had the most success cultivating a bohemian lifestyle were those of the upper class and that for “middle-class women to cut loose from family and convention and enter this world” was extremely difficult (96). This is because these women were “most hampered by ideas of respectability and fears of loss of caste, but it was they who were more likely to wish to pursue an artistic career” (96). If, generally speaking, the fear of betraying familiarities was linked to women’s lack of success in Bohemia, the society in which Entre visillos is set magnifies the consequences of violating traditional parameters for women.

It is nearly impossible for women to experience a freedom of movement, intellect, and creativity because even the male “bohemians” are inhibited, their rebellion is insipid, and they too feel society’s watchful eye on them at all times. Elvira and the other women are doubly marginalized by their gender and by the strict social codes that govern both women and men. As Bellver has observed, Yoni’s experience is a case in point: “society indulges the young male’s yearning for rebellion and allows for alternative models of masculine behavior, especially if he is a rich man’s son” (41). However, even Yoni’s rebellion is tame and knowingly temporary, highlighting the impossibility of artistic and social insurrection in the provincial capital.
In Laforet’s *Nada* and *La isla y los demonios*, the narration closes ambiguously on the two adolescent protagonists, leaving us unsure of what will happen to them as they enter adulthood. In the case of *Entre visillos*, we can be quite sure of Elvira’s end—her marriage to Emilio seals her fate and squelches any still-burning embers of rebellion. However, several critics have noted that, in many respects, Elvira could be interpreted as an older version of another character in *Entre visillos* whose fate is not as clearly defined: Natalia.\(^{54}\) Elvira feels inexplicably drawn to Tali when she meets her for the first time in the cemetery, where both girls visit a parent’s grave. Elvira approaches her, introducing herself as someone who also studies, like Tali, at the *Instituto*, and offers her notes and assistance if she wants them, welcoming Tali to her home. “Me extrañaba la insistencia,” Tali muses to the diary’s pages, “porque no comprendo que pueda tender nada de interés mi amistad para una chica mayor” (181). This link between the two women of different ages helps to underscore their similarities and may help us to better surmise what will become of Tali in the future. Lynn Talbot explains that with Elvira’s “greater experience she expresses more openly her anger and frustration” with the society’s expectations than Natalia does (90). Natalia is on the cusp of womanhood and resisting it with all her might, which has led her reject wearing her first long dress, to embrace solitude and her studies, and to despise the tedious gatherings of her sisters’ friends. It even leads her to tell her father: “Si tengo que ser una mujer resignada y razonable, prefiero no vivir” (229). Several critics have taken Tali’s statements like these to mean that she will resist becoming a woman like Elvira in the future. For example, Cruz-Cámara asserts that Natalia “no ha interiorizado las consignas franquistas sobre la identidad femenina” (106) and Brown believes that Natalia is “a

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\(^{54}\) Martín Gaite herself has referred to Tali as this story’s *chica rara* (*Pido*, 250). Cruz-Cámara has detailed more closely the characteristics that make Tali *rara*, among them her “negativa a casarse” (99) and the fact that “Natalia solamente puede aliarse con figuras masculinas” (104).
symbol of hope in the struggle against the discrimination and repressiveness of traditional society” (169). However, if we believe that Tali’s *chica rara* tendencies link her to Elvira, then the kind of lifestyle these critics assume the former will adopt in the future is put in question. Though Pablo encourages her to continue her studies and Tali acknowledges that “cada vez estoy más decidida a hacer carrera,” she never actually discusses the matter with her father, who is staunchly opposed to the idea (221). Just as Marta and Andrea’s fate was dependent on Pablo and Ena, so too does Tali’s appear to depend on Pablo Klein. As López observes, his departure problematizes her possibilities for escape: “la marcha definitiva de Pablo, única persona de quien Tali recibe el apoyo necesario, parece apuntar la mayor posibilidad de esta solución” (100). Elvira is incapable of true rebellion, as her association with the “false” bohemians proves. Her internalization of the mores of her society leave her torn between propriety and putative artistic rebellion. Without Pablo’s guidance, it is presumable that Tali could follow the same course.

Perhaps the most frustrating part of the end of all three novels in question is also what makes them most innovative for their moment. Contemporary readers may want to believe that Andrea finds herself in Madrid, that Marta is able to embrace her literary vocation in the capital, or that Tali goes on to study and evade the same fate of her sisters and Elvira. Nevertheless, the authors do not allow us such closure. The girls do not find a knight in shining armor nor are they “punished” for this transgression of the societal norms. The novel’s protagonists are not typical for women’s writing of the moment and thus, neither are their stories’ endings. These texts fulfill DuPlessis’s definition of “writing beyond the ending,” as they generate “a narrative that denies or deconstructs seductive patterns of feeling that are culturally mandated, internally policed, and hegemonically poised” (5). As I have sought to elucidate, the inclusion in the text of the bohemian characters influences these open endings in meaningful ways. Their unmasking—the
way that the characters marked as “different” see through their charade—is an integral part of the girls’ heightened awareness, and in some cases, their development leads to an ambiguous fate. Andrea is the most skeptical of the bohemians from the start, and the quickest to discard the possibility of finding fulfillment among them. Marta is initially less cynical regarding Pablo’s bohemianism and even when the painter pushes her out of his life, fearful of the qué dirán, the girl still idolizes him as a progressive role model. She is only convinced otherwise when Pablo explicitly takes on the task of his own demythification, and her response is to give up on art as a viable pursuit. In Entre visillos, Elvira, is a one-time chica rara who has grown up, and in the process, given up that the independence, creativity, and free-thinking she once exhibited. These qualities were not supported, cultivated, or fostered, and she is no longer able to see through the bohemian myth. To do so would be to even more painfully expose her own contradictory nature. In all three novels, the charismatic, bohemian artist is used as a symbol of freedom. As the authors employ their unconventional characters to unmask them, they simultaneously point to the bleakness of the Spanish post-war reality, where free-thinking artists and free-thinking women have no place.
In interviews carried out with Norwegian art students between 1998 and 2004, social scientists Sigrid Røyseng, Per Mangset, and Jorunn Spord Borgen set out to discern to what extent the “charismatic myth of the artist” impacted young artists as they began their university training, and again as they sought jobs in their chosen fields after graduation. In the initial 1998 and 1999 interviews, they discovered that stereotypes about artists impacted not only the interviewees’ proposed career choices, but also, in large part, the way they understood and cultivated their own personal and professional identity. The majority of the students interviewed in the early stages of their training saw their artistic talent as “a gift of grace” or as “a result of ‘fate’” (5). Many of them felt that being an artist was not a conscious career choice; instead, they felt predestined for their future occupations (5). Additionally, some of the students acknowledged a desire to make money, but “were not willing to be involved in purely commercial activities without having some artistic reservations. In other words, there was a limit to the extent they would ‘prostitute’ themselves” (7). Røyseng, Mangset, and Spord Borgen interpreted these statements as evidence of the “charismatic myth’s” pervasiveness among students, and later interviews with the same young artists revealed that as they prepared to establish themselves in the professional art world, these same attitudes were incompatible with

55 Cited in Lechado, 206.
the reality they encountered. The scholars succinctly describe the charismatic myth as the notion that “artists are often seen as people with extraordinary talents, possessing the ability to create unique, sublime works of art. The charismatic myth demands that artistic work should be carried out in a disinterested manner with pure aesthetic vision as the only guiding light” (1)

However, the students who bought into this notion in their younger years admitted that they “did not feel sufficiently prepared for the practical and administrative tasks they encountered” once they had graduated (9). What is more, when they were asked what they considered to be the most critical element leading to artistic success, “most of the young artists stressed the importance of initiative and hard work. However, this corresponds badly with the charismatic myth,” which prizes inborn aptitude over learned skill and leads students who subscribe to it to believe that talent alone is enough to procure success (10).

The charismatic vision of the artist’s “calling”—including seeing it as a vocation rather than a job in the first place—is nothing new. In fact, it dates back to the nineteenth century, to the days when the artist was raised up as a cultural and literary hero of sorts. Though the artist’s socio-cultural standing has changed drastically since the nineteenth century, though the art world has undergone staggering transformations—especially regarding the ways art is bought and sold—and, though art’s monetary and cultural value have been revolutionized, the Romantic charismatic myth is as pervasive in the twenty-first century as it is pernicious to those who would

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56 The term “art world,” which I will use throughout this chapter, has been defined aptly by Lawrence Alloway this way: “What does the vague term ‘art world’ cover? It includes original works of art and reproductions; critical, historical, and informative writing; galleries, museums, private collections. It is a sum of persons, objects, resources, messages, and ideas” (“Network,”29).
try to “make it” in the art world wholeheartedly believing it to be reality.\footnote{That is not to say that the myth has remained completely unchanged since the nineteenth century. Røyseng, Mangset, and Spord Borgen conclude in their study that, while the myth remains a determining factor in the lives and career choices of young artists, “the charismatic myth is created and re-created as part of continuous meaning-making processes” (2). They also note that there are other artistic models—namely the “cultural entrepreneur” (which \textit{does} focus on the prospective economic gains which could await the artist in a way the “charismatic myth” \textit{does not}) and “the artist entertainer” (which is more dependent upon public opinion than the “charismatic myth”).} Nowhere else has this vision of the artist as a cultural hero who embodies the charismatic myth been so clearly delineated as in the \textit{Künstlerroman}, or artist novel, a genre that traces its roots back to the late eighteenth century, but which reaches a zenith in the Romantic sensibility.\footnote{Most number of critics (myself included) use the terms “artist novel” and \textit{Künstlerroman} interchangeably, but Robert Seret distinguishes between them in her 1992 study. Seret suggests that the artist novel is “less psychological in its implications, less personal in its perspectives” than the \textit{Künstlerroman} (5). Additionally, while the \textit{Künstlerroman} tells of the artist’s development, the artist novel, according to Seret, “narrates the story of which the protagonist is already a formed artist” (5).} It is this Romantic artist hero to whom so many future artist-protagonists, and even some actual artists, owe their vision of the profession and the creative mission.

The artists who paint, draw, write, compose, or sculpt their way through the pages of these novels follow, with some variation in motivations and outcome, a rather predictable path. They are men (because, with few exceptions, the artists of this epoch’s literature were male) heroically at odds with a society that does not understand them or their disinterested desires to create, and they are willing to sacrifice everything—perhaps even life itself—to reach an ideal or “pure” form of art. As Donald Kuspit explains, the avant-garde artist (in literature, but also in life) was subject to a double mythologization: he or she was seen to possess “special perceptual power” inaccessible to others, a power which allowed him or her to live as “uniquely authentic in an inauthentic society” (\textit{The Cult}, 2). The artist is idealized, Kuspit maintains, “for the
transmutation of value [...] that is, the perceptual and personal authenticity to effect and symbolize” (*The Cult*, 2). If this picture of the artist—widespread as it was—was anachronistic even in the nineteenth century, it has become even more irreconcilable with reality in the twenty-first, though it doggedly persists in the imaginary of artists and non-artists alike.

That is not to say, however, that the myth is given the exact credence it was in the nineteenth century. Kuspit observes that this belief in the artist’s special powers is now “in serious disrepair,” but “it has hardly passed from the scene” (*The Cult*, 3). Both artists and, consequently, artist protagonists, in contemporary *Künstlerromane*, must confront the unsettling meeting of expectations generated by the charismatic myth and reality of the art world. As Rupert Christiansen notes, artist novels have been linked in some way to the real developments of the art world, while always keeping one foot in the world of fiction. He observes that the *Künstlerroman* has “reflected realities and consolidated stereotypes” simultaneously, and though those realities may have changed, I would suggest that the role of the artist novel has not (32).

The major difference is that today, as Kuspit postulates, “behind the glowing respect for art is a certain doubt about what it gives us” (*The Cult*, 3). Can it still be considered heroic to fight for an “authentic” life for art? And, is a life lived solely for art really an “authentic” one anymore?

The novels by Ángeles Caso and Julio Llamazares that I will discuss in this chapter, both of which are contemporary examples of the artist novel in Spain, depict artists living in a postmodern (art) world. Though both young, male artist protagonists are far removed from the historical and cultural circumstances which laid foundations for the original European artist protagonists of literature, they retain certain ingrained characteristics of the charismatic myth that those past heroes embodied. It is, without a doubt, the charismatic myth itself which conditions the way these texts’ artists imagine their profession and their own personal and
occupational identity. While Caso’s *El mundo visto desde el cielo* (1997) and Llamazares’s *El cielo de Madrid* (2005) certainly dialogue with the traditional *Künstlerroman* in this and other ways, they reveal new modalities of the artist novel for the postmodern age in which the artist is not, and never again can be, a hero in the way he was before. This reflects the changes to the Spanish art scene experienced in the Transition and post-Transition years, which coincided with “large numbers of artists who, for the first time, benefitted from state sponsorship and access to the outside world” (Smith 66). Spanish art became more cosmopolitan and more tied up with state and private money, making it harder and harder to believe in “pure” art.

Both Julio and Carlos, the novels’ painter protagonists, must come face to face with their own “interested” participation in the network of cultural producers. Simultaneously, they must acknowledge what Kuspit defines as the new vision of the artist: “Today, the artist remains an unconventional hero, but he is also a pretender—all too stylized and privileged in his unconventionality—if not quite a conventional fraud” (*The Cult*, 3). Rather than believing in the possibility of redeeming life through art as the artists of the past had done, Carlos and Julio have to concede that art can no longer make them heroes and that everything they once believed about their profession must be revised when their careers offer to bring them the fame and fortune they were taught to despise, or at least to consider with ambivalence. In the end, while both novels represent a certain degree of lamentation or even mourning for the charismatic myth’s demise, there is also a tenuous attempt at reconciliation between the artist, the reality of his profession, and even an acceptance of the “bourgeois” desire for home, family, and economic comfort.

In the following pages, I will examine briefly the sociohistorical circumstances that generated the rise of the charismatic artist as hero, both in life and in literature. Then, I will provide a succinct overview of the ways the myth has informed the traditional *Künstlerroman*
and detail the most typical characteristics of this genre. This will allow us to see better how the novels by Llamazares and Caso retain the key elements that allow us to characterize their novels as such, but also the way they break with tradition. Finally, a detailed analysis of each individual novel will reveal two different responses by artists to these social and professional changes; while Caso’s novel depicts the artist’s slip from hero status as ultimately tragic, Llamazares takes a more balanced approach, representing an artist who finds contentment as an integral member of a network and as one more position-taker in a field of position-takings—not as a heroic genius. Bourdieu’s insight provides a particularly crucial framework for this part of my study, given that his entire body of work on the field of cultural production is an attempt to demystify the charismatic myth by revealing the vast number of conscious decisions, hard work, and a supreme “interest” in the acquisition of capital (be it cultural, symbolic, or economic) that dismantles the notion of the artist as a disinterested creator motivated by Genius alone.

**Historical Origins of the Charismatic Myth of the Artist**

While literature clearly is not a faithful mirror of reality nor should it be interpreted as such, it is essential to understand the socio-historical conditions which brought about important changes in art and artists’ role in society, allowing for the development of the charismatic myth and its subsequent representation (often in an exaggerated form) in literature. Providing this historical basis is indispensable for my project because the artist novel as a genre could not have come about as it did without the staggering transformations produced in the art world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Even as these social and artistic conditions changed further in the twentieth century, the charismatic myth, rooted in nineteenth-century circumstances, continued to exist—albeit uncomfortably—in the new art world. It remained a
valid method of externally evaluating an artist’s success or failure, as well as a model upon which artists and those who marketed their work could base the artists’ public identity.

According to Bernard Smith, the artist has been a “culture hero” at three crucial occasions in human history: in ancient Greece (especially as evidenced by the myths of Prometheus and Daedalus), again in the Renaissance, and later still, in the Romantic period. Smith describes a “culture hero” as “the hero whose life-enhancing action is embodied in some form of production, either material or mental” (9). He goes on to explain that “it is within the genus of culture-hero that […] the artist as hero, is located and from which it may be said to have evolved” (9). The artist became a culture hero in the early fifteenth-century as arts and crafts began to separate from one another (13). As artists broke free from medieval-style guilds and started to work alone for wealthy patrons, they became heroic individualists who fought against “the routine, institutionalized production of the guilds” (13-14). Instead of working anonymously in groups, they founded academies and workshops in which the artists and academicians “were elevated to the status of intellectual elite” (Bain 28). It was in this period that artists and those who wrote about and defended them began to speak of “genius,” a notion that would come to form an essential facet of the nineteenth-century charismatic myth of the artist. As Smith explains, “genius” was the only way manual production could be elevated, given that it was that same “genius” which allowed for the expropriation “of the spiritual form, invention, from the material form, craft skill, in the total process of production” (15). Smith summarizes the

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59 Smith opines that the first occasion of the artist as “culture hero” is “associated with birth of technology,” long before the arts and crafts were separated (9). While they represent different phases in history, both Prometheus and Daedalus personify “the early history of technology;” they are “charismatic innovators whose inventions are aided by divine support” (11).

60 In Spain, it took much longer for artists to demand recognition of painting as a liberal rather than a manual art. As Spanish artists began to travel to Italy, they returned to their homeland
artist’s role as culture hero in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as that of “a progressive technologist,” but notes that the next time the artist plays the role of hero several centuries later, his social function “is subject to a radical inversion” (19).

The inversion in the artist’s role to which Smith refers is anchored in some sectors of the arts and humanities’ response to the industrial revolution. If the artist of the Renaissance had been a progressive intellectual and had thus been elevated to the status of hero, the artist of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was heroic precisely for being regressive, nostalgic, and even tragic, characteristics which henceforth would characterize the artist in the popular imaginary. Whereas the artist of the Renaissance was seen as heroic for his quasi-divine skills—his ability to realistically copy nature or, even more astoundingly, to improve upon it—in the nineteenth century, the product itself becomes secondary to the ideology that conditions the artist’s counter-cultural lifestyle and the modes of production. As Smith notes, this modality of culture hero became heroic specifically because of his fight to endure as a author of handicrafts in a society becoming increasingly mechanized: “It was in this survival situation that he survived into the industrial society as a new mutation of the culture hero, in order […] to sustain an old-fashioned, but human, mode of production in an increasingly inhuman, increasingly inorganic situation” (21). In order to underscore this supremely human element of the artist’s creativity, artists began to privilege their own subjectivity over the “accurate” depiction of reality, a shift that occurred in tandem with the fall of monarchies and the rise of a secular society. As fewer

ready to demand the treatment of painting as an intellectual activity that they saw there. Artists in Spain began to wage a war on the alcabalas, taxes “que gravaban a las mercancías con el diez por ciento de su valor, y que los artistas trataron de no pagar, alegando que lo que daba valor a sus obras no era el material con el que estaban realizadas o el esfuerzo físico que requería su ejecución, sino el trabajo intelectual” (Portús 88). In 1677, when Calderón de la Barca published his “Deposición a favor de los profesores de la pintura,” this liberation from the taxes had still not been achieved, though it did come to pass within the following decade.
artists were needed to paint portraits of nobility or to commemorate battle scenes, and as there were fewer ecclesiastical commissions to satisfy, artists became “increasingly dissociated from the mainstream of social life,” as Alison Bain observes (28). She goes on to note that “this notion of separateness came to be regarded as an essential quality of any true artist,” and, in fact, became a fundamental building block of the charismatic myth of the artist (28).

Whereas the art of the past had had clearly delineated social functions which in turn dictated the artist’s own social role, the new societal position of the artist was to produce art that was the least “useful” or “practical” it could possibly be. Martha Woodmansee notes that today it is common practice to treat the arts as “identifiable and distinct from the crafts, sciences, and all other human activities,” in other words, to treat it “as if it were universal and timeless” (1). Yet, until the nineteenth century, the arts had not only “intervened directly in human life,” but they were attributed value based on their “success or failure in serving those broad human purposes” (12). In 1785, Phillip Karl Moritz asserted, for the first time, that works of art were “self-sufficient totalities,” produced simply to be contemplated […] ‘disinterestedly,’ purely for the

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61 It is essential to note that traditional forms of art—portrait painting, historical painting, etc.—did not disappear entirely, even as a sea change occurred in the art world. As Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz point out, “in each phase of historical development, new social types appear alongside the old, without ever entirely displacing them” (6). They observe that this was the case in the nineteenth century when the world “embraced the fêted darling of his prince and country just as much as the slouch-hatted Bohemian living out his conception of genius on the social periphery” (7).

62 When one considers that it was precisely the utility of the painted image that justified painting’s social status in Spain during the Renaissance and in the Counterreformation period, it is clear that seeing painting as an “impractical” activity was indeed a radical shift. As Portús explains, the “usefulness of painting,” namely the “eficacia doctrinal del arte” was used to justify “la alta consideración social e intelectual que se debe al pintor” in the Early Modern era (22).
enjoyment of their internal attributes and relationships” (Woodmansee 11). The result of this ideology was the idea that the opinion of anyone but a fellow artist or a person with artistic sensibility was inconsequential. To use Bourdieu’s terminology, artists became—at least nominally—producers for other producers, rather than for public or critics. If art really was totally independent and autonomous, then the public’s reaction mattered very little. In fact, trying to please the masses became actively discouraged, and this flagrant disregard for the “bourgeois” public supposedly incapable of understanding or appreciating artworks formed another integral part of the charismatic myth. Woodmansee sums up such a mindset this way:

In terms of earlier theory, art that fails to affect and so to achieve the approval of an audience is without merit. On the new theory art’s autonomy, however, such unfortunate facts of reception have no ultimate consequences. They are not indicative of an imperfect work, but of the imperfect sensibility […] of the audience. (21)

And yet this ideal of disinterestedness and the desire to rid oneself of the dreaded “public” was not viable, even in the nineteenth century which generated it.

As the discussion of the Bohemian’s appearance in Chapter 1 demonstrates, the rupture with a bourgeois public was key to the new identity that many artists assumed in the nineteenth century. According to Bätschmann, the artist of this period was “liberated” in every sense of the word. He was given “political and creative freedom, the liberty to trade and exhibit, the freedom of art from any imposed purpose, [or] moral license,” but freedom came at a price (58). One of liberation’s most unexpected consequences was the “difficult problem of artistic legitimation,” a

63 This notion would be echoed by Kant several years later in Critique of Judgment. For Kant, “a judgment can only be aesthetic when it is disinterested, that is, free from any desires, needs, or interest in the actual existence of objects apprehended, which might distort that ‘pure’ appreciation” (Grenfell and Hardy 39).
problem which Bätschmann maintains “is still unsolved today” (58). Whereas, in the past, the artist could count on legitimation from patrons like the church or the monarchy, they became subject to the judgment of the market and its buyers, many of whom now belonged to the growing middle class. As Elizabeth Wilson suggests, the primary antagonism between the artist and the bourgeoisie “gave rise to a paradoxical situation in which to succeed for the artist was to fail” (18). Bourdieu calls this phenomenon, which would come to characterize artists’ relationship with fame and money for more than a century to come, “a generalized game of ‘loser wins,’ [based] on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies” (39). 64

While it is obvious that most artists wanted or needed to make money and many desired success in one form or another, the public’s opinion was held in such low regard that they criticized those who were successful as having sold out or given in to the vulgar tastes of an uncultured, though moneyed, middle class. If their art was not accepted or understood by that middle class, the artists, “instead of blaming themselves, lash[ed] out at the hacks and the unscrupulous publishers and book dealers for thinking of nothing but their own selfish ‘interests,'” as Woodmansee notes (29). The new sources of legitimation—such as academies—the new kinds of patrons, art dealers, and of course, the public, were all deemed unsatisfactory judges of quality and importance of a work of art. The only audience considered suitable to offer

64 The basing of an artist’s success or failure on ultra-subjective criteria has led to the development of the “economic world reversed” or the “game of loser wins” of which Bourdieu writes. This strange economy is one which “excludes the pursuit of profit,” making it different from a business economy; it “condemns honors and temporal greatness” as it rejects (at least nominally) consecration by academic institutions, museums, and even some “commercial” galleries, thereby differentiating itself from the economy of power; and finally, as it often considers a virtue “the absence of any academic training or consecration,” it even differs from the economy of “institutionalized cultural authority” (Bourdieu 39).
its opinions was one composed of other artists. Bourdieu refers to this shift as the affirmation of “the absolute autonomy of the creator” (114). That is to say that as a result of Romanticism’s reaction to the market and the affirmation of the “creative genius’s” power, the artist could “claim to recognize as recipient of his art none but an alter ego—another ‘creator’—whose understanding of works of art presupposes an identical ‘creative’ disposition” (114).\(^{65}\) However, as Bätschmann observes, this need to be legitimated by other producers, based on “maintaining [the artist] was a genius or through the testimony of his life” led to unfavorable consequences, like “insecurity, self-doubt, paralysis, and melancholy” (66). Artists had to compete with one another to prove the “truth” or the “genuineness” of their artistic conviction, which led, in turn, to the conscious living-out of the stereotypes that we are discussing here as the “charismatic myth of the artist.”

Bätschmann identifies four major factors of the myth that artists embraced in the nineteenth century. First, the popular notion developed that artist could (and probably should) “suffer a lack of recognition or even humiliation by his contemporaries and institutions” (67). Second, the inner drive that inspires the artist’s passion should turn him, if the need arises, into a “martyr to true art,” and thirdly, that that drive should be of “religious intensity” (67). Finally, the artist should be as anti-establishment as possible, “resist[ing] the authorities, regardless of his own comfort or financial security” (67). There were practical, as well as ideological reasons for believing in the myth. One the one hand, it helped to impose definitional parameters where none

\(^{65}\) Bourdieu characterizes two general sub-fields within the field of cultural production which are differentiated based on their relationship to the audience. The “field of restricted production” is the one in which “producers produce for other producers,” and the one in which the notion of “art for art’s sake” is most likely to flourish (39). The field of large-scale production” is composed of artists who “produce for the market” (39). The more autonomous the field is, the more pronounced is this division between the restricted and large-scale producers.
existed. As Bain notes, given that “there are no degrees or licenses, prerequisites or credentials to authenticate occupational status,” artistic identity is often constructed upon the basis of “myths and stereotypes” (25). It also served as a coping mechanism. Røyseng, Mangset, and Spord Borgen observe that, even today, artists embrace and believe it, at least in part, because “it helps to make the risks and insecurity of artistic life seem bearable” (3).

Artists are not the only ones to believe the myth. Lawrence Alloway suggests that even after an artist has become consecrated, famous, and even wealthy, these same characteristics continue to be attributed popularly to him or her: “the sentiment we have for the struggling artist often stays attached to affluent artists when the phase of innovation and hardship is over” (*Network*, 172). Included in such a “sentiment” is the notion of the “lonely artist” who works with a “small self-supportive alliance” rather than having a real, direct interaction or communication with the market, and a constant resistance to the public and the establishment in all its forms (172). Yet, Alloway notes, “these may be no more than stereotypes that artists and dealers tell their clients and to themselves” (172). Alloway’s comment reveals the charismatic myth’s wide reach—even its necessity—which, though it may be utilized to different ends for different groups, is pervasive throughout the art world, finding adherents to its doctrine among artists, gallery owners and dealers, museum curators, and university professors. Bourdieu refers to this pervasiveness as a kind of “collective bad faith,” built on “a denial of the economy” which “helps to support the effort of individual bad faith” (50). Given this collective denial of the traditional economic world, artists need to play the game and at least pay lip service to the myth if they wish to advance symbolically, and eventually, economically. The only “unforgivable transgression,” Bourdieu notes, is to “call into question, not a way of playing the game, but the game itself and the belief which supports it” (81). As I will explore in the next section, the late-
nineteenth and early twentieth-century artist novel helped to perpetuate these stereotypes among artists and readers alike.

**The Traditional Künstlerroman**

The overwhelming changes to the art world doubtlessly affected the way artists were portrayed in literature, though that same literature was the source of new stereotypes about the artist’s life and work. Many of those stereotypes were based on the realities discussed above: the art-buying public’s changing face, the crises of legitimation provoked by the artists’ newfound freedom from their traditional patrons, and the replacement of an external and “universal” ideal of beauty with a compulsion to represent an individually subjective vision of the world. In this social environment, the Künstlerroman was born. It is not enough to simply define *Künstlerroman* as a novel about artists, as there are specific traits that mark these novels as such which extend beyond their protagonists’ profession. Evy Varsamopoulou defines the *Künstlerroman* as “the narrative account of the formation, development, education, [and] psychology of an artist, as a special type of individual” (xi, emphasis in original). According to Roberta Seret, the *Künstlerroman* is the tale of the artist’s spiritual, social, and psychological development, thus differentiating it from its sister genre, the Bildungsroman, “as it involved a journey of mind and soul, a movement away from the materialistic to the abstract” (2). She notes that the protagonists’ ultimate goal is “creativity and an unlimited expression of [their] soul[s]” (2). Though a substantial number of critics since have devoted book-length studies to the *Künstlerroman* as a genre, Maurice Beebe’s seminal 1964 study, continues to be an important reference point for almost all of those who have followed him.66 Beebe outlined a trajectory in

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66 Lia Ogno asserts that the first scholar to study the “artist novel” as such was Herbert Marcuse, who, in 1920, “llevo[ó] a cabo una original tesis de licenciatura sobre La ‘novela de artista’ en la literatura alemana” (238). Though Beebe was the first to develop and coin the notion of the
the genre’s development that most scholars continue to accept as valid, even if in recent decades they have begun to question some of Beebe’s other premises. While it is not my goal here to detail the entire genesis and expansion of the European *Künstlerroman*—Beebe’s text is (among others) a useful source for that—a short summary will prove worthwhile as we examine the characteristics typical of the traditional artist hero.

According to Beebe, who is seconded by critics like Varsamopoulou and Francisco Plata, the *Künstlerroman* traces its roots to both Goethe and Rousseau, for different reasons. Citing the former’s *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774) and the *Bildungsroman* titled *Wilhelm Meister’s Lehrjahre* (1795), Beebe posits that Goethe had a fundamental role to play in the genre’s development “because a dominant theme in his work […] is the conflict between art and life” (27). As we will see, this particular concern is one of the characteristics which has persisted most strongly in the contemporary *Künstlerroman*, including the novels in question in this chapter. Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1782), Beebe asserts, also helped to pave the way for the artist novel in a formal sense. He notes that effect of Rousseau’s work and his many imitators “was to change the emphasis in fiction from outside the self to analysis of the hero’s psychology” (49).

The interest in the art and life conflict, as well as the increased curiosity about the inner workings of the artist’s mind culminated in the production of the Romantic *Künstlerroman*. In the novels of this period we find an amplification of the charismatic myth’s characteristics which authors were able to carry out to its ultimate consequences, especially the artist’s willingness to be a martyr to the “true” art, even at the expense of his or her life. Varsamopoulou suggests that the first and most emblematic of these artist novels is Novalis’s 1802 novel, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which she calls a “generational turning point,” given that it “reflects the change

“divided self,” in 1920 Marcuse already noted that the artist novel was only possible “desde la pérdida de la unidad entre el arte y la vida, desde su ruptura” (Ogno 239).
from a certain medieval notion of the artist as a skilled craftsman only, to the Longinian or modern (Romantic) ideas of the work of art as defined by something beyond teachable skills” (xi). In other words, it is Novalis’s novel in which we first see in literary representation the shift which was already taking place in the actual art world: the recognition of genius and lifestyle, rather than the appreciation of the product itself as the mode of determining the artist’s success or failure.

In the wake of Romanticism, and in many European literary traditions, the artist novel proliferated widely. Honoré de Balzac’s *Le Chef d’oeuvre inconnu* (1831), Emile Zola’s *L’oeuvre* (1886), Thomas Mann’s *Tonio Kröger* (1903), and James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) are just a few of the most famous examples of the *Künstlerroman* in the European tradition. The vogue of the artist novel arrived later in Spain than it did north of the Pyrenees. As Joaquín Casalduero observes, “el tema del artista no abunda en la literatura española del siglo XIX” (cited in Plata 42). As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, there were some imitators of Henri Murger’s *Scènes de la vie Bohème*, such as Pérez Escrich’s *El frac azul* (1864), but the mode of confessional artist novel which represented the creative man’s conflict with the world around him, was not particularly popular until the early twentieth century. Francisco Plata’s 2009 dissertation, *La novela del artista: El Künstlerroman en la literatura española finisecular* is one of the few attempts to address critically this theme in a Spanish context. As Plata demonstrates, the artist novel was cultivated by some of the most representative authors of the day, among them, Pío Baroja with *Camino de Perfección* (1902),

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67 The majority of the extant critical texts about the *Künstlerroman* are centered on German, British, French, and American examples of the genre. Though there are an appreciable number of Spanish artist novels, they have rarely received the same attention as those of other national literary traditions.
Emilia Pardo Bazán with *La Quimera* (1905), and Vicente Blasco Ibáñez with *La maja desnuda* (1906). Even if Spanish authors began to write artist novels later, and despite the fact that the world of art in Spain was much different than it was in France, Germany, or England, the Spanish authors created artist characters who had much in common with their northern European counterparts. As Linda Huf suggests, the artist protagonists in a large number of European *Künstlerromane* are portrayed as heroes, “whose stereotypical character and conflict make [them] predictable to a tee” (3). Glossing Beebe’s study, Huf describes the traditional artist protagonist succinctly as “The Hero with Creative Genius,” noting that he is “always the same man—sensitive, dreamy, passive, bookish, egocentric, tormented, and misunderstood” (3). In 1967, Beebe observed that there had been “little historical progression in the concept of artistic temperament” (65). He conceded that different variations of the archetype had arisen up to that point, but maintained that “the main characteristics of the artist are unchanged from the first of the artist-novels to those of our time” (65). In 2014, Beebe’s statement remains valid. The novels by Llamazares and Caso feature protagonists who know by heart the role that the artist should play and the personal characteristics he should have if he wants to succeed. As their fictional forebears did, both Carlos and Julio attempt to live out the myth in terms of the artist’s fundamental characteristics; their difference from their predecessors lies in the impossibility to carry it out, even in the fictional universe they inhabit.

Perhaps the most fundamental of the characteristics that mark the artist hero in the traditional *Künstlerroman* is the notion that the artist is inherently different from the average

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68 While these particular examples feature visual artist-protagonists, we could find other Spanish *Künstlerromane* with author-protagonists as well. In fact, as Lia Ogno has noted, the definition of “artist” which constitutes an “artist novel” can be further expanded to include those who do not necessarily make art, “ni tan siquiera […] personajes que serían *capaces de crear*, aunque no lo hagan, sino […] personajes cuya vida de ficción viene modulada por el arte” (239).
man. Nearly all critics of the genre mention, in one way or another, the idea that the artist is a special individual. Beebe was the first to suggest this, explaining that the artist protagonist is portrayed as a “superior being,” either because he is “a recipient of a divine inspiration” or if he takes the place of God himself, becoming “a god in a Godless universe, forced to control, manipulate, or create new worlds through a careful, voluntary process” (27). This difference from the masses is usually explained by the artist’s unique “sensibility,” that is, a particularly fortuitous way of experiencing the world around them which others cannot even dream of accessing. Carl D. Malmgren suggests that concept of artistic sensibility is linked to a particularly acute “awareness or consciousness” (8). “The artist is always aware that something is going on,” he notes (8). And yet, that same sensibility that makes the artist more perceptive of his surroundings is also traditionally “diacritically marked by its wholesale alienation—psychological and social, economic and cultural, stylistic and aesthetic” (9). It is this kind of alienation which makes the artist feel alone even in a crowd, since the masses do not understand him and he has no desire to stoop to their level. At times, the incompatibility with the mundane realities of life takes the form, in literature, of a retreat from the world, the seeking out of an ivory tower. However, it may also be expressed through an embrace of dandyism or by seeking refuge in a Bohemian community in which the artist can fraternize with like-minded artist types.

The second distinguishing feature of the Künstlerroman’s protagonists is linked to his supposedly inherent difference: the conflict between life and art. Beebe referred to this conflict with the term “the Divided Self,” and upon it he bases his entire study. For Beebe, the Divided

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69 Beebe founds his concept of the divided self on Karl Jung’s notion that artists have a different kind of psychological make-up than other “normal” people. Beebe quotes Jung: “On the one side he is a human being with a personal life, while on the other side he is an impersonal creative process. […] The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purposes through him” (10). As Varsamopoulou has noted, Beebe
Self is made up of two components which are constantly in opposition to each other. On the one hand is the longing for the “Ivory Tower,” or the desire to “exalt art above life” (13). This position implies the belief “that the artist can make use of his life only if he stands aloof,” and ultimately “equates art with religion rather than experience” (13). On the other hand, the “Sacred Fount” element of the artist’s divided personality pushes him to live his life as fully as possible. Shunning the monastic devotion required by the Ivory Tower, the artist who drinks from the Sacred Fount “equates art with experience and assumes that the true artist is one who lives not less, but more [...] intensely than others” (13). Beebe believes that the artist-hero is, thus, “the artist-man wavering between the Ivory Tower and the Sacred Fount, between the ‘holy’ or aesthetic demands of his mission as artist and his natural desire as a human being to participate in the life around him” (18). In one form or another, this notion of the divided self is reiterated by most scholars of the artist novel. Huf, Malmgren, and Varsamopoulou, citing Beebe, use the same term to describe the artist protagonists they analyze, and Seret claims that for the artist character who has his roots in Romanticsm, a “Unity of Being is impossible” to achieve (1).

Given the disdain for the public and all other sources of legitimation that did not emanate from the field of restricted production—that is, from other artists—it makes sense that if the artist-protagonist was to be a hero, he would necessarily need to be a failure in terms of his

“gives credence to a metaphysical category of the artist as a certain type of human being,” as have many of those who have followed him (xvii). However, as we have seen, even artistic actions which appear the result of “art realizing its purposes through him” are actually the result of conscious position-takings in the cultural field.

One particularly salient example of an artist of the “Ivory Tower” tradition in Spanish literary history is Emilia Pardo Bazán’s artist protagonist, Silvio Lago, of La Quimera. As Marina Mayoral has described, Silvio lives motivated by the chimera, which becomes a symbol for “[lo que] impulsa al hombre al heroísmo [...] Silvio deja no sólo la vida en el empeño sino cuanto en ella hay de apetecible y grato: familia, amigos, amor” (37-38).
ability to garner wealth and fame from other sources. As Bourdieu explains, the “relationship to the audience” becomes one of the determining factors “for evaluating producers and their products” (46). The “degree of success with the audience” is taken as evidence of “their interest in the economic and political profits secured by success” (46). “True” art was now classified as such based on the degree to which it was “useless” or “productive,” and so, in an increasingly bourgeois society that prized savings, wise investments, and utility, the only true artist had to be one who failed among the politically and economically dominant class. As Plata remarks, the artist character never receives his glory in his lifetime. The prophet without honor in his homeland, the artist “es condenado por la misma sociedad que lo alienta. El artista es genio, mago, y sacerdote, sí, pero también maldito” (1). The fact that the artist is a genius means, as Bätchmann observes, that “[he] is free of the rules, but this makes it impossible for him to be adequately acknowledged in his own time, and his recognition is postponed to the future” (67).

As Lynda Nead writes, citing Balzac’s short story Le Chef d’ouevre inconnu of 1831, creativity was expressed “through a narrative of revision and uncertainty, frustration and failure, rather than through a final image displayed triumphantly to an audience” (59-60). When artists in Künstlerromane are faced with the prospect of success, whether it be in the form of economic gratification, academic consecration, or—even more difficult to accept—appreciation by the masses, it provokes, at the very least, and inner conflict, if not an outward one with the other members of the field.

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71 Bätchmann also observes, that “the artist as failure [is] a theme that recurs frequently in nineteenth-century novels,” citing Zola’s protagonist, Claude Lantier, of L’Oeuvre as a chief example. Claude’s failure as an academic artist is a mark of success among other producers at first, but later, even those in the field of restricted production begin to pity him.
Finally, the traditional *Künstlerroman*’s artist is almost always engaged in a sort of quest or voyage. Because the artist is nearly always depicted as a hero—many times, a tragic one—it is not surprising that he or she should be involved in the fulfillment of a quest. As Smith observes, the culture hero or artist hero shares with the typical hero certain defining characteristics: “the typical hero or heroine is separated in early life, or separates himself or herself, from family, tribe or nation, to embark upon, or be compelled towards, a series of adventures, physical, mental or spiritual” (8). As we have seen, the artist’s separation from the rest of the world, often marked by childhood demonstrations of his or her genius or otherness, is part of this early heroic separation. The quest upon which the artist embarks is often a quest for identity through the creative process. Beebe notes that the “quest for self” takes place in the artist novel “because the self is almost always in conflict with society” (6). Seret refers to the artist’s “voyage into creativity,” which ultimately leads him or her to “look into his [or her] soul, draw upon his [or her] imagination, and create his [or her] own world” (3). In short, the artist, struggling with a divided personality and a world which does not understand either one of his or her selves, must embark on a quest to understand his or her own special individuality and, at the same time, create a world through art in which he or she can find a sense of belonging.

Taken together, the characteristics mentioned here form the archetypal picture of the artist, drawn from the nineteenth century. While based on artistic and social realities, we must remember that the *Künstlerroman*’s artist characters of any age are just that: literary characters. As Alexander Sturgis reminds us, the nineteenth-century view of the artist as a “melancholic outsider” is “a distortion” (7). He rightly notes that as far as the realities of artistic life in the nineteenth century are concerned, [this view] omits much of the consequence. It is very little concerned with the business
of art, the practicalities of making, promoting, and selling pictures, which
developed in new ways during the period. It prefers to focus on the heroic conflict
with society and with academies, juries and artists, and on rejection, poverty and
even failure rather than on success that rewarded the efforts of artists whose work
conformed to what was required. (7)

Though many of the elements which caused the artist to be seen as a misunderstood rebel
continued to be replicated in the modern *Künstlerroman*, as we will see, there is no longer a
place for a hero in these postmodern novels, in large part because the very value of art as an ideal
to which to aspire is questioned.

**Julio Llamazares’s *El cielo de Madrid* (2005)**

Llamazares locates the origins of *El cielo de Madrid* in an article of the same name he
wrote more than a decade before publishing the novel.72 In this article, Llamazares waxes poetic
about Madrid’s sky, praising the cerulean expanse of its sunny afternoons and the fiery oranges
and reds of its sunsets that have been the obsession of great painters for centuries. He also
suggests that the relationship of the city’s inhabitants to its sky is not to be found in any other
metropolis in the world. Madrid and its sky draw people to it, Llamazares wrote, and “al
contrario que a otras ciudades, todos hemos venido a Madrid para conquistar el cielo” (25). It is
precisely with the hope of “reaching the sky” that he and his friends leave the provinces for
Madrid in the novel, though for each of them, that “conquest” means something quite different.
The sky over their heads may be the same, but the symbolic sky they seek is much more

72 In her 2005 article in *El País* detailing Llamazares’s presentation of *El cielo de Madrid* in the
Madrid’s Círculo de Bellas Artes, Andrea Rizzi records the author’s comments on the origins of
the novel. Llamazares explained: “En el año 1992 había una revista que se llamaba Lápiz.
Querían sacar un monográfico sobre Madrid y me pidieron un artículo. Se llamaba ‘El cielo de
Madrid.’ De ahí surge la novela” (no pag.). This article appeared with minor variations in *El País*
on October 10, 1993, under the same title.
individual. As Llamazares explains, there are two different “skies” in the text: the literal blue expanse “que Carlos mira y pinta continuamente,” and a metaphorical sky “que simboliza los sueños y las ilusiones de Carlos y todos sus amigos” (Mahmoud and Llamazares 255). And yet, *El cielo de Madrid* is not exactly the story of dreams fulfilled, but rather of dreams redefined and reimagined when they meet with reality.

As I will demonstrate in the final section of this chapter, Caso’s novel reveals—with a certain degree of melancholy—that the charismatic myth is untenable in the modern world (almost implying that it was, at some point in time, tenable). However, Llamazares’s *El cielo de Madrid* challenges the charismatic myth and its implications for an artist novel in a more fundamental way by suggesting an alternate path. If the artist hero can no longer exist—and Carlos learns he cannot—the contemporary artist can and should look for a different kind of fulfillment. As Eva París-Huesca has observed, *El cielo de Madrid* represents the Transition in Spain as “un fenómeno marcado por la necesidad económica, cultural y estructural fuertemente relacionada con el capitalismo” (140–41). Within such a representation of the Transition, the image of the charismatic artist cannot exist unproblematically. Llamazares explores the way this myth meets with the reality both of the art world and of Spanish culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, thus challenging the *Künstlerroman*’s traditional character development, structure, and denouement. Ultimately, *El cielo de Madrid* becomes the artist’s self-conscious reflection on the conspicuous creation of an artistic identity, an identity which is not the inevitable and authentic result of artistic genius, sustainable by disinterestedness alone, but rather one that is the product of hard work, branding, marketing, and living out stereotypes that seem appropriate to the artistic lifestyle. The novel’s final section even implies an attempt to reconcile the historically antithetical “bourgeois” lifestyle and the “artistic personality.”
Llamazares’s novel is example of the “confessional” Künstlerroman.\textsuperscript{73} El cielo de Madrid is written as a fictional autobiography, penned by Carlos in first person upon his son’s birth, for whom he hopes to chronicle the story of his artistic career.\textsuperscript{74} The reader learns of Carlos’s development as a painter, beginning with his late adolescent and young adult years spent in the Madrid of the 1980s during the Movida, though Llamazares has expressly stated that this text “no se trata de una novela sobre la movida” (Rizzi, no pag). Neither does this novel imitate the style of the Movida, Conte asserts: “[Llamazares] es dueño de una prosa tradicional, respetuosa y nada rupturista, por lo que, siendo un producto ‘de la movida’, nunca adoptó sus formas” (no pag). Llamazares records the story of Carlos’s early bohemian days as he tried to “make it” in the art world without knowing very well what that meant, his smashing success in the mid- to late 1980s, his dissatisfaction with the gallery scene and his retreat to the wilderness, and, finally, his disenchantment with the wilderness as well, which leads him back to Madrid.

\textsuperscript{73} Both Llamazares’s and Caso’s novels are examples of the “confessional” artist novel Beebe describes, which often deals with themes of “the divided self, art as compensation, and the principle of distance,” all of which appear in El mundo visto desde el cielo and El cielo de Madrid (54). Beebe also notes that the artist protagonists in such texts are generally “so self-absorbed that they have difficulty getting outside themselves and hence are naturally at odds with their environment” (54). It is here that Caso and Llamazares diverge from the pattern—their artists eventually are able to free themselves from their extreme introspection and reflect critically on the world around them, though that reflection has different results in each text.

\textsuperscript{74} Several critics have assumed that Carlos is a foil for Llamazares himself, an assumption typical of critics of the artist novel. Beebe believes that “portraits of the artist help us to understand the novelist who wrote it” (4) and Seret maintains that “the line differentiating the author from his hero [in the Künstlerroman] is often tenuous” (5). In his interview with Llamazares, Salwa Mohamed Mahmoud begins a question with the assertion “Carlos, el narrador, o más bien Julio Llamazares…” (253). However, Llamazares responds by noting that Carlos is not purely autobiographical: “Todo personaje surge de la experiencia de la realidad, pero la personalidad del novelista no tiene porqué reflejarse necesariamente en uno de sus personajes. […] Hay muchas cosas que comparto con Carlos, el protagonista, pero otras no” (253).
*El cielo de Madrid* is divided into four parts that reflect four distinct moments in Carlos’s life and career. Though retrospective, their flow is chronological and ordered, leading Rafael Conte to call the text “la más hilada de las [novelas de Llamazares]” (no pag). In what the author calls “un homenaje explícito a *La Divina Comedia* de Dante,” the text’s sections are titled “El Limbo,” “El Infierno,” “El Purgatorio,” and “El Cielo” (Mahmoud and Llamazares 255). With this four-part structure, Llamazares’s homage differs in an obvious but significant way from Dante’s tripartite poem. Whereas “Limbo” forms a small part of Dante’s vision of Hell, Llamazares separates it as its own section in his novel and its importance in the rest of the text is a central one, which I will explain in greater detail below. As Thomas Rendall observes, the number three, in Dante’s time, “was the number of God,” whereas the number four “was the number of the world, of the material” (151). Llamazares’s four-part structure in the novel is fitting, given that the quasi-divine, god-like artist is no longer relevant or viable in the world his novel portrays, and, when his protagonist ultimately finds his “cielo” it is located squarely within the human realm. Llamazares has stated that *El cielo de Madrid*, “de alguna forma, es una novela contra el éxito. El tipo de éxito que está vacío,” and the novel’s four parts reveal the narrator’s changing relationship to his success in a contemporary art market as he revises his relationship to the charismatic myth (Rizzi, no pag). Bain explains that many artists must come to such a realization as they progress in their careers: “Although myths of marginality, alienation, ‘outsider’ status and creative freedom remain potent and have a strong hold on artists themselves, the reality of the marketplace requirements currently dictate a different set of

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75 Llamazares’s homage to Dante is observable “tanto en la estructura como en las citas de cada una de las partes” (Mahmoud 255). Though not nearly as explicit or prevalent, Caso’s novel also makes references to *The Divine Comedy*. Áurea considers herself a kind of Beatrice whose task it is to lead Julio to his Paradise: “Si soy Beatriz, debo llevarte de la mano al Paraiso, ya sabes” (155).
demands” (29). It is precisely this progression that Llamazares’s novel depicts, and as Carlos grows in his career and becomes familiar with the way the art market functions, he lets go of some of his beliefs corresponding to the myth, even if he does not give himself over completely to the commercial pole of his field. The process is represented in four phases that correspond to the four sections of the text: in “El Limbo” Carlos dreams of success; in “El Infierno” success is achieved; in “El Purgatorio,” success is rejected; and finally, in “El Cielo,” success is redefined. Several elements of this development are signs that El cielo de Madrid represents a new, more self-aware, contemporary modality of artist novel, especially in terms of its implications for the novel’s end, as a closer look at each of the individual sections will reveal.

**El Limbo: Dreams of Success**

The novel begins with Carlos’s memory of drinking with his friend Rico in a bar also called “El Limbo” in 1985, the year when his career and life changed drastically. As he and Rico talk, waiting on a hot summer evening for the dark clouds building outside to unleash a torrent of rain, Carlos contemplates the sky painted on the bar’s ceiling, “aquel cielo negro y gris bajo el que […] estaba sentado” (34). At the time, he is not sure why, but he senses that once he leaves the bar – once he steps out of (El) Limbo – things will never be the same again, and he is right. His long-time girlfriend Eva leaves him, disappointed that he does not want to live a “normal” life, at the same time that his career begins to skyrocket. In time, Carlos comes to long for the artificial sky of the bar, the one that covered him when his ideas about the future were equally inauthentic, but more comfortable and safe. The night in El Limbo in 1985 marks the end of the life Carlos describes in the novel’s first section, his bohemian beginnings in Madrid in the chaotic years of the Movida. This was the time when Carlos and his friends arrived in the city “con la maleta y el sueño a cuestas,” searching out other artist-types with whom to live “en
buhardillas o en pisos de alquiler que cambiábamos cada poco en función de las circunstancias y de nuestras posibilidades y pasábamos los días en una especie de larga fiesta” (28-29). Carlos admits that in these early days, he and his friends had no interest in politics, only in art and a life lived for it, an attitude that pitted their generation against the progres, the leftists ideologically opposed to the Franco regime: “Anteponíamos la vida y el arte a la política. Cuestión que provocaba no pocas ni pequeñas discusiones con los que habían hecho de ésta prácticamente una religión” (79). In every sense of the word, Carlos and his friends were in a kind of limbo – economically, professionally, romantically, and even politically – as they lived for art and lived in the moment.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the representation of Bohemia was common in artist novels after Henry Murger originally depicted it in his *Scènes de la vie Bohème* (1845). As Beebe notes, all manifestations of Bohemia – from the Parisian version of the nineteenth-century Latin Quarter to the American “beatnik” vogue of the 1960s – are “rooted in the romantic concept of art as experience” (78). However, though those living it may not recognize (or want to recognize) it, Bohemia is, for most, “a way-station to success and a fitting domain only for young people” (Beebe 77). It is a place for dreamers and one that welcomes believers in the charismatic myth. Wilson asserts that the bohemian “is, above all, … the personification of a myth” exemplified by “transgression, excess sexual outrage, eccentric behavior, outrageous appearance, nostalgia and poverty (3,6). Wilson notes that artists and writers who depicted Bohemia in their works “fixed their own transient circumstances as permanent or archetype examples of how the artist ought to live” (6, emphasis in original). These archetypes clearly have had an influence on Carlos, who,

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76 Murger’s Bohemia was subject to a number of adaptations and transformations in a relatively short time. Theodore Barrière adapted them for the stage in 1849, and, decades later Puccini’s modeled his popular opera of 1896 on Murger’s work (Beebe 77).
when confronted by his girlfriend’s desire to live a more stable and “normal” life, responds that his life lived “a caballo entre la bohemia y la marginalidad [es] la única [vida] que parecía acorde con [su] trabajo de pintor’ (111). It is evident that Carlos’s professional identity is tied up in a very meaningful way with his personal lifestyle.

As we have seen, the charismatic myth could offer refuge and serve as a kind of coping mechanism for artists whose existence was precarious and unstable. In Movida-era Spain, that insecurity was great and Carlos’s belief in the myth understandable. In his chronicle of the Movida, José Manuel Lechado observes that it was quite difficult for Spanish painters to exhibit in this period, given that “había pocas galerías, y las que había funcionaban de modo conservador” (202-03). Carlos and his friends revel in their Bohemia and their myths, justifying their precarious economic situations through an assertion that there is no other job for which they are suited, no other “vocation” to which they have ever been drawn. Carlos remembers that, at that point in his life, he acknowledged his agency to determine every aspect of his life but one:

Yo había elegido mi vida dentro de mis circunstancias y de mis posibilidades. Lo hice cuando comencé a estudiar, al elegir la carrera, y volví a hacerlo cuando decidí dejarla. Lo hice cuando me vine a Madrid … Lo único que no había elegido era la profesión de pintor. (66)

Given that the Movida was, as Hamilton Stapell describes it, a movement that “symbolized the belief that there is something more to life than simple economic production and consumption,” this belief in the charismatic myth and in Bohemia were a perfect fit (109). The limited possibilities for exhibition, the certainty that they were participating in an artistic rite of passage by living as bohemians, and the freedom from external demands on their work allowed Carlos and his artist friends believe even more strongly in the notion that they were “special”
individuals and that their art was “pure,” key elements of both the charismatic myth and the artist-hero character of the *Künstlerroman*. Bourdieu asserts that the position of “pure” artist is “an institution of freedom, constructed against the ‘bourgeoisie’ (in the artists’ sense) and against institutions” (63).\(^7\) The artist protagonist always has been, to a degree, most comfortable when recognition, fame and fortune seem like nothing more than pipe dreams, when he can blame his anonymity, poverty, or reduced audience the uncultured public, the money-hungry art dealers, or the sell-outs and hacks who *have* made it, and thus strengthen an artistic identity via the charismatic myth. So, what happens to the artistic identities built around this myth when, as in Carlos’s case, the dreams for success are actually realized?

**El Infierno: Success Achieved**

In the novel’s second section, “El Infierno,” Carlos’s days of anonymous Bohemia abruptly end. He goes from being a stereotypical artist protagonist – the bohemian genius whose talent goes unrecognized – to a rising star. This celebrity is woefully incompatible with the charismatic myth of the artist, but it more accurately reflects the workings of the cultural field. In this second section of the text, the *Movida* is over for all intents and purposes and the art world in Spain has been transformed.\(^7\) As Paul Julian Smith explains, after the PSOE’s electoral victory in 1982, the Spanish art scene changed wildly, as that year “marked the end of the Transition to

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\(^7\) This belief can only exist “at the lowest degree of institutionalization” and in this field of competition, there come to exist “incentives and gratification for emancipatory endeavors” (Bourdieu 63). As soon as an artist moves closer to consecration, either by a bourgeois or mass public, these notions of purity are difficult to maintain.

\(^7\) Stapell marks the cooptation of the *Movida* by Enrique Tierno Galván’s administration between 1984 and 1986 as the end of the movement as a spontaneous manifestation. He explains its allure for the local government this way: “When it was clear that the movida represented an inclusive, participatory, optimistic and modern culture, the mayor and the other political elite appropriated the movement in order to further distance Madrid from its authoritarian past ” (95). For more on this appropriation, see Stapell, Chapter 4.
democracy and coincided with the emergence of large numbers of artists who, for the first time, benefitted from both state sponsorship and access to the outside world” (66). New museums and galleries opened their doors as Spain opened itself up again after years of repression and there was “feverish coverage of the new Spanish artists in the press … which gave rise to charges of consumerism” (Smith 67). In the novel, Carlos experiences these changes first hand. In the mid-1980s, he earns his first solo show, an important gallery picks him up as one of their chosen painters, and the press features him as an up-and-comer. He recognizes that, “a final de la década de los ochenta, el panorama artístico y literario empezó a cambiar en España, [y] yo comprendí que había llegado mi momento” (126). Carlos’s work begins to sell well after success at the art fair ARCO and a series of newspaper articles and interviews thrust him headlong into the public eye – though he acknowledges that though he finds himself “continuamente asediado” by journalists and critics, “la gente normal … ni siquiera sabía quién era (mi fama no alcanzaba todavía más que un público concreto, como es lógico)” (132). His place in the contemporary artistic panorama is further concretized by “un reportaje que publicó El País. ‘La nueva pintura española’ se titulaba, y hablaba de seis pintores. Uno de ellos era yo” (127). In combination with his success at the famous art fair ARCO in 1991, this press coverage has “una repercusión … tan increíble que, en apenas unos meses, pasé de ser un desconocido a que me persiguieran el resto de los periódicos” (127). As a result of this success, Carlos is forced to negotiate a new identity in an art world which, in his country, had not been so vibrant in decades. Smith observes that, in this period, “artists, suddenly celebrities, struggled to combine the long-term logic of production with the newly accelerated and facilitated conditions of distribution” (67). The charismatic myth has taught Carlos that, if he is an artist worth his salt, his recognition will be postponed to the future as he rejects short-term profits and gathers symbolic capital in its place. However, Carlos
cannot live on symbolic capital alone, as it is his painting that puts food on the table. He admits: “No sólo la pintura era mi vida, sino que vivía de ella” (38). Thanks to his dealers at La Mandrágora – the gallery which sells Carlos’s paintings in Madrid – he has been recognized in a way he never dreamed possible.

As we have seen in the analysis of Caso’s novel, the relationship with gallery owners forces the artists to recognize their participation in the “game,” the one that the bad-faith economy of disinterestedness would have them ignore. Carlos describes the gallery owners for whom he works with disgust, provoked by their boldfaced desires to sell at any cost. Paris-Huesca rightly notes that “la galería de arte donde Carlos expone y vende sus cuadros muestra la nueva dinámica existente entre el artista y la realidad en el que intenta insertarse” (135). Carlos describes the gallery owners who sell his work, Corine and Álvaro, with an aversion provoked by their bold-faced desires to make money in any way they can.79 Carlos is no longer able to believe in the logic of long-term production or to blame the world for not understanding him as a result of his relationship with Corine and Álvaro. Instead, he must face the fact that he is but one part of “una sucesión de círculos comunicados entre ellos, pero aislados de la vida de la gente en general” (138-39). The sense of unease that Carlos begins to feel – and a factor in what leads him to eventually consider his success that many view as “el cielo” as “el infierno” – is connected to the revelation of the cultural field’s presence which allows only for an uncomfortable existence of the charismatic myth within it. The very labeling of this section recounting Carlos’s success as “El infierno” is indicative of his desire to cling to the myth.

79 The apparently unbridgeable differences between them is evident in Corine’s description of Carlos’s success. What Carlos sees as “el infierno,” Corine sees as the culmination of a career: “Como repetía Corine, […] saboreando ya el éxito por anticipado, teníamos el cielo al alcance de la mano” (129).
Because of the press coverage and the dealings with the gallery owners, Carlos is forced to see his painting as a profession more than as a vocation, and it inspires in him a fear of “lo que más odiaba: la profesionalización que tanto había huido” (159). He is almost embarrassed to admit his appreciation of the comfortable stability he has won as a result of his painting, in part because, to achieve it, “[la pintura] se había convertido en algo útil y obligatorio o, cuando menos, inducido y forzado desde fuera” (158). The artist, as a supremely disinterested being, is to care little for worldly things that “useful” art—art that can be appreciated and understood by all, or even by those who are not other artists—can provide. Bourdieu explains that when artists are under the protective cover of Bohemia or when they work in the field of restricted production – producing for other painters alone – it is much easier to euphemize this “professionalization,” but when the audience becomes wider, as it does in Carlos’s case, “the quasi-coincidence of [artists’] authentic representation and the objective truth of their professions is a fairly inevitable effect or a prior condition of their success with their specific public” (130). In other words, as artists become more successful, hiding behind the shield of the charismatic myth becomes more difficult. Carlos cannot deny the real benefits he experiences as a result of his success: “Sabía que detrás de mí había gente esperando a que acabara cada uno de mis cuadros y dibujos; … Y

80 Carlos still considers himself different at some fundamental level from the other big sellers at his gallery, two men whom he believes are selling an image more than they are selling art. He critiques their poses—one is “un valenciano arrogante y egocéntrico hasta extremos increíbles” and the other “un andaluz [que] solía vestir de mujer”—observing that they are the two most important painters the gallery has, not only because their work sells, but also because of their personalities (119). According to Kuspit, this is a natural product of the belief in “novelty for the sake of novelty.” He observes that “the belief that the artist’s charismatic publicity image is more important than his actual work (which borrows its charisma from he publicity image)” (20).

81 Beebe notes that the artists of the Ivory Tower tradition were those most opposed to “useful art,” because they were “inevitably at war with the society in which [they] liv[e]” (132). Beebe quotes Baudelaire as the most vocal believer in this notion, as the poet alleged that useful or practical art has no place in the world of a true artist: “To be a useful person has always appeared to me something particularly horrible” (cited in Beebe, 132).
eso, por una parte, me confortaba y me daba ánimos (por primera vez también sabía que no tendría que esperar a que la gente pudiera ver lo que hacía” (159). It may be a “false” world, composed of posers and those who consciously or unconsciously delude themselves, but Carlos is forced to admit that “no todo era negativo en aquel mundo de cartón-piedra” (142).

His confusion is further aggravated by the relationship he has with his two closest artist friends, Suso and Mario. Together, Carlos and his friends form a kind of triad which represents what Bourdieu calls “the three competing principles of legitimacy,” which allow them all to feel relatively secure in their definitions of “success” (50). Art exists only “by virtue of the (collective) belief which knows and acknowledges it as a work of art” and the field operates through the struggles to determine who has the right to consecrate or name a work of art or a cultural producer as legitimate (35) Bourdieu identifies three primary “principles of legitimacy” based on the audience for whom the products are created. Suso, Carlos’s poet friend, is a supreme representative of and believer in the “specific principle of legitimacy, i.e., the recognition granted by a set of producers who produce for other producers, their competitors” (Bourdieu 51). He is the archetypical artist character who gives credence to the nineteenth-century notion that failure among a wide audience is a sign of victory, for he believes that “la mejor novela, para un escritor puro, es el fracaso” (20), and, in contrast, defines real success simply as “hacer lo que a uno le gusta. O por lo menos en intentarlo” (83). He is also the epitome of the “Sacred Fount” artist Beebe describes, a man who sees art as experience. According to Suso, “el presente se vive, no se escribe. Por eso hay que elegir entre vivir la vida o contarla” (65). He is disgusted by Mario, a successful novelist, whose beliefs correspond to the “popular” principle of legitimacy, “the consecration bestowed by the choice of the mass audience” (Bourdieu 51). Mario—a much more minor character—becomes a famous novelist because of a
concerted and acknowledged effort to become one. The polar opposite of Suso, Mario has always known that he wanted this kind of success: “él siempre tuvo muy claro que quería triunfar como escritor y a ese objetivo se dedicó desde que llegó a Madrid” (144). Mario feels neither doubt nor shame as he gives himself over to the fame and money he earns, and he becomes a sort of “cultural entrepreneur,” a position that, for Suso, is a contradiction in terms. Mario’s mass appeal is further confirmed at the end of the novel when he marries a famous actress as he is “en plena cima del éxito” (244).

Carlos’s own creative and personal dilemma is rooted in the legitimation conferred upon him by “bourgeois tastes,” that is the “consecration bestowed by the dominant fractions of the dominant class” (51). He is neither willing nor able to give himself over to the popular as Mario has, for, as Bourdieu points out, the effects of “going commercial” for cultural producers can be detrimental in the long term by keeping them from profiting off of disinterestedness. The commercial success he has with his gallery is proof of this, given that those buying his work are “empresarios y profesionales que, bien porque les sobraba el dinero o bien porque en aquel momento la pintura estaba de moda, al margen de que fuera una inversión como decían, se dejaban engañar por los pintores” (117). If Suso—the voice of the traditional artist hero—refers to Mario’s overt search for success with disgust, he looks at Carlos’s success with disappointment, as he believes that “[los éxitos les] habían cambiado para peor” (149). On the other hand, Carlos is not able to limit his audience as Suso does, but he still feels connected to the charismatic myth in some ways. Even if he sees Mario’s version of success as a kind of selling out, he is equally aware that Suso’s dogmatic attitude is untenable, and it plays out in such a way in the text, as well. When Suso’s money runs out, embittered and never having published anything of note, he returns to his family home, “donde sigue alimentando su
nihilismo y su leyenda” (251). Carlos’s use of the word “leyenda” to describe his friend’s attitude, the attitude of the archetypical artist protagonist, is significant because it marks the distance between Carlos and the friend he once admired, as the painter now realizes that Suso’s practices and attitudes – as well as those of many other artists he knows – are nothing more than poses, an acting out of the kinds of lives they expected artists to have.

One of the features of El cielo de Madrid which most distinguishes it from its counterparts of an earlier time is the self-reflexive critique of the charismatic vision of artistic production by a successful artist. Kuspit notes that today’s artists, particularly those who came of age in the 1980s—like Carlos in the novel—“are unconvincing, oratorical actors – however brilliantly capable and knowing – because we are aware they are posing” (Idiosyncratic Identities 13). In El cielo de Madrid, Carlos’s success leads him to recognize the poses of those around him, as well as his own. For example, he observes that younger artists he meets or old friends who have not “made it” in the art world yet, “ahora me criticaban por haberme convertido, según ellos, en famoso (cuando en realidad me envidiaban precisamente por eso)” (133). Others accused him “de haber hecho un pacto con el diablo. … La acusación no era algo original o personal” (135). The camaraderie felt in the bohemian years clearly has faded, and, as Bourdieu notes, this reaction is typical among those artists who bond when they have not yet been consecrated. These avant-garde positions, the ones Carlos and his friends hoped to fill in their younger days, “are defined mainly negatively, by their opposition to the dominant positions, bring together for a certain time writers and artists from very different origins, whose interests will sooner or later diverge” (66). A common tipping point for the groups’ dissolution takes place when a small number (or maybe only one of them) ‘achieve recognition [and] symbolic profits,” as Carlos does in this period of his career (66). Rather than taking others’ denunciations
to heart, Carlos is able to see through them, to recognize them for what they are: manifestations of jealousy towards the field position he has achieved, thinly veiled with the language of the charismatic myth of the artist. Bourdieu asserts that accusations like the ones Carlos describes in the text are common. Those who have not yet achieved success are the ‘zealots,’ whose only capital is their belief in the principles of the bad-faith economy and who […] condemn in the same breath the merchants in the temple who bring ‘commercial’ practices and interests into an area of the sacred, and the Pharisees who derive temporal profits from their accumulated capital of the field.

(82)

This “zealous” position is almost always moderated with time, Bourdieu adds, but those who are starting out have little but their belief in disinterestedness to which to cling. Yet, as Carlos is able to see, the vehemence with which they decry consecration and remuneration is but evidence of a desire to achieve the same thing for themselves. He comes to see that disinterestedness is not the mark of a “pure” artist, but rather, one more characteristic of the charismatic myth that he begins to question.

These adopted or enacted attitudes are not limited to Carlos’s competitors. He is also able to see, with time, that he and his friends acted in a similar way – and some of them still cannot, or will not, see those past actions as the poses they were. Grace Stewart also studies the myth’s importance, not among actual practicing artists, but rather in the Künstlerroman. She observes that “specific myths seem to be more attractive than others to the artist when he is writing autobiographically,” as Julio does in his fictional autobiography that is the novel (6). Citing Ernst Kris, Stewart refers to “incidents of ‘enacted biography’ that show the tendency of artists not only to identify in fiction with […] heroes, but also to follow in their own lives the traditional
mythology of the artist” (6-7). In El cielo de Madrid, Carlos points to two specific moments in his life in which he lived in a way he considered appropriate for a “real” artist. He locates the first of these instances in his childhood, remembering that while his siblings were attending local festivals or going to the beach, “prefería quedarme en casa pintando o paseando por el campo o por la playa, como hacían los pintores de verdad” (66). A monastic devotion to art that required solitude and renunciation of frivolous activities unrelated to art made the young Carlos feel that he was on track to become like other successful artists with whose biographies he was familiar. He cites as his principle inspirations:

los realmente importantes; esto es, los expresionistas, los vanguardistas del fin de siglo, los de entreguerras, Picasso…principalmente Picasso. Ellos eran mis maestros y mis auténticas referencias, ante los que palidecían, cuando no se volvían patéticos, los pintores que por entonces pasaban en España por geniales. (126)

This notion had only become stronger when, as a young man, he abandoned traditional university studies and faced bitter confrontation with his parents, moved to Madrid and rejected his home and family life. Carlos remembers that he considered all this a worthwhile sacrifice “con tal de poder vivir y pintar como yo quería: como un pintor de verdad” (67).

Once he had settled in Madrid, Carlos recalls that he and his friends fashioned their apolitical anarchy – “un anarquismo [que] era sobre todo estético” – on preexisting models which responded more to the kind of artists they wanted to be than to the ones they actually were. In the most overt recognition of the charismatic myth’s impact on the identities he and his generation cultivated, Carlos admits that this anarchy of which they were so proud:
[era] un anarquismo teórico que bebía en las fuente más radicales, las del romanticismo puro, pero que, en la mayoría de los casos, el mío, sin ir más lejos, se traducía simplemente en una actitud. Una actitud estudiada y adoptada muchas veces de propósito, pero que nosotros creíamos sincera todavía en aquel momento. (79)

In this exemplary quote, Carlos refers to one of the most important changes produced in the art world in the postmodern era, one that Kuspit explains this way: “the modern has become the postmodern. In learning to monitor the surprises of the new, we discovered that they could be produced in a predictable way, sometimes even mass produced” (Idiosyncratic Identities 334-35). Carlos and his friends acted a certain way hoping to be recognized and consecrated, for, as Kuspit observes, “the modern way of becoming an official artist … was to look revolutionary” (335). Unlike artist heroes in past literature, Carlos and his friends were not moved by an unseen force of Art to act and create as they did. Rather, they had seen or read or imagined which aesthetics, attitudes, and lifestyles corresponded to artists they admired and, in the hopes of acquiring a similar field position, acted in ways they considered in accordance with those positions.

At the end of this long second section of the text, Carlos is fed up with the art world and dissatisfied with himself and his work. He longs for those indeterminate days of El Limbo – the nights spent in the bar and the ideals he believed in back then: “Ahora ya no tenía sueños; tenía ambiciones, que es diferente,” he laments, noting that “los sueños me habían roto o los había ido

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82 For example, in Pardo Bazán’s La Quimera, Silvio Lago explains his artistic inclinations as “¡Vocación…o delirio!, una cosa que parece enfermedad. Me posee, me obsesiona” (154). When Minia – the representation in the novel for Pardo Bazán herself – asks him what the end goal of his art is, Silvio responds, “¿Finalidad? Ninguna…¡Por hacerlo!” (154).
perdiendo por el camino” (118). In a moment of desperation, he asks rhetorically, “¿Cómo explicarles a los demás … que estabas harto de todo aquello y lo que tu querías era regresar al limbo, ahora que, según todos, habías alcanzado el cielo?” (155). It is only after Carlos has experienced Hell that he can fully appreciate El Limbo, and it is only at this point that the reader can understand fully why Llamazares may have chosen to deviate from the tripartite structure to include El Limbo as a fourth section in his text. In *The Divine Comedy*, Limbo is a space for the innocent and the uninitiated—the babies who died unbaptized and those who died before the advent of Christianity. While their pain is “not caus’d by tortures” (Canto IV, 26), they still suffer since they can see Heaven, but have no means of reaching it. Virgil explains that those who reside there are “Only so far afflicted, that [they] live / desiring without hope” (Canto IV, 38-39). Before he became famous, Carlos and his friends were like those denizens of Limbo, uninitiated into the art world, able to see, but feeling that they never would be able to grasp, the success offered to Great Artists. However, when Carlos does triumph, and his life becomes what he considers Hell, he longs for the Limbo. The Limbo, that place of indetermination, was most comfortable for Carlos precisely because it allowed him to imagine a future for himself compatible with the charismatic myth. It was the moment when Carlos and those of his generation were able to “jugar a ser artistas más que de serlo con todas sus consecuencias” (125). Finally aware of what those consequences of being an artist actually are, Carlos feels that he needs to try to recover both the faith in himself and his painting, as well as that sense of authenticity and purity he once felt in his days of limbo.

*El Purgatorio: Success Rejected*

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83 Virgil tells him that this first circle of Hell is populated by those who “of sin / Were blameless; and if aught they merited, / It profits not, since baptism was not theirs, / The portal to they faith. If they before / The Gospel liv’d, they serv’d not God aright” (Canto IV, 31-35).
Though it is a difficult decision for Carlos to make, he finally opts to abandon his gallery, his friends, and his city. He admits wearily: “desde muy joven, había soñado con ser pintor y con ser admirado por ello. Pero ahora estaba cansado precisamente de todo eso” (169). The remedy, he believes, will be found in Miraflores, a remote town in the sierra outside of Madrid, where Carlos rents an old chalet in which to live and work. París-Huesca describes this retreat as “otra fase de este viaje vital que, si bien no sigue el propósito dantesco de purificar el alma para alcanzar a Dios, se puede interpretar como un viaje espiritual del narrador” (138). Carlos believes that by getting away from the physical manifestations of the art world – his gallery and its owners, the bourgeois buyers of his work, the journalists who hound him for interviews – he will not only recover the peace of mind and the hope for the future he felt in his younger days, but the solitude will allow him to rejuvenate his painting in a way the city prohibits him from doing. Miraflores represents a kind of Ivory Tower for Carlos, a place where he can escape from the commercial pressures of his profession and ostensibly reacquaint himself with his art on a very personal level. Carlos’s days of the “Sacred Fount,” the bohemian days of his youth when art was “equated with experience” are behind him and now inaccessible for the reasons we have seen (Beebe 13), namely that the avant-garde group has broken apart based on the success of a select few of its members. In order to combat the commercial realities of the artist profession, then, Carlos opts for an Ivory Tower as a last resort.

Though he is quite productive in the first year of the three he spends in Miraflores, Carlos comes to realize that “aquel retiro a la sierra no era una vuelta al limbo, como creí” (208). His ties with Madrid are never fully severed, given that “seguía dependiendo de Madrid para vivir” (179), and his disappearance from the scene he used to frequent gives him “un aureola de misterio que derivaba precisamente de mi silencio y que fue en aumento con el tiempo … Me
convertí, por ello, en un pintor especial” (211). What is more, the isolation and solitude begin to weigh on Carlos in a way he never imagined possible. As he spends the cold, dark winter months locked in his chalet with only a stray dog he adopts for company, he is forced to recognize that he is too lonely to paint. He laments the “eterna paradoja del artista:” “vivir y pintar en paz es imposible a la vez” (213). By running away from the people and things that made him a successful artist, Carlos believes he can return to the state of mind and being he possessed before his disillusionment, when he was “playing artist” instead of being one. Yet, he realizes that his flight has not returned him to the comfort of El Limbo; rather, it has turned into “un duro purgatorio personal” (208). Carlos finally leaves Miraflores with the realization that he is condemned to a “triste destino … siempre a medias entre el cielo y el infierno, entre la libertad y la necesidad de amor, entre la soledad y la búsqueda de éxito” (242). Neither the Sacred Fount nor the Ivory Tower is a feasible option for the contemporary artist, especially the one who has experienced success. None of the models on which Carlos has fashioned his identity has proven viable, and so, in the novel’s final section, Carlos refashions himself in a manner that has a profound impact on El cielo de Madrid as a Künstlerroman.

**El Cielo: Success Redefined**

Carlos’s recognition of his place in the field, his admission of his conspicuous artistic posing, and his ultimate, pained rejection of both a “Sacred Fount”-style Bohemia and an “Ivory-Tower”-style isolation make him an unconventional artist hero. His disenchantment with the art world, because of its uncomfortable coexistence with the charismatic myth leads him to seek a more authentic form of existence, but he does not find it in the forests of Miraflores. Instead, in the mere four pages that compose the novel’s final section, the reader discovers that Carlos has found fulfillment in a place unexpected for an artist hero: in family and domestic life. In fact, it is
for his newborn son that Carlos writes the text we read, and on the novel’s final page, he explains to his child, “te lo cuento ahora, que no me escuchas, porque, cuando me escuches, ya no sabré decírtelo” (254). Carlos’s priorities are different from past artist heroes, who could not enjoy self-realization in both art and love, and he finds creative and personal fulfillment in a domestic life his predecessors disdained or rejected.

As the title of this last section reveals, “el cielo” has not been reached through the profligate and eccentric bohemian experience, nor through a monastic devotion to art carried out in extreme isolation and sustained by genius and passion. Neither has it been reached exclusively through success with a specific public and the wealth and fame garnered from it. “El cielo de Madrid” – the “cielo” Carlos set out to conquer with his painting – is all of those things together: “es a la vez el infierno, el limbo, y el purgatorio, aunque haya tardado mucho en saberlo” (254). However, his own personal “cielo” is found in the relationships with his lover and his child. When asked why he dedicated so few pages in the text to Carlos finding his “cielo,” Llamazares responded:

Dedicar otras ochenta páginas a contar que regresa a Madrid y que vuelve a encontrarse con sus amigos ya no tiene interés; para mí, Carlos había vuelto purificado por la soledad, sobre todo. Al encontrarse consigo mismo, había aprendido que el cielo no está en las grandes ilusiones y en el éxito, sino que encontrar un lugar propio en el mundo, tener una persona que te quiera, llevar una vida más o menos agradable. (Mahmoud and Llamazares 257)

Like artist-protagonists of the past, Carlos sets out on a quest, but unlike them, it is not a journey exclusively to find “creativity and the unlimited expression of [the] soul,” as Seret has described the quest of the modern Künstlerroman’s hero (2). Instead, Carlos’s quest for happiness is
rewarded in the form of a combination of artistic success and consecration – he never gives up the money he made and continues to make from his painting – love, and family; in short, three things that artist heroes of the past did not consider possible goals to be achieved in their lifetimes.

Carlos – the representative of legitimacy conferred by bourgeois tastes – embraces a way of life that leans more towards the bourgeois than it does to the lifestyle of the Romantic, “pure” artist. He does not go as far as to strive for the title of cultural entrepreneur like Mario does, but he is just as content to reject the life of Suso’s “leyenda.” París-Huesca interprets this ending with disappointment:

Al nivel diegético, el regreso a Madrid y el comienzo de una nueva vida del narrador como esposo y padre son el retrato de una generación vencida por un sistema que mueve al individuo a encontrar la felicidad a través de la estabilidad económica y afectiva, anulando cualquier posibilidad de que los valores que proyectaron en la Transición pueden triunfar en esta sociedad capitalista. (140)

However, Carlos and his friends – the artists who got their start during the Movida – do not represent the ideals of the Transition, and Carlos professes as much in the text. Though París-Huesca identifies Carlos and his friends as those who suffered from the “desencanto” which followed closely upon the heels of the Transition, the narrator’s own comments conflict with such an interpretation, given that Carlos and his friends were largely apolitical:

Pronto llegó el desencanto, palabra con la que se denominó al fenómeno de desengaño respecto de la política que se estableció en la gente en cuanto los partidos políticos de izquierda abandonaron sus ideales más radicales y un
sentimiento agridulce se apoderó de todos, salvo los que, como nosotros, nunca habíamos creído en aquellos. (79, my emphasis)

The “desencanto” Carlos suffers is not linked to politics, but to the realization that the myths upon which he built his own personal and occupational identity are nothing more than fictions. He and his friends do not belong to the same world, nor did they suffer the same disappointment, with the Transition as the progres who had plotted against Franco. Teresa Vilarós explains that these different kinds of disappointment between generations led to outright antagonism: “El desencanto de la generación de la movida no es, sin embargo, el mismo desencanto de las generaciones mayores. Hay entre ambos un enfrentamiento total, apasionado e irreconciliable” (39). Stapell clarifies this opposition further, as he observes: “Many of the progres on the left decried the movida’s apparent lack of ‘values’ and believed the movement was a distraction from political participation” (98). Thus, Carlos and his friends (with the exception of Suso who continues to live his “leyenda”) do not strive for the same ideals as their artist counterparts of the previous generation; in other words, their identities are not defined solely by their ideological opposition to and rejection of Francoist models of aesthetics and conduct.

Though Carlos struggles at first, as a result of his ingrained beliefs in the charismatic myth, he comes to accept a different experience as “authentic,” one that is more attuned to the realities of the world in which he lives. Though it does not appear entirely true to say that El cielo de Madrid is “una novela contra el éxito,” as Llamazares has called it – Carlos does not exactly reject his material success, even if he does shy away from artistic fame – it is clear that Carlos finds himself in a kind of middling position even at the novel’s end (cited in Rizzi, no pag). He does not wholeheartedly embrace the mercantile and marketing aspect of the art world as Mario does, but he does not believe, as Suso and many artist heroes of the past, that being an artist...
means rejecting love, family, and stability. Neither does he meet a tragic end like Claude Lantier in Zola’s *L’OEuvre* or Silvio Lago in Pardo Bazán’s *La Quimera*. Carlos has found happiness, his “cielo.” If the novel is, as Rizzi has called it, the chronicle of “una búsqueda de la felicidad de una generación,” then that generation is no longer one that believes the artist must be tragic, condemned to suffer (no pag). “El oficio [de artista] no conlleva estar jodido,” Spanish artist Ceespe asserted in 1981 (cited in Lechado, 206). It is likely that Carlos would agree.

**Ángeles Caso’s *El mundo visto desde el cielo***

Ángeles Caso’s *El mundo visto desde el cielo* (1997), bears certain striking similarities to Llamazares’s novel: a prosperous, respected, and famous painter takes stock of his life, and tells to his child the story of his career and his relationships. The greatest difference, however, is that Carlos of *El cielo de Madrid* speaks to his newborn son, whom he holds in his arms as the symbol of his embrace of the bourgeois lifestyle, but Julio Canac, the protagonist of Caso’s novel, speaks to a daughter he has not seen in twelve years. The conclusions Julio reaches at the end of *El mundo visto desde el cielo* are also different from Carlos’s; whereas the latter is able to reconcile life and art in a way antithetical to the charismatic myth, the former never attempts to do so, but is ultimately left with remorse as a result of his determination to uphold the myth’s tenets. If it were not for Julio’s reflections on his life and his painting that comprise the first and last segments of this chapter-less novel, it would appear that Julio is content with his decision to embrace the elements of the myth in which he wants to believe wholeheartedly. The novel begins and ends with Julio sitting alone in his garden, staring at a framed painting titled, “El mundo visto desde el cielo 2,” which he hoped would be his definitive masterpiece, his saving grace as an artist who had lost his way, and a manner to represent his life and achievements in visual form. However, the painting—and, by extension, his life—is a supreme disappointment, and it is
this image that prompts Julio to begin a one-sided conversation with the daughter who cannot respond, given that she is nothing more than “una pequeña mancha naranja” he has depicted on the canvas (16).

In a 1997 interview with *El Pais*’s Javier Goñi, Caso admitted that she could have told a similar story of progressive disillusionment and regret from a writer’s perspective rather than a painter’s, “pero eso ya se ha hecho muchas veces […] Un pintor me permitía ahondar en un mundo de sensualidad y colores, como no podía encontrarme en un músico o en un escritor” (no pag). More than that, however, the colors serve as a primary structural device in the novel.

Whereas the phases of Carlos’s career and life are marked in *El cielo de Madrid* by the four-part Dantesque references, Julio’s are marked by colors which represent his development as an artist. In each of these color phases—yellow, gray, red and orange, blue, and green—Julio must cling more desperately to elements of the charismatic myth on which he has built his identity: social marginalization, belief in genius, and above all, disinterestedness. However, when Julio attempts to combine the colors that represent his life in his final painting, he realizes they do not blend and the result is unharmonious. He is not an artist whose disinterestedness has led to personal and professional success; rather Julio is forced to recognize that the myth is anachronistic and that art no longer has the power to cure him or anyone else. He begins to regard charismatic life, ostensibly summed up in the final painting’s “manchas de colores” as a failure for a variety of reasons, but, unlike Llamazares’s protagonist, he has realized it much too late to effect meaningful change. Julio sees that his acts of artistic antiestablishmentarianism cannot be heroic, as even the rage against the establishment has been institutionalized and co-opted. Whereas Carlos of *El cielo de Madrid* ultimately appears content with his decision to renounce a stereotypically artistic lifestyle, the tone in *El mundo visto desde el cielo* is much more nostalgic
and elegiac for the ability to live for art. In the following pages, I will explore the elements of the charismatic myth—reminiscent of those found in artist novels of bygone eras—that Julio embraces in the different periods of his life, marked in the text by colors. Then, through an examination of Julio’s final painting, I will demonstrate the ways the text reveals those elements to be untenable in the modern world.

**Colors and the Charismatic Myth**

Several definitive characteristics of the charismatic myth are ingrained in Julio’s conception of art, especially in his idea of what exactly his profession means, what art is and what it is capable of doing. These ideas evolve as he grows older, but they follow the basic precepts of the charismatic vision of artistic activity detailed in the previous pages. In the novel, the phases of his life are divided into three categories, discernible through colors: the bright yellow that represents his childhood, the color gray that represents his rejection of fame and his creative crisis, and finally, his romantic relationship with the budding art historian Áurea, characterized by red, blue, and green at different points in its tumultuous course. Though it is not as explicitly delineated, Julio’s career follows a trajectory similar to Carlos’s, at least at first. He feels “called” to be an artist from a young age, but when he achieves fame, he rejects it as incompatible with the myth and retreats to a kind of Ivory Tower by leaving Paris for his childhood home. However, the relationship with Áurea causes Carlos and Julio’s stories to diverge. The reader learns very little about the woman with whom Carlos eventually decides to build his life in the final pages of *El cielo de Madrid*—he never even reveals her name. However, Julio’s love for Áurea is both an essential part of his recovery from one creative crisis and what precipitates another. I will explore each of these three phases in turn.
**Yellow.** In the narration, Julio’s story starts in the middle. He is already a formed artist, and a rather famous one at that, but, he returns to his late father’s home in Asturias fleeing fame and hoping to recover the tranquility he associates with his childhood. Like Carlos in his retreat to Miraflores that he thinks will transport him back to the idealized and romanticized world of “el Limbo,” Julio desires an escape from the Parisian art community, from his dealer, and from the artistic life he thought he always wanted. In short, he hopes to return to a golden age, literally marked as such in his mind by the color yellow. In coming home, Julio admits that he “había creído que al regresar que volvía a vivir en el amarillo, el color fervoroso de mi infancia […] Tal vez había creído volver al Paraíso” (57-58). While this color is associated with all of the idealized memories of his childhood—“[amarillo] ligero como […] las manos perfumados de tabaco de tu padre,” “amarillo dichoso como las risas de tus amigos cuando juegos en el parque” (57)—he also associates this period of his life with the most pure artistic experience, before he understood exactly what being a professional artist entailed.

Julio has always believed in art as a higher calling, never to be confused with a mere job or solely as a means of making money, and this conviction dates back to his childhood. From the time Julio could hold a pencil, his family recognized his talent. As Røyseng, Mangset, and Spord Borgen observe, young artists commonly assert—much more readily than students of other professions—that they have known they would take this career path since childhood (5). Prudencia, the family housekeeper, who served as Julio’s caretaker and who constitutes his only real family after his father’s death, recalls that she was the one who gave the burgeoning artist his first art supplies. After that point, she observes, Julio “era el niño que más pinturas tenía,

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84 Kris and Kurz observe that, in the biographies of artists dating back to the Renaissance, the early demonstration of artistic genius is a leitmotif that emerges again and again. They stress that “it is of greatest significance [to their legend] that the artist’s talent is already evident in childhood” (9).
porque le gustaba mucho más pintar que jugar al balón. [...] yo lo miraba y decía mi Julito va a ser artista” (66). Encouraged by his father and by Prudencia, Julio remembers pursuing his calling from his youngest days.

As he grew older, Julio began to understand the depth of his vocation and enacted another facet of the charismatic myth of the artist: the need for social marginalization and the inability to combine love and art. Recalling his adolescent infatuation with Pilar, “una chica muy bonita y liberal,” he tells of the moment he realized that love, as enjoyable as it may be, has no place in the life of a “true” artist (92). From the day he meets her, Julio is obsessed with spending as much time with Pilar as possible, neglecting his family, friends, schoolwork, and art for trysts with his lover. This comes to an end one day when he accompanies his friends to the Museo del Prado. Julio describes the painful sensation he experiences when surrounded by the masterpieces of great painters of past generations:

Para cuando llegamos delante del Perro enterrado en la arena, estaba a punto de desmayarme. Mi corazón había dejado de latir, ahora tronaba como un tambor que iba resonando, me parecía por todas las salas del museo, arriba y abajo. Me eché a llorar a gritos. Amargas lágrimas por el arte perdido. ¿Qué había hecho aquellas semanas? Nada. (94)

This response is common to artist heroes of nineteenth and early-twentieth century novels. Beebe notes that in texts from these eras, the artist often “is […] forced to choose between woman and vocation and only rarely does he achieve fulfillment as both artist and lover” (97). Julio comes to a hard realization after his experience with Pilar culminates with this histrionic episode in the Prado: “Era hermoso, sí, el amor era hermoso. Y tiránico. Tan hermoso y tan tiránico como la pintura. Y ahí precisamente estaba la tragedia. El uno y el otro se excluían, se mataban a
puñetazos” (94). Julio cultivates the notion early on that human relationships—especially romantic relationships—are nothing more than distractions for the “pure” artist he presumes to be. When he thinks back on his childhood, every memory tinged with yellow, Julio recalls a freedom and a happiness he can no longer access, but also a purity and an naïveté in terms of his artistic vocation that have long since left him.

**Gray.** Just as Carlos hoped to return the Limbo—that period of innocence and hope for the future destroyed by his contact with the art world—in Miraflores, Julio believes that he may be able to get back to the pure, primordial artistic self of his adolescence. Julio’s experience in Asturias, however, does not recolor his world a shade of yellow. Rather, what he finds is “una época gris. No negra, no con el negro de la muerte, el negro del vacío […] Tampoco fue blanca como la nada antes de la existencia […] No. Fue gris, triste, asfixiante” (58). For Julio, the color gray comes to symbolize his time spent in Paris and his subsequent creative crisis. In *El cielo de Madrid*, Carlos’s period of fame is his “infierno” because it causes him to realize the unviability of the charismatic myth, and, in a similar fashion, the color gray represents the suffering associated with fame for Julio. It seems appropriate that this phase of Julio’s life was initiated with a painting in gray-scale, a painting titled *Antimaternidad*, that he painted as a kind of “venganza” toward the mother who abandoned him (42). This painting depicts “una gran

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85 In Emilia Pardo Bazán’s artist novel, *La Quimera* (1905), the tortured artist-protagonist Silvio Lago rejects Clara, the wealthy woman who proposes marriage to him in order to free him from painting on commission. Silvio responds to her proposal: “Es que yo no puedo casarme, ¿sabes? No sirvo para tal vida. … Sólo tengo entrañas para mi loco deseo de pintar como los semidioses” (239-40). In Blasco Ibáñez’s *La maja desnuda*, Mariano Renovales marries a bourgeois señorita when he is very young, and later bitterly regrets his decision. His marriage becomes what he calls a form of “esclavitud,” and Renovales avers that all artists “como él debían ser libres, … sin la cárcel interminable de la vida común” (274).

86 Julio’s mother, Isolde Nara, abandoned him when Julio was just a baby, because, she explained in a note, “buscaba la calma, pero no la soporto. […] Hay otro hombre esperándome”
silueta gris, helada, la sombra de una madre sin rostro ni manos que sostiene en brazos a su hijo muy pequeño” (41-42). With this cathartic painting that helps Julio express his pain, his dealer, Jean-Luc Laffon, chooses Julio as “uno de [sus] protegidos,” describing him as un “joven genio” (42). Because of this one dark painting, Julio’s career skyrockets and his life is changed forever. He does not appreciate all the changes as positive ones, however and he eventually returns to Asturias “porque estaba harto de la fama” (45).

Julio rejects fame, his dealer’s fawning praise, the buyers of his work, and the artistic friends he has made in Paris largely because they do not allow him to live out his identity as a disinterested artist. He clamors loudly:

No quiero premios, no quiero fiestas en mi honor, no quiero fotos de mi cara en los periódicos, no quiero gentes repitiendo lo bueno que soy porque ha habido fiestas en mi honor y fotos de mi cara en los periódicos […] No quiero nada…sólo tranquilidad para pintar. (206)

Julio does everything he can to prove—to himself and others—his disinterestedness, that is, his desire for nothing more than pure self-expression, the relative unimportance of money and prestige, and his disdain for the buyers and his dealer who are unabashedly in it for the money. The only way Julio (and many other artists, both fictional and real) can sustain such an attitude is, as Bourdieu asserts, by “pretending not to be doing what they are doing” (74). Julio accumulates “symbolic capital,” that is, “economic or political capital that is disavowed, misrecognized and thereby recognized, hence legitimate, a ‘credit’ which, under certain conditions, and always in the long run, guarantees ‘economic’ profits” (Bourdieu 75). Julio

(40). In this circular text, Julio completes a family cycle of abandonment as he leaves Aline and Aurea, also searching for calm in order to paint in peace. We are unable to know if Isolde had regrets, but Julio’s are clear.
leaves the “dirty work” to his dealer, always asserting his difference from Jean-Luc, whose “interest” sickens him as a disinterested creator. In order to succeed, symbolically and eventually economically, the artist must minimize the overt promotion of his work, because “the less visible the investment, the more productive it is symbolically, [meaning] that promotion exercises which in the business world take the overt form of publicity, must here be euphemized” (Bourdieu 77). Jean-Luc is the one who takes on the publicity tasks that Julio will not (and, if he is to succeed in the particular art world economy, cannot), though his way of doing it infuriates the artist. He explains that Jean-Luc markets his paintings in Paris as the work of “un latino, […] un hombre del sur, una verdadera fuerza de la naturaleza” (22). Though the image of the “spicy Spaniard” helps his work to sell in Paris, Julio complains that he will never get Jean-Luc to understand “que había crecido en una tierra de caseríos encaramados en las montañas, a pico sobre ríos violentos, una tierra envuelta en grisuras y humedades, vecina a una mar tempestuoso que nada tenía que ver con ese Mediterráneo ardiente que le llenaba la boca” (22). Jean-Luc capitalizes on what he considers the most attractive and marketable aspects of Julio’s Spanish identity, and soon his professional identity is not reflective of his life experiences. As a result, the relationship between Julio and Jean-Luc is always marked by latent (and at times, blatant)

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87 In the economy of the art world, Bourdieu notes that artists who “‘go commercial’ condemn themselves, and not only from an ethical or aesthetic point of view, because they deprive themselves of the opportunities open to those who can recognize the specific demands of this universe, and who, by concealing from themselves and others the interests at stake in the practice, obtain the means of deriving profits from disinterestedness” (75).

88 Paul Julian Smith observes that this kind of “fetishization” of Spanish artists is “characteristic, yet problematic” (73). The image disseminated is one “that feeds on stereotypes of a ‘typically Spanish nature’: the image of instinct, fierceness, and a heated expressivity with classical touches” (73). Smith cites the media representation of contemporary artist Miguel Barceló as a real world example of this marketing strategy.
antagonism, as the dealer pursues the artist, forever trying to assure that Julio “pensaba que sus garras [de zorro] eran las suaves manos de un niño inocente” (45).

Even if he (fairly) condemns Jean-Luc’s method of marketing his work, the truth is that Julio is able to live comfortably from the profits, including when he is submerged in one of his periods of crisis and is unable to produce anything new. As Bourdieu explains, the relationship between painter and dealer is always ambivalent. He notes that “dealers form a protective screen between the artist and the market, [but] they are also what link them to the market and so provoke, by their very existence, cruel unmaskings of the truth of artistic practice” (79). In short, Jean-Luc’s presence alone is enough to remind Julio how unrealistic the disinterested artist of the charismatic myth is. As a result of Jean-Luc promoting him, Julio becomes famous, though he cries as loudly as he can that fame was not his choice: “Y te juro que no elegí [la fama]. Fue Jean-Luc quien me la metió en mi cama, Jean-Luc y sus periodistas amantes de titulares y coleccionistas amantes de lo-que-sea-que-haya-que-amar” (46). However, the reader soon learns that it is not actually fame itself—and the material benefits which accompany it—to which

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89 In a 1998 interview with Alejandro Luque of *El País*, Caso gave an account of her own conception of her profession as an author in which certain elements of the charismatic myth also shine through. For example, Caso spoke ambivalently of popularity with her reading public: “la popularidad siempre es contraproducente. Las ventajas que tiene, a mí no me compensan, pero reconozco que en el terreno concreto de la literatura puede abrir puertas” (no pag.). When asked about her feelings on winning the Premio Planeta, Caso responds with a similar irresoluteness: “Nunca me había planteado ganar este premio, pero me ayudó el hecho de tener una novela ya publicada en el editorial, y además, me dio la oportunidad de seguir escribiendo” (no pag). Caso’s attitude is an example of the euphemization any self-promotion or “interested” attempts to advance or assume a new position in the field which Bourdieu describes. He observes that for authors who attempt to write *future* classics, “success is suspect” and that “asceticism in this world is the precondition for salvation in the next” (101). By claiming that the prizes mean little and that she never hoped for publicity, even though she has achieved both, Caso is publically “throwing away a gift,” something which Bourdieu explains, is based in “the economy of cultural production itself;” “Investments are recompensed only if they are in a sense thrown away, like a gift, which can only achieve the most precious return gift, recognition, so long as it is experienced as a one-way transaction” (101).
Julio is so strongly opposed. He confesses: “En el fracaso, puedes guardar la esperanza. Puedes confiar en el paso del tiempo, en la llegada de ese crítico que al fin va a comprenderte, en el advenimiento del Juicio Final. En el fracaso puedes parapetarte, armarte de ira, echarle la culpa al mundo” (46-47). Just as Carlos feels comfortable in Limbo, the place where he has innocent dreams instead of “interested” ambitions, Julio also idealizes a time before he became famous. This declaration is a very revealing one, since it implies a tacit recognition of role of charismatic artist that Julio wants so desperately to be able not just to play, but to believe in. The dealer’s promotion of his work and the fame that has come to Julio as a result, no longer allow him to convincingly blame the world for not understanding him, and therefore, he cannot base his identity on being a solitary, misunderstood artistic genius. The world—at least one sector of it—acclaims and appreciates him, making it difficult to sustain the persona of the Romantic artist against the world.

Julio believes that his escape from Jean-Luc will allow him to give himself over once again to pure art and to a freedom of expression he believes has been co-opted. However, once more in Asturias, Carlos falls into a creative (and existential) crisis even greater than the one provoked by his fears of selling out. He feels unable to produce anything of value, and he begins to question his talent and his genius, which leads to a supreme anxiety about his identity as a creator even more profound than the one triggered by associating art with money. Even as he becomes the darling of art critics and the academy, Julio begins to lose faith in his abilities, though, at this juncture, he still believes in the power of art itself. While in Asturias, Julio is tormented by the weight of originality, the need to create something to legitimate himself when he does not believe in any other form of legitimation: “yo sólo pensaba en el muro de Van Gogh, el horrible muro candente y apestoso que se alzaba entre lo que quería pintar y los que podía
“pintar” (46). Though this period of self-doubt is temporary, it prefaces for the reader the ultimate disappointment that Julio will feel when he sees his finished painting at the end of the novel when he takes those conclusions a step further and realizes that not only he is powerless to change the system, but art is, as well. Before he can deduce this, however, he enters a new phase of his life and career, one marked by love and a passionate shade of red, but which ultimately becomes characterized by cooler colors—and “interests.”

Áurea: Red, Blue, and Green: Despite the fact that he swore to never love again after Pilar drove a wedge between him and his art, Julio is enamored instantly by Áurea, a woman he sees on a bus who is the spitting image of Ingre’s famous Odalisque. Her resemblance to this image, which had fascinated him since childhood—that period of yellow purity—inspires Julio and awakens a desire to work that he believed dead or dormant. Áurea’s name—meaning “golden” or “like gold”—seems to reinforce the notion that she will lead Julio back to the blissful, yellow period of his life. However, more than just a color, gold is also linked to money and “interest,” thus underscoring the ambivalent nature of presence she will have in Julio’s life. He approaches her, only to discover that she already knows who he is; she is writing her dissertation about his work. The day of their first meeting, Áurea tells him: “Estoy haciendo el doctorado en Historia del Arte. Neoexpresionismo: Pintores españoles en París. Me conozco casi de memoria tu obra. Eso creo” (99). At first, it does not seem to bother Julio that Áurea has a vested interest in his art—her scholarly life depends on it—and, because of her resemblance to the Odalisque, he sees in her only the ideal woman he needs as a muse. He recalls the hours he spent recreating Ingre’s image when he was young: “Yo adoraba a mi Gran Odalisca. La había dibujado decenas de veces, copiándola de una vieja edición Rizzoli de mi padre” (86). As the work of his own hands, the Odalisque could serve as Julio’s muse, his possession and creation,
the ideal woman who could never detract or deter him from his real love—art—because she was the pure embodiment of art. When Íaurea scoffs at the notion of the muse and tells him that she wants to be “la esclava de su genio,” Julio believes he has found a living, breathing version of his Odalisque (105). Far from distracting or burdening him, Íaurea promises to facilitate his work: “Yo haría todo lo que hiciera falta para que tú pintases. Todo. Incluso desaparecer si es preciso. Tú eres un genio. Y tu arte vale más que cualquier otra cosa. Más incluso que tu amor” (103). Julio is reassured and newly confident in his abilities as a result of Íaurea’s rhetoric that affirms the charismatic myth, and he reasons that perhaps his painting is not so bad after all: “Al fin y al cabo, la Gran Odalisca sostenía que yo era muy bueno, incluso genial, y ella no era una profana ni una esnob, era una tía que había estudiado un montón y sabía de lo que hablaba” (131). As a result, Julio transitions out of his gray period and enters one that is fiery red and orange—passionate and unbridled in every sense: “Así fue nuestro amor en los primeros tiempos. Rojo y naranja” (117).

After the passion fades, and love takes its place, Julio’s world turns blue, a blue he describes as “tranquilo, suave, encerrado en sí mismo. […] El azul es hermoso. El azul es la calma, la pureza” (156). The problem, he asserts, is that “[el] azul […] se convierte en verde a poco que te despistes,” and it is that color green that will soon pervade every facet of his life that signals the start of another creative crisis from which Julio cannot recover (156). Though she claims to want nothing more than to be the “esclava de su genio,” Íaurea is another member of the cultural field who benefits from Julio’s work in economic and symbolic ways. On the surface, her motivations may appear more “pure” than Jean-Luc’s and Julio does not see (or chooses to ignore) them for quite some time. He knows that Íaurea profits from his success; her “éxito académico, subrayado por cierto en aquellos días con el hermoso cum laude, se había
At the same time, Áurea is also much more of a pragmatist than her lover, and while her willingness to sacrifice herself for his genius reveals that she buys into at least some aspects of the charismatic myth, she is more inclined to see the art world for what it is: a network of people working together to create, buy and sell, even if it means “trad[ing] in things that have no price,” to use Bourdieu’s phrase (74). For example, she encourages Julio to strengthen his professional relationships with his friends in Paris in order to stay abreast of new developments, and when he snaps back at her, telling her they are not his real friends, she replies with exasperation: “No seas niño, Canac…por supuesto que son intereses. Y por supuesto te interesan. No puedes desaparecer, como si te hubiera tragado la tierra” (108). She also understands that the prizes and the honors that Julio refuses—such as the prestigious Kassel Documenta prize—are imperative to his acquisition of symbolic capital needed to maintain his status as a respected artist. As an art historian, it is of vital importance for her that Julio to remain relevant in order to justify the choice she made in studying him. Though she may love him and enjoy his work, her professional (and economic) success is contingent on his. A large part of Julio’s frustration with Áurea comes from her openness about the role he plays in the network, as she will not allow him to believe in the myth of the charismatic artist as outsider genius.

At the same time that Áurea’s (likely unconscious) exposé of the cultural field causes Julio to recognize her interestedness, he begins to feel crushed “con el peso de [su] devoción” (106). While Áurea does not make unreasonable demands on his time and she encourages his work, he realizes that he has begun to paint to please her—the ultimate affront to the charismatic identity. This experience is summed up near the end of the novel when Julio is outraged to find that Áurea has order that a row of acacia trees behind their house be cut down. Julio loved and
was inspired by the trees, and he confesses that, that day, “estuve a punto de matarla” (172). When he attempts a painting to memorialize them, he wants it to be an image to “reflejar la idea de la muerte, la muerte todopoderosa que se había abatido sobre mis pobres árboles en pleno esplendor. Pero luego, al ir pasando los días me dio por pensar que una obra así podría molestar a Áurea” (175). Instead, he opts for a painting of “dos acacias alzándose hermosas contra el cielo, llenas de pequeñas flores blancas” that, in the end, is “decorativo y no malo,” but he feels as though he has capitulated to the (tacit) demands of a particular viewing public. As Beebe notes, a common plot point in many artist novels revolved around “a gifted young man who is ultimately defeated by passion” (98). Though at times the artist passes through his passionate experience and emerges stronger from it—as Julio once did as a result of his relationship with Pilar—more often than not, “the discovery of his human bondage destroys whatever artistic aspirations or ability he may have” (98). He begins to realize that his relationship with Áurea is separating him from a truly disinterested form of self-expression and the world around him, once red, then blue, gives way to a sea of disquieting green.

Julio feels the shackles of his “human bondage” most when, as his life becomes more and more green—“verde repugnante y bobo, un mundo repleto de amorfas cosas verdes, una vida verde”—Áurea announces that she is pregnant (190). Julio is frightened, repulsed, and struggles to refrain from lashing out at his lover: “Logré al fin […] no abalanzarme sobre ella, no estrangularla, no recuperar mi libertad, mi sagrada capacidad para decidir cuándo quería […] pintar y comer, cuándo quería hablar y quedarme mudo, cuándo quería tener un hijo y con quién” (190). When Aline is born, he believes himself incapable of love for “la forma amorfa […] [con] carita de gnomo estúpido que miraba sin ver” (16). Though Julio feels “tan miserable, tan egoísta y sucio,” he cannot help but wish that his wife and daughter would disappear and let him work in
peace (190). Giving in to his desires to live as a charismatic, Romantic artist, he takes the very path Carlos rejects in *El cielo de Madrid*: he shuns Áurea and Aline, preferring isolation, and the creative liberty he believes will ensue, to any kind of familial relationship. When they disappear in a taxi, Julio’s sense of relief is stronger than any feelings of sadness or regret: “En el mismo instante, supe que, al fin, volvería a pintar, y fue como si las puertas del sepulcro se abrieran ante mi. Yo era el Resucitado” (19). With Áurea and Aline out of the picture, with Jean-Luc only a distant voice in his head rather than a constant, overbearing presence, Julio is convinced he will recover his artistic self. Art—not money, not relationships, not fame—will put him back in contact with the person he once was (or the person he remembers being), back when the world was yellow, before it was tainted with the gray of fame and self-promotion, before the red of passion blinded him to his own transformation, before the flood of cool blues and greens of oppressive domesticity.

“*El mundo visto desde el cielo 2*” The painting that shares its title with the novel, but also with another painting Julio sees that inspires him, stands as the ultimate representation in the novel of the postmodern condition of the artist and of Julio’s failure to live out the charismatic myth. In order to understand why, it is essential to look to Julio’s inspiration. After the episode with the acacia trees, before his world has become completely green, Julio and Áurea take a trip to Brazil. It will be their last trip together, the moment when Julio makes the decision to leave her, but also the moment when he recovers a desire to paint stronger than one has ever felt before. It happens in an unlikely place: a small museum, housing the work of a (fictional) Brazilian painter, Guimarães da Costa, “un pintor […] que había sido muy cotizado en los años 50 y 60 en su país, aunque era totalmente desconocido en Europa” (197). Áurea scoffs at the museum and the painter’s meager collection of works, and even Julio admits that the majority of the paintings are
“anodinos y mil veces vistos antes,” except for one, labeled: “El mundo visto desde el cielo. Última obra del artista, pintada unos minutos antes de fallecer el 26 de agosto de 1974” (197-98). Julio is transfixed by the painting, and by the notion of seeing the world from above, and he believes that this painting was able to redeem Guimarães de Costa, even on his deathbed. In it, Julio sees that “el pintorcillo mediocre, el funcionario de los pinceles estrangulado de éxito comercial toda su vida, había alcanzado la genialidad a la vez que le alcanzaba la muerte” (201). Painting saved him even after he had sold out, it brought him artistic life and transcendence even as his corporal one was snatched away. Julio has never been so inspired and he has never felt so hopeful that, by undertaking a similar project, he can return to his original, pure creative state.

Therefore, when Áurea leaves with Aline and he has all but renounced his ties to Jean-Luc’s gallery, Julio embarks on the creation of his own Mundo visto desde el cielo. He wants to create a fixed, static, two-dimensional representation of his experiences, his memories, his life which, when viewed with distance, is “inmóvil, plana, llena de figuras y paisajes parados en un instante de tu existencia” (200). The result is an abstract painting composed of “grandes manchas de colores luminosos y descarados, un ridículo esplendor de naranjas y verdes y rojos y amarillos y grises,” but, as the shared title implies, it is also the novel we read (15). The colors of his life experiences—those we have read about: the “mancha naranja” that represents Aline (16), the green of his troubled relationship with Áurea, the red of their ardent first encounters, the innocent yellow of childhood, and the gray of Paris, the gray of fame—come together in the final painting which stands as a desperate attempt for Julio to prove to himself that his sacrifices on the altar of charismatic artistic activity have been worth it. If the painting is a success, by extension, Julio’s life has been a success. However, when the painting is delivered to him after years of work, he is utterly disappointed: “nada es ya como debía ser” (14).
The painting was meant to save him, to bring him back to life, but it does not, in large part because, as Julio eventually recognizes at the end of the novel, art no longer has that redemptive power. If the Romantic artist believed art could save the world, the modern artists of the early twentieth century believed in the curative qualities of art to save themselves as individuals. As George Hagan observes, “Modern artists were only satisfied when their creation reflected their most personal, inner vision, and they viewed creativity and art as opportunities for a transcendent state of self-fulfillment. For them, art was a chance at self-healing, and perhaps, a fantasy of immortality” (2). But, in the postmodern age, this belief in art’s power has waned, and Kuspit alleges, “art has lost its therapeutic will […] It no longer affirms, blesses, deifies existence, producing perfection and plenitude for its audience” (*The Cult*, 12). In Julio’s estimation, the original *El mundo visto desde el cielo* was able to save Guimarães de Costa even after he had sold his soul, but Julio’s own contemporary version has done little but cause him to “hacer el ridículo” (13). In a sense, Julio’s desire was to play God, to create a world. When he fails, he realizes that art is no longer sacred, and that its contribution to a postmodern society is much different than it was in earlier generations. While that difference is not inherently bad, Julio views it as such because to acknowledge rather than euphemize it is to undermine the charismatic myth. Kuspit locates the advent of this social sea change in the 1980s, when, he suggests, “life has declared art to be *less* than life—far from its center, peripheral to its major concerns. That art pretends to a greatness, a significance, whose content is no longer clear has become a problem of our time (*Idiosyncratic Identities*, 12). As he speaks to the daughter he does not know, confessing to her his innermost secrets, Julio reveals his newfound understanding of his place in a post-art society:
El ansia era otra, ser buen pintor, ser mejor pintor aún, acercarme a la perfección, parecerme a Dios. Ay Dios, que fanfarronadas, Aline… Qué lastimoso y ridículo diosecillo he sido, siempre dudando, siempre temiendo no tener fuerzas suficientes para separar las aguas de las tierras. (95)

The Romantic artist may have seen himself as a “god in a Godless universe” (Beebe 27), one who could create new worlds and affect people’s sensibilities, but Julio must learn, painfully, that his art is powerless. When he obeys his “inner voice” and expresses his subjective vision of his world, seen from high above, it does not change the world, and ultimately, it does not change him either. His friend Ginés, the artist friend who is “hermoso e inspirado como un lord Byron” and whom Julio deeply admires (182), explicitly seconds Julio’s assertion when he cries:


El arte precisa el orden. De él nace y hacia él tiende. Orden, sentido, significado…Todo ateniéndose a unas normas para poder ser algo. El arte tiene algo de cielo, o de infierno, como un resplandor, una sombra…Sólo puede ser divino o diabólico, sagrada armonía de las esferas o canto de sirenas luciferinas.

Pero en el mundo en que vivimos, ni el cielo ni el infierno existen ya. Así que no nos engañemos, ya no hacemos arte. Sólo memeces” (184).  

90 Repeated references to Romanticism underscore Julio’s connections to the myth of the artist rooted in the nineteenth century. In likening Ginés to lord Byron, whom Beebe describes as emblematic of the artist as “guilt-cursed rebel whose intensity of purpose and appetite for passionate experience alienate him from a society that prefers […] the usual to the unique”, Julio reinforces his connections to a Romantic myth (66). He describes other friends in his group as “seres del extremo, radicales de la estética, ascetas del nihilismo,” who frequent cemeteries for inspiration, “como poetas románticos buscando lo inaprensible” (129). Julio even paints himself as a Romantic figure in a self-portrait he does while in Asturias: “Y la vista de una playa solitaria […] en la que me pinté a mi mismo como una figura de [Caspar David] Friedrich, de espaldas, asomándome entre las rocas del acantilado a aquella ponderosa desolación” (51).
Artists of the past saw what Kuspit calls “a basic opposition between activist (profane) and estheticist (sacred) art, but the meaning of both has become problematic” (Idiosyncratic Identities, 2). As Ginés observes, art can no longer stand in for religious experience, as it did for the Romantics. It can no longer heal those who practice it. There is no longer a distinction between profane art—art made for profit, art made in an “interested” way—and sacred art, that which is produced as an expression of the artist’s inner voice. Duchamp stands as the final frontier of novelty, a barrier broken down by his ready-mades. Ginés’s statement uncovers a frustration with notion that the avant-garde has become institutionalized, that nothing the postmodern artist can do is able to shock, awe, or be novel in any meaningful way.

As a result of these realizations, Julio becomes very different from past artist heroes in the Künstlerroman in two meaningful ways. First, he must acknowledge that he is part of a network of production and belief, rather than an artist who works only for himself, obeying the higher calling of art, and second, he must admit that he and his art are powerless to make any real existential changes. Julio openly recognizes his participation in the field, even if his acknowledgement is really more of a lament, when he explains, “Sufro sabiendo que he puesto toda mi vanidad al servicio de la vanidad de otros,” and he proceeds to list the other members of the field who have profited from his work, including the collectors, the critics, the art lovers who visited his gallery shows, and even the art historian “que se jactará de entender los fantasmas de mi mente a través de mi pincelada” (216). However, even more painful than realizing his place in the network is Julio’s awareness that art is powerless to effect change. The god-like qualities of the Romantic artist, even if they always were a chimera, are impossible to believe in now. He tells Aline: “Somos una panda de necios del fin de siglo, Aline, una panda de ateos sacralizando
lo humano porque añoramos irremediablemente lo divino,” echoing thus Ginés’s pronouncement that art reflecting the divine or the diabolical can no longer exist (217).

As much as it was in his power, Julio recognizes that he carried out the myth as far as he could in the modern world. He shunned fame, he sought an Ivory Tower and sent away his lover and his child so that he could be with his other “tyrannical” lover—painting—and he allowed what he calls “la enfermedad” to overtake him (95). He strove to be like God, but was left with nothing more than anxiety, insecurity, and frustration. His failure is not noble, nor is it heroic, because he has not been an authentic man in an inauthentic world. He recognizes that he has been posing, that he is a fraud, that everything to which he has aspired means nothing. Seated before his painting, El mundo visto desde el cielo, he does not have the reaction he expected: “Así que tampoco soy como había supuesto un pintor emocionado y abrumado, un pintor de corazón agitado y alterado […] sino un gilipollas que trata de enfocar sus ojos deslumbrados para mirar un cuadro enorme y ajeno, recién llegado del taller de marcos” (15-16). Though he hoped that this painting would be a summation of his entire world, the most personal of visions, his bird’s eye view of his world, it seems foreign to him when he views it. He believed unequivocally that Áurea and Aline’s leaving would provide him with the clarity of vision to represent what his inner voice told him to paint, but he finds the end result hollow. This emptiness is what prompts him to confess himself before Aline, to give an account of his life and world that the painting should have done, but cannot (16). Julio decides that the only thing he can do in this state of impotence is commit artistic suicide. He plans to burn the painting, offering “una hermosa humareda de colores ofrecida en el holocausto personal al vacío” (219). However, Caso underscores his powerlessness one final time. As he is ready to light the fire, to condemn his painting to nothingness, “resulta que llueve a cántaros. ¿Tú crees que será posible
encender un fuego bajo este chaparrón? Ya te decía yo que siempre andábamos haciendo el ridicule…” (220). Unlike nineteenth and early twentieth-century Künstlerroman protagonists, Julio is not an artist powerless to make the world see that his creative vision of life has worth. He is an artist who is powerless because art no longer has power—at least not the kind of power the charismatic myth would afford it. He is not tragically misunderstood, left clinging to the hope that one day in the future, he will be comprehended and valued; Julio’s fame and recognition is of the here and now, even if he finds it hollow and wanting.

In the Spanish art world of the twenty-first century, as Smith avers, the “interpenetration of the world of art and the world of money” is increasingly evident, but “the revelation of the ‘end game’ need not lead to disenchantment” (61-62). Instead, artists reshape and reimagine their own identities, and with them, the charismatic myth of the artist. In the novels, however, where the charismatic myth has so long reigned supreme, it is much more difficult for artist protagonists to deal with the revelation of the “end game,” as my analysis has demonstrated. Though they initially believe themselves different from other people as they struggle with the conflict between life and art they consider unique to themselves, Carlos and Julio both learn that being artists does not necessarily preclude them from having families, fulfilling romantic relationships, and careers which can be recognized as such. Llamazares and Caso have written contemporary Künstlerromane emblematic of a changing art world that is attempting to reconcile old myths with new realities, both in Spain, and on the global art scene. The authors lead us through the artists’ processes of reconciliation that prove painful for both of them, marking the steps along the way with Dantean references in El cielo and the progression of colors in El mundo. The results of these developments are quite different, however; Carlos realizes in time
that his “cielo” is not to be found living the mythologized life of the artist, while Julio realizes only too late that art is not a valid substitute for life.
Chapter 3: The Postfeminist Turn in the Contemporary Spanish Artist Novel by Women: The Case of Almudena Grandes, Clara Usón, and Nieves Herrero

In 1913, Spanish author Edmundo González Blanco expressed, in no uncertain terms, his view of women’s capacity for making art. “Las mujeres no aman ningún arte […],” he pontificated in his text La mujer según los diferentes aspectos de su espiritualidad, “en ellas el ejercicio de un talento es un puro acto de imitación, un pretexto, una afectación explotada por sus deseos de gustar, pues son incapaces de desinterés” (cited in Muñoz López 2). Authentic disinterestedness, which had formed a cornerstone of artistic activity since the Romantic era, required staunch disregard for the opinions of others with respect to one’s work. Thus, González Blanco argued, women’s ostensibly innate interest in pleasing others—and especially in garnering male approval—made them fundamentally incapable of creating fine art. Pilar Muñoz López explains that, especially in Spain, attitudes like González Blanco’s that depreciated women’s artistic capabilities for biological, spiritual, and social reasons were widespread through the 1950s (1-2).91 It comes as no surprise, then, that the depiction of female artists in literature is so scarce in the Spanish tradition, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rare exceptions can be found in the figure of Minia Dumbria, the female composer and mentor to Silvio Lago, the traditional artist character in Emilia Pardo Bazán’s La Quimera (1905), or the amateur painters in a women’s art class in Margarita Nelken’s ironic short novel,  

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91 Muñoz López cites a wealth of texts written or sold in translation in Spain that express similar sentiments with regard to female creativity by authors such as Ramón Pérez de Ayala and José Ortega y Gasset (2). She also notes that the work of Paul Julius Möbius on the “physiological idiocy of women” (Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes, 1900) had wide diffusion in Spain and profoundly affected opinions on female creativity (1).
La exótica (1930). However, Minia, often read by critics as a fictional rendering of Pardo Bazán herself, has traded her passion to create art for religious devotion, and Ruth Lewinson, “la exótica” of Nelken’s novel, gives up art when she gets engaged, only to later be deceived and abandoned by her lover. Yet, these scant depictions of female artists bear little resemblance to the traditional male artist character, that “Hero with Creative Genius” examined in the previous chapter whom Linda Huf calls “sensitive, dreamy, passive, bookish, egocentric, tormented, and misunderstood” (3). What has changed since those first decades of the twentieth century? In a 2010 article in La Vanguardia, Laura Freixas speaks of “un fenómeno nuevo: la mujer artista como personaje literario y cinematográfico,” and her ample list of examples in English, Spanish, and other languages is evidence that interest in the female artist as character is growing in Spain and out (no pag.). However, the question remains if this newfound interest has resulted in greater parity between depictions of male and female artists.

Historically, there have been fewer novels written by women about female artists than those written by men. However, as Linda Huf observes, just because “artist heroines are much less often met with than artist heroes” does not mean that there is no female artist novel tradition.

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92 Another early example of a female protagonist drawn to a creative career is found in Fernán Caballero’s La gaviota, in which María Santaló is drawn to the theater. Her risky decision to elect a singing career over a domestic one is punished. By the end of the novel, María has lost her prestige, her beauty, and even her voice. As Lou Charnon-Deutsch notes, “when the pursuit of a career tempts some heroines to place personal satisfaction above family duty, the results are disastrous for both the woman so bold as to dream of a profession and the family she forsakes” (465).

93 As Marina Mayoral explains, Minia has rejected the characteristics that mark her as “woman” in order to live as artist; she cannot be both: “[Minia] aparece exclusivamente como artista, no como mujer. […] No se menciona ni al marido, ni a los hijos, ni a amistades masculinas” (22). Religion has helped her tame the wily Chimera which torments her young friend Sílvio: “A Minia, las creencias religiosas le sirven de antídoto contra la Quimera. Su fe, su esperanza en una vida eterna son un contrapeso de su deseo de inmortalizarse a través del Arte” (40).
to speak of (4). In fact, Huf’s objective in her book is to establish the parameters of that tradition, which differs significantly from the androcentric one. She notes that female artist protagonists “have different traits and troubles than artist heroes” and, for that reason, “women’s artist novels are so unlike men’s—and so like each other—that they must be supposed to have their own tradition and development” (4). The reason for the quantitative disparity between men’s and women’s artist novels is linked to the stifling conditions creative women encountered and the challenges they faced in expressing themselves. The vast majority of women’s artist novels dramatize the practical or material impediments—such as maternal and domestic responsibilities, a lack of dedicated space for working, and inadequate access to professional training—as well as ideological limitations in the form of attitudes, like González Blanco’s found above. These challenges specific to women so often depicted have prompted critics to read women’s artist novels through a feminist lens. Though it was difficult for the authors, and for real female artists, to escape such conditions in actuality, they could be more easily transcended in the fictional realm.

The only way for a woman to give herself fully to art—as the Romantic conception of the artist requires—was to renounce “womanly” obligations and adopt the “selfish” attitude praised in the male genius but admonished in women. As Roberta White explains in her 2005 book on fictional female artist characters in British and American literature, the very act of a woman daring to forego family, domesticity, and all that goes with it usually means that she “sees herself as embarked upon a journey toward independence and self-knowledge that can only be carried out by her daring to risk a life of art. Feminist goals are to be achieved by aesthetic means” (31). Thus, as White suggests, the very act of writing a female artist novel becomes a feminist act. This is particularly evident in many of the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century novels
White’s study and other like it analyze. However, in the novels published in Spain in the twenty-first century that I will explore in this chapter, the female protagonists—all aspiring artists—have few explicitly (or implicitly) feminist goals. The protagonists of Clara Usón, Almudena Grandes, and Nieves Herrero’s novels are unmarried and childless, have their own spaces in which to work, and have had access to top-notch professional training. Even so, they struggle to acquire symbolic capital and claim their own position in the cultural field.

Marta, the protagonist of Usón’s *Corazón de napalm* (2006), Carmen, of Herrero’s *Todo fue nada* (2005) and Maria José (or Jose, as she likes to be called), the young protagonist of Grandes’s *Castillos de Cartón* (2004), live in different historical moments—Jose’s story is set in the early 1980s, while Carmen and Marta’s is set in the early twenty-first century—but the characters all benefit from an art scene and world impacted by the existence of feminism. The female characters (and their authors) inhabit a postfeminist world. Deborah S. Rosenfelt explains that the term “postfeminist”—which does not imply “the death of feminism,” as some have interpreted it—“acknowledges the existence of a world and a discourse that have been fundamentally altered by feminism” (269). According to Janet and Genaro J. Pérez, the majority of texts published in Spain and elsewhere that can be considered postfeminist, or set against a postfeminist backdrop, “have little or nothing to do with feminism as originally configured,” although “they are frequently works that would have been inconceivable prior to ‘second-wave feminism,’ if only because the world in which they take place has incorporated the gains of

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94 While the scholars all address a different selection of authors who have written female artist novels, a few are ubiquitous in their studies. Jane Austen (*Emma*, 1815), Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (*The Story of Avis*, 1877), Kate Chopin (*The Awakening*, 1899), and Virginia Woolf (*To the Lighthouse*, 1927) make consistent appearances as women’s earliest ventures into the genre. Some later examples cited and/or analyzed frequently are Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* (1973), Silvia Tennenbaum’s *Rachel, The Rabbi’s Wife* (1978), Margaret Atwood’s *Cat’s Eye* (1988), and Mary Gordon’s *Spending* (1998).
second-wave feminism” (24). Especially if we compare Marta, Carmen, and Jose’s situations to that of Elvira in *Entre visillos*, a female Spanish painter of an earlier era, we are able to detect feminist advances. The contemporary protagonists have the ability to dedicate themselves to art with little or no recrimination (and, often, with praise and encouragement) and to participate in non-traditional romantic relationships—both of which are denied Elvira. In theory, it would appear that the women’s playing field has been leveled; the plots no longer revolve around their struggles to find time and space to create. Yet, the women in the contemporary female artist novels still confront challenges that, as Huf observed decades ago, creative men, such as the protagonists of *El cielo de Madrid* and *El mundo visto desde el cielo* do not face.

Three primary differences between the contemporary Spanish male and female artist novels stand out at first glance. Firstly, the women artists never become successful, whether success is defined through their commercial success or personal fulfillment. Whereas the need to reconcile myth with the reality of success becomes the crux of the male artist novel, no such dilemma is present in the novels about women. Secondly, a romantic plot comes heavily to the fore in the women’s novels (though in all cases it is a rather non-traditional relationship) and it often parallels the women’s artistic trajectory in some way. The final difference is related to the depiction of the cultural field and its relationship to the charismatic myth. Here, the three novels diverge in their representations and point to two diverse types of response to the artist novel in the postfeminist age. In the case of *Corazón de napalm*, the cultural field is laid bare and the charismatic myth destroyed with more brutality than it is in *El cielo de Madrid* and *El mundo visto desde el cielo*, but it is done matter-of-factly and without nostalgia or remorse. The male artist protagonists of the previous chapter struggled openly with these revelations, always trying to fall back on the pillars of the charismatic myth even as they crumbled beneath them. This
female artist performs her own unmasking and feels little compunction about questioning or revealing the art world’s inner workings. However, in the case of Grandes and Herrero’s texts, just the opposite occurs: the myth is idealized as something inaccessible, but desirable, for women because it is something to which they have been denied access. It remains the domain of men and is out of the young female artist’s reach, but not because the myth is revealed as untenable in a modern art world. Instead, in these postfeminist novels, the male Great Artist keeps the women under his spell and in his shadow, paralyzing them in their attempts to create and leaving them unfulfilled as artists.

In the following pages, I will analyze Usón, Herrero, and Grandes’s texts as representative of two disparate modes of the contemporary female artist novel in Spain, both of which reveal the effects of postfeminism on their authors and their narrative worlds. Usón’s text is an artist novel that rejects and exposes the charismatic myth outright. In Corazón de napalm, I will explore three interconnected facets the text addresses: the female artist novel tradition, the results of its juxtaposition with the postfeminist novel, and women’s place in the Spanish cultural industry. Herrero and Grandes’s novels represent a mode of female artist novel in which the charismatic myth, in both texts embodied in a male artist character, is idolized and revered as something so far out of the women’s reach that they do not even strive to attain it. I will examine the ways in which this incapability of pursuing the goal of becoming a great artist is tied to the postfeminist nature of the novels, and especially to their privileging of a romantic relationship. What both kinds of novels have in common is that their contemporary female protagonists, whether they idolize or abhor the myth, are unable to accrue symbolic capital in the same way men do, and they are all prepared to abandon art for love or marriage when the opportunities present themselves.
The Female Artist Novel Tradition

Before exploring these three interrelated aspects in the novels, some background on the female (and feminist) artist novel is required. The critical exploration of the female artist novel, not just as a different modality of the male artist novel, but as a genre all its own, began in earnest in the 1970s and is linked to the rise of feminist art history. In 1971, feminist art historian Linda Nochlin posed a question in the form of an essay that would have far-reaching implications for art history and other related fields, including the study of the female artist novel: “Why have there been no great women artists?” Nochlin bluntly elucidates female artists’ situation, in terms of both scholarship and practice: “The fact of the matter is that there have been no supremely great women artists, […] although there have been many interesting and very good ones who remain insufficiently investigated and appreciated” (264). The reason for this, she asserts, can be found not in biological or spiritual deficiencies, but in social ones, in “our institutions and our education” (265). Perhaps even more important to Nochlin’s appraisal of the problem than the material circumstances and deficiencies faced by female artists is her recognition of many naïve, distorted, uncritical assumptions about the making of art in general, as well as the making of great art. […] Underlying the question about woman as artist, we find the myth of the Great Artist—subject of a hundred monographs, unique, godlike—bearing within his person since birth a mysterious essence…called Genius or Talent which, like murder, must always out, no matter how unlikely or uncompromising the circumstances. (265-66)
This “unique and god-like” man is embodiment of the charismatic myth of the artist, a vision perpetuated by a particular kind of art historical research and writing.\textsuperscript{95} The only way to evaluate art by women properly, Nochlin states, is to encourage a different kind of scholarship, a “dispassionate, impersonal, sociological, and institutionally oriented approach which would reveal the entire romantic, elitist, individual-glorifying, and monograph-producing substructure upon which the profession of art history is based” (265).\textsuperscript{96} Nochlin touches here on a key point which reappears in the study of the female artist novel and in the way female authors depict women artists: in its early iterations, the charismatic myth of the artist developed to describe a certain type of \textit{male} artist and women have never been able to see it as a viable model of professional conduct or as a tool in their identity formation.

As Bette J. Kauffman explains in her study of the effects of the artist myth on real female artists, “male” is the default mode for the category “artist”: “[Artist] is a male role, which is to say that the conditions of producing art and the relations of power that have institutionalized art as a category of valued cultural products have historically favored men as performers of the role” (95).\textsuperscript{97} This is the notion that many female authors question in their novels about women artists,

\textsuperscript{95} A decade after Nochlin, feminist art historian Griselda Pollock observed that art historical writing often glorified artists as mythic, great individuals, noting that art historical monographs were not really history, but rather a form of “‘psychobiography,’ an essentially circular process of constructing the artist from the artworks, then defining meaning in artworks as ‘solely…the expression of the creative personality of the artist’” (cited in Kauffman 99).

\textsuperscript{96} It is worth mentioning that Bourdieu’s approach to the cultural field is a kind of dispassionate and sociological study like the one Nochlin calls for, though Bourdieu’s writings say very little about gender, even as they dismantle the notion of the Great Artist.

\textsuperscript{97} Alexandra Wettlaufer posits that an essential component of the charismatic, Romantic vision of the artist “was an anxious and overdetermined insistence on masculinity” (15) She observes the irony in the fact that the qualities “associated with the Romantic genius—sensitivity, emotion, intuition, imagination—had long been gendered feminine, yet definitions of genius, based on a rhetoric of difference, were gendered exclusively male” (15).
as Grace Stewart pointed out in her book, *A New Mythos: The Novel of the Artist as Heroine, 1877-1977*, one of the first book-length studies to be published on the subject in 1979. In her introduction, Stewart questions the universality of the “the mythic pattern of the artist hero”, suggesting instead that it is a “[construct] of a patriarchal culture that reinforces its wishful thinking by creating or responding positively to these fantasies” (9). Citing Maurice Beebe’s seminal book on the artist novel, *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*, Stewart concludes that neither of his proposed models for the artist character—the “art as experience” Sacred Fount and the “reflective, aloof, self-centered and solitary existence” that is the Ivory Tower—“befits the womanly role of selfless involvement and connection to others” (14). The impact of this difference on the female artist novel, when compared to those written by and about men, is significant. The conflict that drives the plot revolves around overcoming the incompatibility of the notions of “woman and artist,” rather than the conflict between art and life with which the male artist struggles (15). Nearly every study of the female artist novel to follow Stewart’s returns to this point. For example, White asserts in her book that women writers usually do not debate if “art exists in some sacrosanct and separate realm” because they “take it for granted that art cannot be isolated from the messiness of life” (31). For Stewart and others, the conflict comes down to this: the concepts of “woman” (in the most traditional sense) and “artist” (or at least of the Romantic, charismatic vision of artist) are antithetical; in order to be one, she must give up the other.

The theme of the female artist as heroine and the female artist novel as a genre continued to garner consistent critical attention after Stewart’s book was published. In 1983, Huf published her study on the artist heroine in American literature and took Beebe’s model of the artist to task. Huf attempted to prove that female artist novels shared paradigms with each other that
differentiated them from the *Künstlerromane* by men. Since then, Huf’s successors have critiqued her approach, noting, as Evy Varsamoupoulou does, that Huf and Beebe end up falling into similarly reductive traps. While Varsamoupoulou believes “rejecting male stereotypes of the artist is laudable enough,” she observes that Huf presents “merely the reverse of a dominant stereotype,” a move she considers “problematic, if not reactionary” (xx). Instead, Varsamopolou’s 2002 comparative study of *Künstlerinromane* advocates breaking from looking for strict paradigms to consider each text more individually. Steady interest in this theme is evident, as White’s (2005) and Deborah Barker’s (2000) books exploring the character of the female artist in American and British literature, and Alexendra Wettlauffer’s recent book (2011) examining the figure of the female artist in both literature and painting from France and England demonstrate. The theoretical approaches may have changed since the time of Stewart and Huf’s studies, these scholars all return to two common themes in their research. Firstly, they respond to Nochlin’s call to explore the material conditions that kept women from becoming “great artists,” commenting on the way the novels present women’s lack of access to art training, materials, or opportunities open to men. Secondly, they all observe that novels about women making art—especially those written in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—depict it as a radical, transgressive, and potentially dangerous act.

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98 According to Huf, the female artist novel differs from the male in five key attributes: character development, its ruling narrative conflict, the role of the antagonist—both female and male, and in what she calls its “radicalism” (5-10). Following Stewart, Huf asserts that the conflict in the text is driven by a choice, not between the artist’s life and her art, but between “her womanhood and her work” (5). However, the female artist, unlike the male, is “stalwart, spirited, and fearless” (5). She is confronted by other women, “sexually conventional foil[s]” who make her look heroic in contrast, and with men who, far from being her Muse, are “would-be domestic dictator[s]” who stand in the way of her work. All these factors culminate in the novels’ “radicalism.” Huf avers that “while the artist hero battles only the bourgeois and the philistine, the artist heroine combats a much more insidious banality” (10-11).
The subversive or transgressive nature of the representations of women painting, sculpting, or writing in female artist novels is the primary factor which has led critics to approach them through a feminist analytical lens. Rachel Blau DuPlessis summarizes this vision of the *Künstlerromane* by women writers when she says that “the figure of the female artist encodes the conflict between any empowered woman and the barriers to her achievement” (84). Many of the artist novels by women follow the typical pattern of the “feminist novel,” as Rosenfelt defines it. She notes that feminist texts often privilege “women’s consciousness, women’s subjectivity, and therefore, women’s agency,” and “take their textual life from an encoding of the dynamic of women’s oppression and women’s resistance” (269). The oppression the female artist faces, or the “barriers to her achievement,” often takes the form of an authoritarian husband or other male figure who does not approve of her work, the responsibilities of motherhood which keep her from being able to devote herself “selfishly” to her craft or which induce guilt if she does. In the nineteenth-century novel, guilt and social convention often result in the female artist giving up her art, but that tendency changes in novels published in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1983, Huf exuberantly praised “exciting development[s]” in the women’s *Künstlerroman*, namely that “more and more artist heroines are refusing to be selfless, sacrificing, self-effacing” (152). This also means they stand up for themselves to the men who would try to hold them back, and routinely they “[walk] out on the ‘hero’” (153). 99 This leads to twentieth-century artist heroines greater chances for success as artists, though that success is still usually confined to the domestic sphere (DuPlessis 94) The disdain the female artists display

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99 Huf is quick to point out that the female artists are not wholly triumphant. They may break away from their family obligations, but they are still plagued by guilt and even when they rebel against their oafish partners, they have “futile affairs with unworthy men, choose to remain in the end in largely futile relationships with unworthy husbands” (157).
toward the barriers which held back their predecessors also make them characteristic of the feminist novel, as Rosenfelt describes it. She notes that feminist novels often share a tendency to “reject, marginalize, or subvert heterosexual love and passion” and, simultaneously, to “interrogate family and motherhood,” as the artist novels of the feminist era often do (270). However, in the same era in Spain, those societal changes occurring elsewhere were still slow in coming. In 1975, feminist author María Aurèlia Capmany lamented that “la mujer en España no ha asesinado al Hada del Hogar […] Por el contrario, sigue en buenos tratos con ella” (cited in Muñoz López 10). Though the female artists in the twenty-first century novels may have broken some ties with the “Hada del Hogar,” her influence still coexists uncomfortably with their ostensible liberation.

Almudena Grandes and Nieves Herrero’s novels explore obstacles to female achievement like traditional artist novels did, but their novels are set in and reflect the postfeminist era. Herrero’s novel continues to interrogate the limits to creativity posed by motherhood and marriage, even in the twenty-first century, but ultimately the novel places a romantic relationship at its center and ends without positively affirming women’s creative abilities. For example, Grandes’ Castillos de cartón appears at first glance to represent a much more liberated young woman who is prepared to do what it takes to succeed as an artist. However, by the novel’s end, the reader realizes that the same self-sacrificing nature—whose decline Huf predicted in her 1983 study—is precisely what leads Jose to abandon her dreams. As I will explore below, these postfeminist artist novels depict conditions much more amenable to women’s success on the surface, but neither artist character is ultimately successful, in large part because of internal barriers with which they problematize their own possibilities for accomplishment.
In addition to psychological impediments, Usón’s novel explores structures of both contemporary Spanish society and the art world that work against her protagonist to keep her from achieving her goals. This approach echoes another variation of artist novel by women, which Deborah Barker explores in her study of the female visual artist in American literature. Barker concludes that commercially-successful female authors used the professional female painter figure in their texts “to circumvent their problematic relationship to high culture” and thus to explore women’s relationship to the book market and the publishing industry (11). This character “allowed [them] to signal the aesthetic seriousness of their own writing and explore issues of creativity and sexuality that conflicted squarely with the limitations of feminine decorum” (11). The female artist character, Barker asserts, came to stand in for the female author, allowing her to “validate and valorize her own writing,” and to defend herself against the critics who placed the whole of women’s writing under the umbrella of “low culture” (11). All of the authors addressed in Barker’s study share what she calls “their vulnerability to the derogatory label of ‘lady novelist’” and, by allowing the female artist to voice in their stead their concerns and desire to be taken seriously, they were able to respond to the challenges they faced in the literary market in ways they could not do in person (13). While American women battled against the term “lady novelist,” Spanish women resisted labels like poetisa, literata, and others

100 Barker examines representations of female artists by male authors (Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James), as well as women’s depiction of female artists in their novels. The female American authors she studies include Fanny Fern, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Kate Chopin, Luisa May Alcott, and Edith Wharton.

101 According to Kauffman, this high-low culture problematic has long informed women painters’ conceptions of their professions. She notes that female artists “are caught between two cultural constructs: the mythic ‘artist as male hero’ on the one hand and the stereotypical dabbling lady painter on the other” (95).
that implicitly degraded them before the literary establishment.\(^{102}\) Freixas observes that the need to combat these terms which emphasize the gender of the author is rooted in the idea that “cuando la autora es mujer, la mala literatura es la norma, la buena la excepción,” because, she adds, tongue in cheek, “como todo el mundo sabe, los hombres sólo una vez, cada mil años, por despiste, producen algo que no sea obra maestra” (Literatura 48-49). The situation that Barker describes in an American context is similar to the one faced by Spanish women in the nineteenth century, though Peninsular authors rarely expressed those concerns through the artist novel. The book market grew rapidly in that era and, according to Catherine Davies, “as novels for mass circulation”—texts read just one time and for pleasure—increased demand for literary production by men and women, though female writing faced special suspicion and accusations of low quality or “selling out” (quoted in Henseler 3).

Although women have many more publishing opportunities and face fewer limitations today than they did a century ago, the “literary boom driven by a capitalist consumer economy” at the end of the twentieth century in Spain created, as Christine Henseler has observed, a “publishing panorama…[which] displayed characteristics similar to those of the late nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century” (3). Women are accused of selling books “because of their star power” rather than because of the quality of their writing and the literary industry as a whole is still charged with “selling out to the financial rewards of best-seller

\(^{102}\) Freixas avers that today’s debate over “literatura femenina” and “literatura de mujeres” is the same war being waged over different terms: “Es desalentador ver el tesón, el esfuerzo constante, nunca suficiente, siempre renovado, siempre inútil, con que las escritoras han intentado y siguen intentando desembarazarse de la imagen desvalorizadora que las persigue. […] Cuando consideran que su literatura tiene algo específico, han de apresurarse a aclarar que es de mujeres, quizá, pero no, ¡Dios nos libre!, femenino…y así hasta el infinito” (92).
lists” (3). Henseler explicitly links the allegations of the literary market’s selling out—both then and now—with the increased conspicuousness of female authors:

Today’s literary establishment echoes the decry of past decades when writers claimed that [...] Spain [was] a prostitute who [had] sold out lofty ideas for love of material comforts. The so-called prostitution of the country unabashedly coincides, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the literary opportunities, level of production, and visibility of women writers. (3-4)¹⁰³

Today, that visibility is high and female authors are in the public eye more than ever before in Spain. As the literary market expanded in the 1980s and 1990s, new forms of marketing spearheaded by publishers emerged to promote their authors’ books, such as “advertisements in popular magazines, cultural programs on television, book presentations, and encuentros of young writers organized by the publishers themselves” (Tsuchiya 239). They have also taken to social media—Nieves Herrero is among the authors reaching out to readers through this new medium and readers who follow her on Twitter can keep tabs on the development of her new book, even in its prepublication phases.¹⁰⁴ As Freixas asserts, this “gran visibilidad mediática” that women have experienced for the last few decades simultaneously “aumenta las ventas [y] fomenta una hostilidad reactiva por parte de algunos sectores” (Literatura 38). Women authors are often faced

¹⁰³ Like Henseler, Freixas compares that the notion that female authors exploit their sex in order to sell books to prostitution: “[la frase] encarna el venerable tópico según el cual toda mujer que se desenvuelve en el ámbito público, especialmente si encima gana dinero, está ejerciendo de una u otra forma el oficio más viejo del mundo” (Literatura 23).

¹⁰⁴ On her Twitter profile (https://twitter.com/nievesherrero_), Herrero provides information about her newest book, Lo que escondían sus ojos (2013), including photos from her presentaciones de libro in different Spanish cities. Additionally, she has created a Twitter profile for the book itself, (https://twitter.com/LoQueEscondian), which includes data on sales numbers and more information about book presentations.
with the charge that because of their choice of genre and topics or even their own appearance on book covers and in interviews, they “explotan su sexo para vender” (Freixas, Literatura 23).

In post-Transition Spain, as Freixas observes, the demands of the reading public have been volatile and shifting, and along with the historical novel, the novela negra, and biography, “los llamados ‘libros de mujeres’” have been popular and have sold remarkably well. But, as Bourdieu has demonstrated—and as we saw in Chapter Two—a short-term production cycle and commercial success are often viewed with suspicion by more autonomous or consecrated sectors of the literary field. It is difficult for an author who is successful in the field of large-scale production to accumulate enough symbolic capital to be respected in the field of restricted production—though, as Friexas notes, in the post-Transition years, “las fronteras entre ‘lo literario’ y ‘lo comercial’ se han difuminado,” especially with the rise of what she calls “el best-seller culto” (Literatura 49-50, emphasis in original). The label “women’s writing” still carries with it a negative charge, a charge intimately linked to the genre’s commercial appeal. In her discussion of the work of Lucia Etxebarria—the model for commercial success in the arena of “literatura de mujeres” in the post-transition world—Silvia Bermúdez astutely observes that the resentment felt towards this author (and others like her) and the reason she consistently generates popular and scholarly conversation “[seem] to rest in the openly ‘let’s talk about sex while

105 Freixas provides a list of seven texts published between 1975 and 1997 which she sees as representative of the “libros de mujeres” trend. These texts by authors like Esther Tusquets, Rosa Montero, and Lucía Etxebarria all sold at least 50,000 copies, even without the benefit of previously having been awarded a literary prize (Literatura 50-51).

106 Henseler (glossing Freixas) provides a succinct list of the four categories into which “women’s writing”: “Feminist, politically incorrect, or opportunist,” “intimate, emotional, and sensitive,” “commercial [and] directed at a wide female readership,” and “particular, in other words, not universal” (11). The last three elements in this list are often associated with “chick lit,” the “paradigmatic ‘literature’ of postfeminism” which, as Pérez and Pérez aver “lacks anything canonical” because it has “no apparent connection with ‘new feminism,’ no agenda, and no identifiable ideology” (23).
laughing all the way to the bank’ premise that supposedly guides her writing” (224). Etxebarria is known for her controversial topics, and even more for her blatant self-promotion, which flies in the face of the charismatic myth and the notion of disinterested creation. According to Bermúdez, Etxebarria’s work and her actions shock and disgust certain critics and sectors of the public because “they reveal the operational systems of the agents involved in the production of Spain’s cultural capital” (225). Clara Usón’s novel confronts this overt revelation of the cultural field, and it is in her text, as I will discuss below, that we find a contemporary manifestation of the female author who allows a visual artist character to speak through her about the state of the literary field in which she is situated. Henseler observes that Extebarria and Usón’s generation—those women born in the 1960s and 1970s—are those “most often associated with the ‘selling out’ of the cultural industry,” and so her portrayal in Corazón de napalm of parallel developments in the artistic field come as no surprise (10). In Usón’s novel, Marta advocates for copying as an acceptable alternative to original creation, and she questions the rules that govern the field, especially those that say an artist cannot admit an outright desire for profit without “prostituting themselves” to the market.

**Clara Usón’s Corazón de napalm**

*Corazón de napalm* was awarded the Premio Biblioteca Breve of 2009 and is the fifth of six novels Clara Usón has published since she began her career in 1998. The novel’s first thirteen chapters alternate between two time periods and points of view. The odd-numbered chapters are set in 1984 and narrated in third person, focalized through Fede, the fourteen-year-old boy who dreams of being a punk and emulating his hero, Sid Vicious, by living fast and dying young. They tell the story, in turn comical and tragic, of Fede’s punk aspirations that clash with his still-childlike view of the world and the ardent love he feels for his mother, Carmen—a love that
eventually transcends filial boundaries and ventures into oedipal fantasy. Over the course of the novel, Fede abandons his father and stepmother’s house in Santander to travel alone to Barcelona, where he sets out on a desperate search for the mother he has not seen in over a year. He finds her suffering from AIDS, but he does not understand her affliction and believes her behavior to be the effect of the drugs that separated them in the first place. Fede’s misguided attempts to help his mother result in his tangling with drug dealers, several humorous episodes of cross-dressing, and kidnapping a baby whom he accidentally smothered to death—and for which his mother takes the blame. The connection between the chapters centered on Fede and even-numbered chapters, set in 2006 and which Marta narrates in first person, is not immediately apparent. However, by the novel’s midpoint, the reader begins to suspect that Marta’s lover is none other than Fede, all grown up and going by his proper name, Juan, a suspicion confirmed in the last two chapters. *Corazón de napalm* is a novel about crimes and punishments, a novel about motherly love and oedipal lust, and also, in the chapters focused on Marta, a novel about the contemporary female artist and the art world she inhabits. ¹⁰⁷ Marta challenges the validity of the charismatic myth in a postmodern world in several distinct ways throughout the text. These include her first artistic job working as a ghost-painter for a consecrated artist, her choice to become a conceptual artist exclusively for money, and her questioning of the very existence and value of artistic originality. I will explore each of these three aspects in turn.

¹⁰⁷ Though it falls outside the scope of my study, the theme of crime and retribution runs throughout the entire novel. The epigraph chosen to head the novel is a Sex Pistols lyric that sums up this theme: “Oh Lord God have mercy / All crimes are paid.” The instances of crimes and the discussion of appropriate punishments are many: Juan is a judge who rules in cases in which minors are involved; Marta becomes implicated in aesthetic illegality when she copies paintings on multiple occasions; Carmen takes on the burden of Juan/Fede’s punishment when he kills the baby, knowing her days are numbered because of her illness, and kills herself in prison. When Juan finds out the truth about Carmen’s suicide, his own guilt over his mother’s death leads to his own suicide at the end of the novel, a “crime” for which Marta feels guilty, as she was the one to share with him the details of his mother’s death.
**Originality and the Art of the Copy.** From the novel’s outset, it is already evident that Marta is not a traditional artist hero who embodies the charismatic myth. The first time the reader meets her, she and her friends are waiting in line outside of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona (MACBA) and her nerves are getting the best of her. She has good reason, given that it is “la primera vez que [su] obra se exhibía en un museo” (15). However, the crowds gathered outside the museum are not there to see a Marta Valdés masterpiece in person, but rather to see the retrospective exhibit on the life and work of Maristany, a famed Valencian painter who has recently died of old age. In fact, no one knows who Marta Valdés is, because, though the paintings in the exhibition are the work of Marta’s hand, her name (and her professional identity) “quedaba enterrado bajo [la] firma [de Maristany]” (19). Marta dedicated the initial years of her career to painting Maristany—not to forging them, she is quick to assert: “Yo no falsificaba cuadros; yo pintaba Maristany” (19). Too old and arthritic to paint, Maristany, who at 82 years old still “[seguía con] la cabeza bullendo de ideas,” hired Marta to carry out the projects under his supervision (20). Maristany chose the shapes, the volumes, and the colors that made up his large-scale geometric abstract paintings, but it was Marta who “extendía los lienzos sobre el suelo y pintaba en cuclillas, como había visto hacer a Miquel Barceló en fotos” (20). In the years she worked for Maristany, Marta became “una pintora asalariada,” working eight hours a day bringing someone else’s vision to fruition for money (20). Few artists’ job descriptions could be further from the charismatic vision of artistic activity represented in the traditional artist novel.

Marta’s position as an intermediary between Maristany’s creative dream and the finished product is an affront to the notion of charismatic artist. She admits that when she imagined her career, she saw the job with Maristany as a way station on the road to her own charismatic
artistic identity. As she contemplates the paintings she completed years earlier, now displayed in MACBA, she waxes nostalgic:

había sido como echar un vistazo a mi pasado y encontrarme de golpe con la joven que fui, la pintora en ciernes llena de proyectos e ilusiones, que se decía a sí misma que ese trabajo era un mero expediente que le permitiría pagar el alquiler de su diminuto estudio y financiar sus futuras obras. (18-19)

However, Marta’s work with a “great artist” like Maristany did not lead to her own personal success, but rather interred her work forever beneath his fame. As she watches the museum-going public venerate the master’s work, she is bitter about her own meager salary and cannot help but feel cheated out of recognition and money that should have been (partly) hers. She knows that Maristany, especially at the end of his career, hired her to carry out the work he could no longer do himself in order to continue profiting from his ideas. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the charismatic myth of the artist calls upon the creator to dedicate himself or herself to his or her craft with passion—to prove “true dedication to his or her calling”—but also that same work “must appear as disinterested in terms of private interests, not least regarding his or her pecuniary situation” (Røyseng, Mangset and Spord Borgen 2). Marta, with an air of bitterness, quickly reveals in her first chapter in the novel that neither she nor Maristany created disinterestedly, though Maristany was able to reap symbolic and material rewards in a way Marta cannot.

108 In Usón’s 2006 novel *Perseguidoras*, the protagonist, a young lawyer named Ana, has a similar experience. Ana starts her story in *Perseguidoras* by making clear that she “nunca quise trabajar de abogada, mi sueño era ser actriz” (24). She becomes a lawyer at her mother’s behest, though it never becomes her passion. Ana responds to a classified ad seeking “[una] actriz trabajadora y audaz,” and get the part, not knowing it involves dressing in costume and pursuing clients of a legal firm who have not paid their fees (29). While she initially sees the job as a way to make money to pursue her real dream, she ends up working at the law firm (as a lawyer, not a costumed bounty hunter) and never leaves the profession.
Far from having “messianic” faith in her creative abilities—the kind the charismatic artist needs to believe in his or her vocation—Marta has come to think she may never be a great artist. In her own estimation, her paintings are lifeless, and fail to reflect her “forma de sentir y ver el mundo” (59). Marta is a talented copyist, but she knows that copying is seen by a society that believes in the charismatic myth as secondary to creative originality, and she considers this tremendously unfair: “Por algún motivo que se me escapa […] el copista es despreciado” (60). In his book, *In Praise of Copying*, Marcus Boon notes that while “copying is pervasive in contemporary culture” it is simultaneously “subject to laws, restrictions, and attitudes that suggest that it is wrong and shouldn’t be happening” (4). He observes that this is particularly true when it comes to works of art, which are considered “the pinnacle of individualistic self-expression,” especially when displayed in art museums, “the most prestigious archives of the unique and original object” (15). Like the charismatic myth and the attitudes that typify it, the concept of originality is rooted in the nineteenth century. As Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz have written, the mark of an artist’s skill prior to the Romantic period was an ability to copy and replicate, to “paint a bit of nature so skillfully that observers mistook it for the real thing” (8). However, beginning in the late eighteenth century in Europe, when the notion of “genius” came to characterize legitimate artistic creation, this practice—imitation, replication, copying—was denigrated in a way it had never been before. Boon explains the repercussions of this change, noting that “copying was an integral part of the visual arts until the eighteenth century when the rise of various forms of intellectual property law, retrospectively turned the copier into a forger, and the multiplicity of the similar and imitations into fakes” (115-16). Oskar Bätschmann traces this idea back to Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790), in which the philosopher declared that “Genius is the talent that gives art its rules” (68). In his analysis of Kant’s text, Bätschmann
elucidates that “the genius must first and foremost have originality, and his products must be exemplary, that is, they must not be imitations, but they must offer rules for judgment. Moreover, the genius can neither describe nor explain how his products evolve” (68). In Bourdieu’s terms, this belief leads to the existence of an artistic universe “in which to exist is to differ” and the only way in which an artist can make a name for him or herself and begin to gather symbolic capital (which will, most often in the long-term, lead to material returns) is “by endeavoring to impose new modes of thought and expression” (58). In the world in which uniqueness and originality are prerequisites for the acquisition of symbolic capital, the copyist is considered secondary to the innovative creator.109

In Corazón de napalm, Marta is fed up with this belief system. Originality has to have limits, she muses and, in 2006, how many truly new ideas can remain? Marta observes: “Al fin y al cabo, el número de ideas es limitado; en cambio, son infinitas las diferentes ejecuciones posibles de un mismo concepto” (60). The problem, she suggests, is that the importance of authorship has been exaggerated and she provides as an example of the devalorization process that occurs when a painting thought to be the work of a master painter, like Rafael, turns out to be the handiwork of one of his disciples. This proves, for Marta, a dual injustice. First, she complains, “no es la representación lo que se admira, sino el apellido de la mano que la plasmó” (60). This veneration of the signed artwork inextricably is bound up with what she calls “[e]l culto insensato de la originalidad” (61). In these statements, Marta challenges one of the most

109 I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the place of pop and appropriation art, and the work of artists like Andy Warhol, Sherrie Levine, or, in Spain, the art group Equipo Crónica, who made a career out of appropriation and “copying.” On her article on the concept of originality in appropriation art, Julie Van Camp observes, referring to Levine’s appropriation photography, “the commentary on the earlier work becomes an original contribution” (254). She credits postmodern philosophers like Baudrillard with the creation of “an intellectual framework that accounts for originality [of appropriation art]” rather than “showing the death of originality” (254).
deeply held beliefs central to the charismatic myth and she proposes a project that will imbue the copy once again with value:

en esa época, concebí una ambición: realizar una copia de uno de mis lienzos fetiches de Velázquez, la Vista del jardín de la Villa Medici, en Roma (Pabellón de Ariadna). Mi sueño era que […] el espectador se viera obligado a admitir:

‘Prefiero el de Marta Valdés, tiene más calidad.’ (61)

Marta believes that, with her knowledge of techniques that had not even been developed when Velázquez painted La Vista del jardín de la Villa Medici, she could create an improved version of the painting. Yet, she recognizes how difficult it would be to get anyone to acknowledge her work as better; it would be considered an affront to the “great master” or, provided that she did not transform or parody it in someway, seen as lacking originality.

Marta is driven by this desire to copy Velázquez over the course of the entire text, and it challenges the cult of the “great artist” whose work cannot be improved. At the same time, it advocates for the appreciation of technical skill and execution over mere novelty. In her pursuit of the copy, Marta seeks what many female artist characters shunned. As Amparo Serrano de Haro observes, many men in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believed that women’s ability to “dar a luz criaturas de carne y hueso inhibía su capacidad para otro tipo de creación;” in the visual arts, they were only willing to “conceder a la mujer méritos de copista esforzada, de seguidora con talento, de imitadora fiel; pero nunca de creadora, de genio, de innovadora” (25). Given the wide diffusion of these attitudes, female authors sensed an imperative to combat them by creating characters were capable of originality. According to Barker, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century artist novels by women she examines her study, the female copyist appears often in novels by men who, through the use of this figure, try to discredit the woman
artist. The image of the copyist “acknowledged women’s public pursuit of art training at the same time that it limited the nature of their artistic production to that of copying, implying that women had the ability to imitate, but not to create” (17-18). As a response, female authors rejected depicting the copyist in favor of “the original, professional woman artist” (18). However, in Usón’s 2009 novel, Marta tries not to prove her own capacity for originality, but to attest, in a postmodern way, that imitation and transformation of existing concepts and ideas can also be valuable.

Of course, one could argue that Marta might not praise copying as she does if her own attempts at original painting had been more successful. The galleries in which she has tried to display her work have rejected her, and the majority of the paintings bearing her signature are collecting dust in a closet at her parents’ house in Valladolid. When the art dealer Turpin, whom Marta meets through Maristany’s second wife, commissions her to make copies of two nineteenth-century paintings—paintings she initially considers ugly and of little aesthetic value—Marta comes to love her task, in large part because the burden of originality and the anxiety that inevitably accompanies it are taken off of her shoulders.\(^\text{110}\) When she works on the replicas, the relief she feels is evident: “no me acuciaban las dudas que me impedían avanzar cuando trataba de crear algo nuevo o ‘propio’” (274). Marta’s anxiety about creating something innovative—“the self-doubt, paralysis, and melancholy” that Bätschmann identifies as the

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\(^\text{110}\) Another significant contrast between the artist novels by men and women, and one that corresponds to a more demystified vision of the cultural field, is the representation of the art dealer. In the novels by Llamazares and Caso, the art dealers are depicted as those who are fundamentally at odds with the artist’s creative and charismatic mission. Turpin’s association with Solange, Maristany’s scheming wife, initially casts him in an unfavorable light, but Marta comes to enjoy his company—“descubrí que bajo su apariencia de dandi relamido, Turpin era un hombre agradable” (155)—and desire his representation on the gallery circuit. She sees the possibility of working with Turpin, not as an impediment to her creativity, but as the fast track to the success she dreams of: “Si yo no metía la pata, Turpin podía acceder a representarme y ese futuro de gloria y dinero que me parecía imposible, se haría realidad” (156).
burden of originality—dissipates when her task becomes that of copying and, in the process, improving, an existing painting (66). The interrelated notions of copying, falsifying and forging converge in an even more complex manner in the episodes in the text focused on Marta’s work with Maristany and they form a crucial part of the novel’s debunking of the charismatic myth.

Marta’s work for and with Maristany raises a host of ethical questions tied to the notion that copying or falsifying is wrong. Marta maintains that she does not falsify Maristany’s paintings; she brings them into being. However, the original ideas are not hers, but instead come from Maristany’s sketches, drawn by his own tremulous hand that can no longer paint on a large scale. It is this disconnect between the idea and the material product that causes the greatest polemic in the text. In a discussion of the ontology of intellectual property, Boon explains the key differences between idea and product as they relate to the concepts of originality and ownership. He concludes that

> while the idea itself exists in a realm beyond the human realm, the expression belongs to this world, and to the person who, receiving the idea as author, inventor or owner, fixes it materially as self-expression through his or her labor and turns it into property. This is called ‘originality.’ Others who fix it materially via access to the this-worldly original expression, rather than receiving the idea are said to be making a copy” (21).

Per Boon’s definition, Marta is copying—she fixes Maristany’s ideas, transmitted in the material form of the sketch, in paint on the canvas. Marta is not the one to whom the inspiration comes, but she makes it tangible and able to be sold to museums and wealthy collectors.111

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111 It is important to point out that Marta will only work with real Maristany sketches. After his death, his much-younger wife Solange, who is depicted as conniving and money-hungry, contacts Marta again and asks her to paint some sketches she claims to have found among her
If Maristany had been inspired—as a great, charismatic artist would be—to immortalize his vision in the material realm because of an existential need to express himself, and his paintings were not destined for sale to such illustrious recipients, Marta’s activity as a ghost-painter would matter much less. However, because Maristany (and, by extension, Marta) know they owe to “la posteridad (y a los ricos clientes) una calidad elevada,” her work has greater repercussions (20). Boon notes that when copying is criticized, “one of the principal arguments made against [it] is that it involves an act of deception” (108). This deceptive copying can take the form of plagiarism (“appropriating someone else’s work”) or forgery (“in which one presents one’s own work as the work of someone else”), but the results are similar (109). Citing American legal scholar Richard Posner, Boon explains that plagiarism and forgery are deceitful “in the sense of misleading the intended [buyers] to induce reliance by them. By this I mean that the [buyer] does something because he thinks the work original that he would not have done if he had known the truth” (109). If the museum or the wealthy buyers in the novel knew the truth—that the paintings had been completed by Marta and not by Maristany—they would not have wanted to purchase them for exorbitant sums. Signed by Maristany, the paintings are destined for the museum, while, as Marta observes, “[los] que firmo como Marta Valdés ser[án] arrojad[os] a un contendedor por mis futuros herederos, si llego a tenerlos” (365). By bringing to light her role in the production of Maristanys and in the business of art, Marta effectively demystifies her own artistic activity through her preoccupation with money and status and, at the same time, debunks the charismatic myth embodied by a “great” artist like Maristany.

husband’s things. Marta, embittered because Solange had an important hand in firing her years ago, is skeptical, and when she sees the sketches, she knows that Solange has created them herself. Marta draws a line and, though she is tempted by the money, she refuses the commission, saying “yo no quería ser cómplice de un crimen estético, mi conciencia de artista me lo reprocharía hasta la muerte” (228).
Marta’s greatest preoccupation—and what causes her to question the entire notion of originality and the value ascribed to it—is the potential power of the artist’s signature. She is incensed by instances in which the quality of the work is seen as less important than the “great individual” who created it. Bourdieu refers to this phenomenon as “the quasi-magical potency of the signature” which he explains is “nothing other than the power, bestowed on certain individuals, to mobilize the symbolic energy produced by the functioning of the whole field” (81). This “magic act,” as it were, is only possible among an audience prepared to accept it as true, an audience whose “collective misrecognition, collectively produced and maintained, [is] the source of the power the magician appropriates” (emphasis in original, 81). Donald Kuspit makes a similar remark about the audience and the immortalization of art in the museum setting. He notes that art in a museum “function[s] as narcissistic fuel for the audience, and as narcissistic projection for the artist” (Idiosyncratic 29). The “pole of the viewer,” as Duchamp called it “has the last word,” Kuspit asserts, because “one is only nominally an artist until the audience thinks one is” (30). It is clear that this attitude is entirely at odds with the notion that “artist” is a category of being that sets artists apart from common men, an inherent distinction that drives them to create and makes them great, regardless of others’ opinions of their work. The emphasis on the collective production of belief in art’s legitimacy is one of the most certain ways to reduce emphasis on the charismatic artist, the great creative genius. For an artist like Maristany, symbolic and economic returns depend on euphemizing these aspects of the process.

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112 The clearest example of collective misrecognition is the ready-made. Bourdieu notes that “the artist who puts her name on a ready-made article and produces an object whose market price is incommensurate with its cost of production is collectively mandated to perform a magic act which would be nothing without the whole tradition leading up to her gesture, and without the universe of celebrants and believers who give it meaning and value in terms of that tradition” (81).
of making-meaning in art. However, given that Marta has struggled—in spite of her training and dedication to her craft—to accrue symbolic capital, she has nothing to gain from euphemization. Instead, by revealing the inner workings of the field that have obscured her own name as artist, Marta attempts, in a small way perhaps, to expose what she perceives as an injustice.

**The Pursuit of Novelty and Money: Conceptual Art.** Much more so than the male artist-characters studied in Chapter 2, Marta has reason to expose the charismatic myth. At the same time, she is also much more overt in her own ambitions and career goals, as well as in her attempts to garner symbolic capital. In 2006, the year in which the novel is set, Marta no longer works for Maristany and she is tired of her own endeavors being obscured by another artist’s signature. She wants her turn in the limelight and, more than anything, she wants to make money. Marta’s attempts to sell her paintings have lead to frustration. She contemplates moving to Madrid, to allow the galleries there to discover her talent, “esa oportunidad que con tanta frecuencia había brindado a los galeristas catalanes y que éstos, temerariamente, habían rechazado. Algún día se arrepentirían, estaba segura de ello” (53). What Marta wants most is the opportunity to perfect her copy of Velázquez, but she has to work—first, as a guide in the Museo del Prado (until she gets fired for berating a patron in her tour group), later as an art teacher in an Opus Dei school and as a caricature artist on Barcelona’s Paseo de Colón—and has no time to dedicate to her project. Marta begins to actively search for “la formula que me permitiera conseguir mucho dinero con rapidez, para poder dedicarme el tiempo que fuera preciso para perfeccionar a Velázquez” (101). Her solution is to devote herself to the conscious cultivation of one particular genre of art that she knows can lead to hefty economic profits: conceptual art.

Marta’s aspiration to become a conceptual artist is tied entirely and openly to making money and making a name for herself among a select public—the definition of uncharismatic
activity. Her model to follow is the British artist Damien Hirst and his conceptual art piece from 1991, *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*: “Hace unos años, el artista inglés Damien Hirst compró un tiburón tigre muerto, lo introdujo en una enorme vitrina o urna de acero y cristal, lo bañó en formol, le dio [un] pomposo título […] y lo vendió por más de un millón de euros” (101). Marta’s reaction to Hirst’s piece is neither mocking nor admiring; rather, she exclaims, “Cada vez que pienso en ello, me tiro de los pelos. ¿Por qué no se me ocurrió a mí eso?” (101). According to Marta, conceptual art is nothing more than “meras ocurrencias, ideas chocantes o provocativas, que sorprendan, escandalicen, y con un poco de suerte, asqueen” (101). However, these provocative and disgusting works of art sell and, given that the money is her unabashed motivation, Marta is willing to try her hand at a conceptual art piece in order to earn economic and symbolic recompense, even though she considers such art ridiculous: “De modo que sí, desdeño el arte conceptual, me parece una inmensa tomadura de pelo; […] Pero es una buena manera de ganar dinero” (101). Marta’s association of conceptual art with money is well-founded. As Don Thompson notes, a cursory appraisal of the language critics use to discuss contemporary conceptual art reveals this preoccupation with material value over artistic form:

> Art professionals talk about Impressionist art in terms of boldness, depth, use of light, transparency, and color. They talk about contemporary art like Damien Hirst’s shark […] in terms of innovation, investment value, and the artist being ‘hot.’ (12)

Few concrete markers of quality exist to mark Hirst’s creative taxidermy, and other pieces like it, as a work of art, and this makes buyers uncomfortably insecure in their ability to distinguish a “good” piece from a “bad” one. To remedy this, Thompson observes, “their recourse is often to rely on branding” in the form of a well-known (branded) gallery, collector, or museum, or, after the artist has gathered enough symbolic capital, on the quality—and monetary value—that their own “brand” name assures. Marta is informed about this element of conceptual art, as well, and it forms part of her get-rich-quick scheme: “Así veía yo el asunto: se trataba de embauar a un coleccionista, como el celeberrimo Charles Saatchi, […] y persuadirle de que mi proyecto (el que fuere) era genial” (102).

With the backing and approval of a collector like Saatchi, Marta’s work would be branded in such a way that she could not help but be successful, and her own name would gain symbolic value in the process.

As Marta sees it, the only necessary characteristic of her future conceptual art masterpiece is novelty: “que sea nuevo y diferente es lo único que importa” (101). Kuspit notes that “fetishization of innovation”—to which Marta refers implicitly in this passage—is a “symptom of artistic worldliness” in which “the belief in novelty for the sake of novelty […] becomes inseparable from the perception of the work of art as supreme commodity” (20). In

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114 This insecurity is grounded in the extreme variability of the art pieces that become consecrated today. Charles Saatchi’s glib remark makes clear why some collectors have trouble distinguishing “good” art from “bad”: “There are no rules about investment. Sharks can be good. Artist’s dung can be good. Oil on canvas can be good. There’s a squad of conservators out there to look after anything an artist decides is art” (cited in Thompson, 85).

115 Thompson calls Charles Saatchi “the prototype of the modern branded collector” (85). The association of an artist with Saatchi can be a make-or-break one, as “his purchases are publicized and create an instant reputation for an artist. […] Media articles, auction houses, and collectors may describe a piece of art or an artist as ‘collected by Saatchi’ or ‘owned by Saatchi’ or ‘coveted by Saatchi.’ Each description is likely to drive up prices for the artist’s work. Less fortunate is an artist labeled as ‘rejected by Saatchi’ or ‘sold off by Saatchi.’” (85-86). For more on this branded collector, see Thompson, Chapter 9.
other words, the desire continually to renovate art or one particular genre of art is not necessarily motivated by disinterested desire to express oneself, but rather it is tied to the high returns (symbolic, and later, economic) artists can expect on their innovation in the marketplace. For Bourdieu, this constant quest for novelty is a “structural law” of the field (117). He avers that “the more the field is capable of functioning as a field of competition for cultural legitimacy, the more individual production must be oriented toward the search for culturally pertinent features endowed with value in the field’s own economy” (117). As the artists seek cultural distinction, they can be drawn into “an all-out quest for any difference that might raise them out of anonymity and insignificance,” one which is “continually liable to degenerate into an anomic quest for difference at any price” (117).

Marta’s own quest for difference leads her to follow Hirst into the animal world to find source materials for her inchoate project. While she is babysitting for her goddaughter, who “en vez de entusiasmarse con el juguete didáctico que [Marta] le había regalado […] se entretenía vistiendo de princesa a una rata de plástico,” Marta finds her inspiration (102). She concludes that her idea—a nativity scene populated by dead rats dressed in period costumes—“[es] una de esas que dan pie a una obra de arte conceptual que puede reportar pasta gansa” (102). Her piece has all the necessary elements: it is provocative (“¡Qué gran símbolo religioso! […] ¡Cómo se pondría la iglesia!”), it lends itself to multiple levels of critical analysis and interpretation (“religioso, filosófico, ético, zoológico, artístico también, of course”), and, best of all, “constituiría un espectáculo sorprendente y, sobre todo, repulsivo, muy asqueroso” (102). By depicting Marta’s conscious decision to work in one particular genre because of its possible economic and symbolic returns, Usón turns her attention to the role of female artists—literary and visual—in the contemporary Spanish cultural industry. Women authors often face
accusations that they are choosing to write “literatura feminina” because it is popular and because they can make money, and in the process, they are charged with abandoning “values such as esthetic innovation or ideological commitment” (Tsuchiya 238). Tsuchiya observes that some women (rightly, she seems to imply) have rejected any sort of gendered categories in which critics and audiences try to place their writing, asking works by women must fall into “a single, monolithic category of ‘narrativa femenina,’ while writings by men are consider to be just ‘literature’ (240-41). However, other authors (wrongly) have “responded to the literary establishment’s attempts to label and ghettoize their writing based on gender [by appropriated] gender inflected notions to serve their own ends” (241). Referring specifically to Almudena Grandes and Lucía Etxebarria, Tsuchiya accuses these authors of “the conscious cultivation of a literary genre” they knew would sell well; thus, they are blamed for cheapening feminism and for selling out to the market demands of a less-than-intellectual reading public (242).

If, as female authors of the past did, Usón is choosing to use her visual artist character as a voice for women literary artists, there are connections between the kind of accusations Tsuchiya and other critics level at female authors who are not creating disinterestedly or for the achievement of ideological goals. Marta is unapologetic about her brazen desire to make money and her choice of art form to achieve that end. This desire may not be new, but it is not as

116 The abandonment of these values, according to Tsuchiya, is not limited to women’s writing. Rather, she refers to a group of authors, both male and female, whose commercial success is connected to “their ability to reflect in their works the vision and preoccupations of an entire generation of youth: […] That is, vision of socially and ethically disengaged youth” (239).

117 Freixas notes that notions of “good” or “bad” literature often arise when female authors are asked if they write “literatura de mujeres:” “La mayoría de las entrevistadas responden […] con frase-tipo: ‘No existe literatura de hombres ni de mujeres, sólo buena o mala literatura’. […] La respuesta es curiosa, pues responde a algo que no fue preguntado. […] La pregunta versa sobre una cuestión de hecho, y la respuesta versa sobre esa cuestión de hecho (‘no, no existe’) y simultáneamente, sobre la cuestión de valores, en apariencia ajena al tema discutido (‘la literatura puede ser buena o mala’)” (86).
frequently euphemized as it was by previous generations. Kuspit notes that, in the neo-avant-garde world, “what was once a damnable though—that the artist wanted the same worldly success as everyone else—[…] has redeemed itself because every producer of art, however innovative, believes it, however unconsciously” (21). And yet, for critics and for a society that still cling to some form of the charismatic myth, voicing such a desire is not yet acceptable especially in the field of restricted production. For that reason, the authors who do reveal their disinterested motivations and, in the process, expose the systems that undergird the art world, still face derision. By casting a character like Marta, a woman who has struggled to gain visibility and symbolic capital, the outright articulation of her desires appears more justified.

Unfortunately for her, Marta’s dreams are not realized with her murine nativity. Too disgusted by the living rats to catch them herself, she commissions their capture from some neighborhood hoodlums. When they bring her a bag writhing with two still-live rats, Marta does not have the heart to kill them: “era mi maldita conciencia cristiana, que aún después de muerta seguía azuzándome; se trataba de no tener culpa, de mantener impolutas las manos” (120). The experience leaves Marta disappointed in herself and unsure of her own creative capacity. She concludes that this would never have happened to Damien Hirst: “[a él] no le había temblado la voz cuando encargó a un pescador que le consiguiera un tiburón muerto, y, una vez tomada la decisión, no se retractó. Él sí que era un artista y no yo” (120). What she considered a surefire way to make money and a name for herself in the art world has been frustrated, and not by anyone holding Marta back, but because she stands in her own way. In short, she is not the female artist who challenges and at least attempts to overcome her limitations. Instead, she capitulates to them in more ways than one.
Marta as Postfeminist Female Artist. Frustrated that her best work goes unrecognized because it is believed to be Maristany’s and convinced that she is not capable of making it as an artist under her own name, Marta begins to question her choice of occupation and begins to consider other professional and personal identities. In the chapters that follow the failure of her “belén ratonil” before it even begins, the narration focuses on the relationship Marta develops with Juan, the judge she meets at the MACBA exhibition. From this point forward, until the final chapter of the novel, Marta’s chances of finding her way in the art world decrease dramatically. She is not the artist heroine of a generation ago, the feminist artist heroine White writes about who “dares to risk a life of art” and achieve her “feminist goals by aesthetic means” (31). She is not the artist heroine who, in order to devote herself more fully to her work, “walks out on the hero” (Huf 153). Instead, Marta, a denizen of the postfeminist world, knowingly turns her back on creativity and walks into a romantic relationship—and accepts a marriage proposal—that she believes will impede her art production. Pérez and Pérez note that “much post feminist discourse refers to professional women who should also […] rediscover traditional values (especially marriage and motherhood) and thus return to the realm of the traditional feminine” (21). Even so, as Rosenfelt observes, postfeminist texts frequently “still problematize heterosexual […] love [and] familial relations” (270) and, because of second-wave feminism’s effects, she considers it highly unlikely that heterosexual love and passion would be “restored to the center of narrativity—or to the center of women’s lives” (281).¹¹⁸ In some ways, Marta resembles the paradigmatically postfeminist character some critics refer to as the “Singleton”—a “young, unattached, and mostly city-dwelling” woman who struggles to unite “demands for heterosexual romance and

¹¹⁸ Rosenfelt sees the renewed focus on love and motherhood as related to “an effort to reconcile what some feminists have experienced as disparities between ideology and emotion” (287).
professional achievement” (Genz 32). According to Stephanie Genz, the Singleton is a woman “caught between the lure of feminist politics (and the accompanying promise of public empowerment) and a desire for feminine beauty and heterosexual coupledom” (32). In addition to the conflict Marta faces as a modern woman between feminism and femininity, she must also try to reconcile both with her identity as an artist, and she eventually lets the latter fall by the wayside.

From the beginning, Marta and Juan’s relationship is marked as unequal and it begins with a sexual encounter Marta describes as rape. She explains: “Sí, Juan me violó, no puedo calificar de otro modo lo que me hizo,” though she deems it, “casi tiern[a], si una violación puede ser delicada” (167). She wakes the next day feeling “más que furiosa con él, […] triste, peor, despreciada” (169). Marta vows to never see Juan again, but that afternoon, he sends her a package of high-quality art supplies. Briefly tempted to throw them in the trash in a sign of protest, Marta cannot resist the allure of the paper and brushes she is unable to purchase for herself and she not only keeps the gift, but continues to see Juan on a regular basis. The day he proposes marriage, Marta displays more than ever before qualities that mark her as a “Singleton” character. She does not want to admit it to herself at first—“hay ciertas cosas que una mujer con infuslas de bohemia no se atreve a pensar a sabiendas”—but the marriage proposal comes as a relief (312). She acknowledges that “lo primero que pensé fue ‘ya era hora’; […] ya había alcanzado la provecta edad de treinta y cinco años y ningún hombre me había hecho proposiciones” (312). Though Marta is not portrayed in the text as a woman “consumed with ‘dating panic’ and strategies for meeting Mr. Right”—what Stephanie Harzewski refers to as the “Bridget Jones Effect” that often afflicts “singleton” protagonists—her confession follows those lines and it leads her to divulge, to herself and to the reader, her more conservative leanings that
conflict with her identity as both an artist and a modern woman. Marta, somewhat sheepishly, admits:

Me gustaba decir, por contraposición al común de los mortales, diligentes soldados de los ejércitos de hormigas que integran la sociedad, siempre bullendo, atareados, en torno al hormiguero, que era cigarra, que vivía al día comprometida sólo con mi arte. Era una pose; lo que yo sabía, y no decía a nadie, era que algún día me casaría y mi marido se ocuparía de velar por mi porvenir y asegurar mi bienestar económico.

This statement has important implications, not only as it reflects postfeminism within the novel, but for what it implies about a new kind of female artist novel—a shift we will also see reflected in the novels by Almudena Grandes and Nieves Herrero. Marta wants to believe that, as the charismatic myth would have it, that she is somehow different from other people, that her “artistic personality” not only makes her distinctive among professionals, but it makes her different from other women who want to give up their freedom by marrying and having children. And yet, when the opportunity presents itself, she learns how wrong she was about her own nature and discovers that artistic inclinations are not, in fact, incontrovertible.

Marta knows that marriage and the possibility of children—Juan wants to have at least three—will affect her artistic career. However, when she thinks that her “carrera pictórica habría de sufrir un parón,” she is not overcome with sadness or regret, but rather “de forma inesperada, me alivió” (320). In the future she now imagines, art is a hobby she will practice to pass the

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119 In her study of “chick lit” and postfeminism, Harzewski cites the HBO show *Sex and the City* and Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* as the best examples of the chick lit genre. She explains that the female protagonist is “typically a single, urban media professional” and asserts that they can “provide an ethnographic report on a new dating system and a shift in the climate of feminism” (4). She also observes that postfeminism, as it exists in these texts, “frequently operates through the ‘stylistic alibi’ of irony, its hip style masking conservative ideologies” (9).
time; her days of competing for a place in the field through her innovative conceptual art or with her painting will be a thing of the past and she will no longer be haunted or paralyzed by that intimidating specter of innovation and originality. Whereas Carlos in El cielo de Madrid attempted to reconcile family life and art, Marta sees it as an all-or-nothing choice. She is resigned to the idea that she will have to renounce art until her children are older, and the notion of being a professional artist and mother at the same time is out of the question. For many feminist critics, attitudes like Marta’s in Corazón de napalm, more widespread in recent years, are an affront to the efforts of second-wave feminists. Their disappointment with this apparent sea change is often evident in the tone of their texts, as is the case in Pérez and Pérez’s assessment of postfeminism in Hispanic literature. These scholars lament that “when compared with the enticements of the consumerist culture, the Electronic Age, the era of couch potatoes and widespread inactivity, feminism could not compete successfully for the loyalties of younger generations” (12). It would appear that for Marta, the allure of material and economic stability is more important than the lofty ideals of artistic creation. It is enough to convince her to give up her art, and to a certain degree, her freedom in order to be protected and economically supported by her husband—a marital arrangement that appears to be of a much earlier time and place. Though Corazón de napalm had not been published when Pérez and Pérez wrote their article, they profess fear that postfeminist attitudes like the one Usón represents through Marta “present a return to a pre-feminist status quo reminiscent of the conservative Francoist ideology, where nothing resembling gender equality exists” (41). Usón does not allow her protagonist to go that far, however.

Marta’s engagement with Juan crumbles when she discovers that, in her relationship as in her artistic career, she is not appreciated for who she is. In the final chapters of the novel, Marta
has a chance encounter with a woman the reader knows from the chapters focused on Fede as Marilis, a dear friend of Fede’s mother. She now goes by María and who owns a restaurant, which Marta and her friend have expressed interest in buying. When Marta enters her establishment, Marilis is taken aback by the resemblance Marta bears to Carmen, Juan/Fede’s mother, and Marilis later tells her: “Tú eres igual que Carmen, su madre. A veces, […] me da la impresión de que eres ella. […] ¿No te ha dicho que eres el vivo retrato de su madre?” (330-31). 

Marta has always known that Juan has fantasized about another woman, but she never knew that woman’s identity. It becomes clear that Fede’s adolescent infatuation with Carmen, which the reader has experienced through the chapters written about him, has been fulfilled with Marta because of her physical appearance. It also becomes clear that Marta’s romantic relationship mirrors her professional struggle: her art is obscured behind Maristany’s name and her work as Marta Valdés is without value; in a similar fashion, her own identity in the relationship with Juan is obscured behind her resemblance to Carmen. Neither in art nor in love can Marta be acknowledged and appreciated as Marta Valdés, as an original, as an individual. Marta decides to leave Juan—not because of the rape or even because of the transposition of his incestuous desires—but because she learns that he killed a baby when he was just a child himself and let his mother take the blame, something Marta cannot comprehend or forgive. She has all but given up art for Juan, but she puts a definitive, symbolic end to their relationship with it, or rather, with an act of artistic vandalism: Marta stabs the portrait of Juan she was in the process of completing, describing her actions this way: “con el cuchillo más grande que tenía en la cocina, rompí [el retrato], lo descuarticé con saña, a grandes tajos. Sólo entonces me sentí del todo indemne” (351). It is only after she has killed Juan symbolically, excised him from her work and her life that Marta can move on.
The Embrace of “Selling Out”: Marta’s Chinese Paintings. The final artistic endeavor she takes up in the novel’s last pages blends together and further compounds the elements highlighted in the previous sections: frustrated desire for recognition, the conscious cultivation of a profitable genre, and the effects of postfeminism. Marta leaves for a vacation with her parents in the Pyrenees where she stumbles upon an idea that will finally allow her to leave her definitive mark on the art world. Conceptual art is out of the picture now—a fellow artist friend has mentioned to her recently “la mala época que estaba atravesando el arte conceptual” (354). The newest fad, her friend explains, is “el arte contemporáneo chino [que] hacía furor,” a style that, because she is not Chinese, seems out of Marta’s reach (354). The decorative plates covered with Chinese motifs hanging on the walls of the cabin her parents have rented give Marta the inspiration that will lead to her decisive establishment as an artist: “me puse a pintar falsos cuadros chinos o parodias chinescas, con un toque pornográfico” (354). Her other serious attempts have failed and or have hidden her true identity, but when she tries the least, she has the most success.

In what begins as a joke, Marta eventually finds the success she had been dreaming of since the novel’s opening pages, though it still does not fulfill her as she hopes. She describes her first “chinería libidinosa” in an extended ekphrastic passage:

El primer óleo que pinté representaba a una anciana china, la típica mujer de cara redonda, ojos como rendijas y expresión hierática […] que adorna las litografías y los cuadros kitchs de los restaurantes chinos de cualquier ciudad europea. En la mano derecha le puse a la vieja un vibrador en forma de pene de plástico, de un muy logrado color carne. De fondo, un bucólico paisaje chino. (354)
She paints several more, each time placing the old Chinese woman against a similar backdrop with a different erotic accouterment. When she shows the pieces to her friends, they are impressed and Marta decides to “llevar la broma hasta sus últimas consecuencias;” she attempts to put them up for sale on Charles Saatchi’s online gallery (355). She knows that Chinese art is in demand, and so, to ensure greater chances for success, she offers the paintings under an assumed, Chinese name, Wu Chao. To her complete surprise, the paintings are accepted and sell almost immediately, each for over six thousand euros a piece. Turpin, who has now become Marta’s dealer, is thrilled that she has created an alter-ego and he tells her enthusiastically, “le da al asunto un toque posmoderno genial” (357). Marta will be “la china de Valladolid” and, as Turpin assures her, “darás que hablar. Se desencadenará la polémica. ¿Puede una occidental hacer pintura china? […] Cuanto más ruido mejor; más interés despertarás y más subirá tu cotización” (358). Marta is thrilled with the money she makes, but she is still disappointed because, once again, her real name remains unassociated with her work. She laments what she sees as a cruel twist of fate: “Parecía una maldición, las únicas pinturas de mi mano que eran bien recibidas eran firmadas por otro: Maristany, en mi periodo de abstracción geométrica; la inexistente Wu Chao, en mi fase figurativa…” (356). The commercial side of her success has been realized, but Marta Valdés, as Marta Valdés, still does not have enough symbolic capital to be recognized.

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120 The novel even includes a list of selling prices for Marta’s paintings: “La del vibrador la valoramos en 6.000 euros; la sadomasoquista, en 7.500 porque era más elaborada” (355). She is shocked by “la compra de [los] dos cuadros por un anónimo coleccionista londinense” who is undeterred by “el precio descabellado [de] las pinturas” (255).

121 Another effect of her success as Wu Chao brings the (uncharismatic) recognition of her work as a job like any other: “Pintar para mí se ha convertido en un trabajo, un medio para ganarme la vida, de nueve de la mañana a ocho de la tarde, de lunes a viernes, como cualquier currante”
Like her choice to attempt conceptual art, Marta’s decision to create Chinese paintings because the genre is currently “hot” and her (extreme) cultivation of a media image or persona also reflect the kinds of accusations that Spanish female authors face discussed above. The inclusion of the pornographic element in her work brings this comparison even closer to home. Bermúdez notes that erotic literature, which grew in popularity—and profitability—in Spain after the creation of the “Sonrisa Vertical” series, is still associated with “selling out,” “bad taste or lack of ‘authentic literary value,’ especially when it is authored by women” (224). She explains that most critics who analyze erotic literature by women read them as “participating in the commodification of sex, and capitalizing on the post-Franco rising value of erotic fiction” (228). However, Bermúdez observes that the problem may not lie exclusively with the perceived anti-feminist implications of erotic literature and suggests the issue is more complicated: “The larger issue of the complex relationship between achieving prestige and literary consecration within the arena of erotic literature and the ‘vulgarity’ associated with commercial success has not been thoroughly evaluated” (228). Marta’s new identity as Wu Chao is subtly linked to this notion of prostitution, eroticism, and selling out, but also with the potential power able to be derived thereof. According to Marta, the name Wu Chao belonged to a courtesan who was “una concubina [del emperador] del siglo VII” (355). However, she was also a brutal woman who eliminated her competition—“la esposa oficial y la primera concubina del emperador (ella era la segunda)—to achieve her own ends, and who eventually “terminó sus días como emperatriz absoluta de China” (355). The woman who started out by selling out, by literally utilizing her

122 Tsuchiya explains that “La Sonrisa Vertical” series (sponsored by Tusquets Editores, “known to support the burgeoning industry of ‘popular’—yet ‘high-brow’—erotica”), “lent both institutional prestige and market value to the genre, allowing for its appeal to a wide variety of audiences” (242).
body to support herself materially, becomes a powerful woman (even if that power comes as the result of rather unsavory doings). In Marta’s erotic paintings that sell astonishingly well, and her choice of name (as well as Usón’s decision to explain her origins) we can draw another parallel between the Spanish literary market and the art market depicted in Corazón de napalm. In a small way, by depicting Marta as an artist largely unconcerned with “selling out,” Usón appears to be vindicating the female artist who writes or paints for a determined audience, rescuing her from her demonized position and validating her “interestedness” as an acceptable value.  

However, the fact that Marta’s own identity is constantly effaced and obscured points to a problem that women have faced since the earliest female artist novels and that, even through commercial success, is still not ameliorated: the acquisition of symbolic capital. In 1917, the author and women’s rights activist Carmela Eulate Sanjurjo wrote in her essay La mujer en el arte that plenty of female artists were making art and making a living, but few of them were making it big:

Existe una enorme producción moderna en las Exposiciones anuales […] cuyos nombres en los catálogos junto a los de los hombres, dicen mucho y no dicen nada. Dicen mucho en cuanto afirman la posibilidad de la mujer de […] vivir de sus pinceles, y vender cuadros y retratos que adornan las galerías modernas; no dicen nada en cuanto recapacitemos que ninguno de esos nombres está orlado con el nimbo de Genio, y sus pequeñas victorias personales equivalen a una gran derrota colectiva, frente a la magnitud de las obras del Hombre. (cited in Muñoz López 4)

123Marta has refused to tell her parents about her alter-ego and her erotic paintings because she’s afraid of scandalizing them. Thus, her mother believes her newfound wealth comes from illicit behavior on the part of her daughter: “Creo que sospecha que me estoy prostituyendo” (359). The insistence on the theme of prostitution and selling out is ubiquitous in the final chapter.
This struggle has continued and, nearly a century later, acquiring symbolic capital is still more difficult for female artists, as Usón’s novel suggests through its representation of Marta. However, rather than fight back, Marta accepts her fate and appears resigned to live in a world in which no one knows her name.

If we read *Corazón de napalm* as a postfeminist text, it is easier to understand why Marta accepts her lot as an artist and as a woman. That Marta lives in a postfeminist world—in the sense of a world profoundly impacted by the existence of feminism—is evident; rather than feeling obliged to marry and have children, she chooses to do so. She has not only a room, but a home of her own in which to work. What is more, the notion of Marta as a professional artist is not the issue as it was in artist novels about women of another era. In her analysis of nineteenth- and twentieth-century artist novels by women, DuPlessis observes that the art women make rarely “seek[s] the status of masterpiece or great work, which will be […] stored in a museum or gallery, published or sold. The imaginary art work takes its cue from the artisanal experience, in which the object is made for use” (103-04). This is not the case for Marta; she aspires with the best of male artists to achieve that coveted place in the field, to sell her work and to go down in history, to be remembered as Marta Valdés. And yet, that desire is still out of her reach. As Rosenfelt explains, postfeminist texts are “more aware of limits than transgressive of traditional boundaries” (270). Thus, it makes sense that Marta as an artist character allows her wings to be clipped rather than “taking flight” as the female artists Huf describes in the feminist artist novels from the 1970s and 1980s did. Marta’s final observations reflect her pessimism. She is forced to take comfort only in the fact that one day in the distant future, when “la Tierra será absorbida por el Sol,” every art work ever created, from the most insignificant to the most masterful, will be destroyed and its cultural legacy along with it: “[la tierra] se fundirá con [el Sol] y desaparecerá,
y con ella, todos esos libros y obras de arte que tildamos de eternos: yo no pasaré a la eternidad, pero Picasso tampoco” (367).

The final postfeminist touch in the novel is Marta’s last project, one that will never bring economic returns (the projects she signs as Marta Valdés never do), but one that has meaning to her. The last image the novel presents is not of a woman liberated, but rather a woman consumed by guilt who must expunge it through her art. She does not feel “guilt for creating,” as artist heroines in some nineteenth-century novels did, but she feels responsible for Juan’s suicide, which took place after she revealed the truth to him about Carmen’s death, a truth much too bitter and incriminating for him to bear. She asks herself, “¿Y yo? ¿Cómo iba a pagar la muerte de Juan?” (363). She has killed Juan, symbolically as she slashed his portrait, and, she believes, literally when she told him the truth about Carmen. The work in progress as the novel ends is her attempt to do something for Juan when there is nothing left to do: Marta starts work on a hyperrealist painting in which she attempts to “contar una historia en un cuadro” (366). Marta transfers the image to canvas from a photograph she found in Juan’s apartment of Carmen and her son on the beach: “Se les veía de medio cuerpo, los dos con el torso desnudo y el pelo mojado; [Carmen] lo rodeaba con sus brazos” (212). While Marta does not fulfill the postfeminist fantasy she imagines—married to Juan, who supports her and their three children, while she fulfills the role of dutiful mother—her last work of art—the “estampa de familia” she creates—brings the focus of the novel around to privilege familial relations as a theme. Her name might not live on, but she hopes that, through her painting, the world might remember for a little while “[la madre que] se sacrificó por su hijo, purgó su pena, hizo suyo su crimen” (366).

What is perhaps most striking about Usón’s text are its mixed messages. On the one hand, Marta’s “interested” attitude for which she refuses to feel shame appears to be an attempt
to authenticate and legitimize an image of the artist divorced from the charismatic myth, one that also reflects the current state of the publishing field for women in Spain. But, though Marta has advantages (or perhaps because she has them) that her artist sisters of generations past did not have, she is never successful in the way she wants to be, and, eventually, she stops striving for it. Postfeminist texts are, as Rosenfelt sees them, filled with “multivalent, contradictory and conflicting voices” (287). In this case, those multiple voices are within Marta herself. She is able to recognize the contradiction: “unos días me resignaba a mi decoroso y burgués futuro de ama de casa y madre de familia, pero otros recuperaba mis ínfulas artísticas” (324). What is certain is that Marta is an artist protagonist of a new era, and one is hesitant to call her a heroine. More than to heroism, Marta’s actions point to pessimism and frustration with a system she cannot change.

Almudena Grandes’ Castillos de cartón and Nieves Herrero’s Todo fue nada

Whereas Corazón de napalm’s protagonist is self-aware and acknowledges the contradictory nature of her desires, the artist characters in the novels to which I turn now are not as reflexive. Nieves Herrero and Almudena Grandes’s novels feature protagonists who appear liberated on the surface. They are much younger and their careers, unlike Marta’s, initially seem promising. However, when the reader strips away Carmen’s “women’s-lib” rhetoric and sees through Jose’s “sex-drugs-and-rock-and-roll” attitude, what is left reveals an even bleaker portrait of women’s possibilities to triumph in the accumulation of symbolic (or economic) capital than Usón’s novel does. The messages that underlie the outward appearance of liberation and progress, as well as the novels’ final resolutions, expose a much more conservative and decidedly postfeminist vision of the female artist and her chances of success in the art world. Postfeminism’s most outspoken critics see the attitude of the postfeminist generation as a step
backwards, a retreat from the gains that feminists before them fought to achieve. For critics like Tsuchiya, these attitudes are especially pernicious when the authors write about women’s issues “in a way that appears to be liberating to women, but without posing a fundamental threat to the power structures of a patriarchal society” (244). In this sense, Castillos de cartón and Todo fue nada present postfeminist settings that reveal some of the same gains of feminism discussed in relation to Corazón de napalm, but they also expose attitudes that (perhaps unconsciously) undercut those same improvements. The young female artists may have more opportunities than their mothers and grandmothers did, but their worldviews have not changed in tandem with their material circumstances.

Neither Castillos de cartón nor Todo fue nada tackles the issue of creating for the commercial market in the way Corazón de napalm does, even though both novels appear to have been written for just such a market. The 2011 paperback edition of Castillos de cartón—the sixth edition since its publication in 2004—boasts on the front cover that the novel has sold over two hundred thousand copies, and in 2009, it was produced as a film of the same name, directed by Salvador García Ruíz. Nieves Herrero’s primary profession as a journalist and television personality only recently committed to writing fiction, gives her a kind of publicity unavailable to other authors venturing into the field and it does not fit well with the notion of disinterested creation.124 The central feature of both of these novels is a romance plot, and though Rosenfelt expresses doubt that romance will ever return to the center of women’s narratives or lives in the wake of feminism, these novels represent just such a return (284). Carmen and Jose are artists,

124 Bourdieu notes that those authors or artists most favored by the field of restricted production are those “able to […] take on the risks of an occupation which is not a ‘job’” (43). The fact that Herrero is both author and TV personality, and that the former is her primary occupation, puts her at a disadvantage to accrue capital in the symbolic realm, but well-situated to accrue cultural and economic capital in the short term.
but art takes a backseat (in the narration and in the protagonist’s lives alike) to love in *Todo fue nada* and to sex in *Castillos de cartón*. These novels represent another modality of the postfeminist artist novel—or, perhaps more accurately, the postfeminist romance novel set against an artist’s backdrop.

There are some similarities in the novels’ structures and organization. Both begin with an unexpected and tragic death, and both are structured around flashbacks. *Castillos de cartón* is set in the years between 1980 and 1984 when the protagonist was a twenty-year-old art student. This story of the past is bookended by a glimpse into the present in which the reader learns that María José never became the great artist she dreamed of being in her youth. Instead, she works for an auction house and is a typical postfeminist female character: a professional, single thirty-something, divorced and disillusioned. Her reflection on the past is provoked by the death of a famous artist, and her former lover and friend, Marcos. *Castillos de cartón* is María José’s nostalgic remembrance of things long past, things like art, love, and what she perceived then as freedom. The novel is divided into four sections—*El arte*, *El sexo*, *El amor*, and *La muerte*—which briefly explain María José’s formative years as an artist and her entrance into art school, after which point the novel’s focus on art fades considerably to center instead on the *ménage à trois* between María José, Marcos, and Jaime, art students in her class. It seems initially that this non-traditional relationship could be a positive thing for her creativity—the fact that the two men are painters themselves suggests that they understand María José’s desire to create and will not force her to adopt a more traditional role.\(^{125}\) What is more, the transgressiveness of the

\(^{125}\) In Chapter 1, I explored the way the young *chicas raras* failed to find liberation with the bohemian artists whose lifestyles seemed to promise it. Here, the male artists do not default to overtly sexist practices and attempt to force Jose into a traditional gender role, but her own internalized inhibitions come to be her undoing as an artist.
relationship itself seems to point to María José’s sexual and personal liberation. However, that very relationship among artists is what keeps her from flourishing independently.

*Todo fue nada* opens with the unexpected death of Lourdes, a middle-aged art professor, painter of large-scale nude portraits, and mother to Carmen, a twenty-year-old art student. Carmen returns home to Madrid from Paris (where she is studying painting) for her mother’s funeral and discovers that, years earlier, her mother had set aside a box of her most personal belongings to be given to Carmen upon her eventual death. In the box, she finds her mother’s journal, and from that point forward, the narration oscillates between the story of Lourdes’s tumultuous extramarital love affair with a famous painter and Carmen’s shocked reaction and response to this new side of her mother she has never known. Carmen is determined to find her mother’s lover to both satisfy her curiosity and chastise him, and when she does, falls in love with him herself, appearing destined to repeat her mother’s mistakes. While the hackneyed love story between Lourdes and her partner leaves something to be desired, the strong bond between artist-mother and artist-daughter is a contemporary recasting of a typical female artist novel plot in which the daughter achieves what her mother could not.126 Carmen’s (sometimes reductive and facile) outlook on life and art is more outwardly progressive than her mother’s, but her rhetoric and her actions do not match, as Carmen never asserts herself in the text as a capable female artist. By the end, she has created nothing for herself, has come to appreciate her mother’s art less than ever, and is left basking in the glow of Santiago Bari, a stereotypical male artistic “genius” (a term used many times in the text to describe him). Like *Castillos de cartón*, a young, female artist character who bears the trappings of liberation turns out to be much less progressive and, in terms of her work as an artist, much less productive, than one might expect.

126 DuPlessis cites a variety of examples of the mother-daughter plot in artist novels by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Elizabeth Phelps Ward, Alice Walker, and Virginia Woolf (93-95).
As we have seen, conventional female artist novels often focus on barriers to women’s creativity and ways that they can be transcended. The novels by Grandes and Herrero each explore obstacles that face the contemporary female artist, but those obstacles are different for the protagonists of the individual texts. While Herrero’s novel focuses on the more conventional dilemma of motherhood and domesticity as pernicious to women’s creative process, Grandes’ text depicts a young woman who seems to face no apparent barriers, except the ones she imposes on herself. Though the challenges each artist protagonist faces is different, neither novel presents a triumph over them, and, as in Corazón de napalm, the female artist is left with neither the desire nor the access to the necessary symbolic capital to establish herself. Marta is successful economically, though her true identity is obscured, but in the end of Todo fue nada and Castillos de cartón, neither Carmen nor Jose is still actively painting, and their dreams of being successful painters appear to have been thwarted. In both novels, it is the male artist character, the creative genius who leaves both Carmen and Jose in awe, who triumphs symbolically and economically. The young woman must watch from the shadows as success comes to someone else.

It is evident from the first pages of Castillos de cartón that María José is not the “stalwart, spirited, and fearless” female artist archetype that Huf illustrates in her book (5). Instead, she more resembles the postfeminist protagonist Rosenfelt describes, the woman who is aware of her limits and who rarely dares to transgress them (270). The story of María José’s creative trajectory begins with the description of her childhood gifts, as many artist novels do. Kauffman suggests that this occurs because “in a society that requires artists to be born rather than made, […] one of the ways of presenting oneself convincingly as an artist is to tell a story of having always been one” (97). The first time María José paints something original, she is thrilled with the results. She sets out to depict her vision of a doll in her bedroom toward which she feels
a particular antipathy, following her father’s advice to “pint[ar] lo que sient[e]” instead of “lo que hay” (24). When she finishes, she is left with an image of the doll “[que] inspiraba un desagrado que estaba a medio camino entre la repugnancia y las ganas de llorar” (26). She feels that she has found her voice, but it is quickly silenced when she brings her vision to art class at her Catholic girls’ school. The art teacher-nun results tears her drawing into pieces for being an affront to good taste—“[es] una porquería,” the teacher tells her—and to what constitutes decency for young ladies (25). This episode teaches her a lesson about her limitations that follows her through the rest of the text. María José confesses that she capitulated to the nun’s mandate almost immediately and that she never created anything of the sort again to be handed in in school: “Nunca repetí aquella lámina, pero comprendí enseguida que me había equivocado. […] Aproveché la primera ocasión para volver a pintar un paisaje verde” (27). Kauffman observes that often, when artists retrospectively tell the stories of their artistic formation, they identify the art teachers from their youth “as role models or mentors,” but that those same teachers are “often […] defined as limited, ones who the artist child ‘jumped past…real quick’” (97). Though María José believes herself to have “jumped past” her art teacher, she is not bold enough to continue flagrantly defying the nun’s wishes and tastes, and gives in to the innocuous and unoriginal style expected of her as a “nice girl.”

With that flowery and inoffensive landscape, María José goes back to winning school art contests and winning approval, but she continues to practice her new art in private, or as she

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127 The nun’s reaction to María José’s drawing appears to reflect a contemporary version of the nineteenth-century notion that allowing women to practice art was a “useful” distraction, but not actually meant to train them to be professional artists with unique perspectives. Citing a Victorian book of etiquette, Kauffman notes that painting and drawing were considered “feminine accomplishments [that] keep the mind from brooding upon self” and she adds that it was little more than “a pastime with the benefit of producing useful or decorative objects—all that ‘fine art’ could not be” (96).
describes it, acting like “un agente doble, pintando cosas diferentes para mí y para los demás” (28). By the time she is ready to start art school, Maris José has developed her own signature theme and has attempted to style her own personality and life around what she thinks the artist should be. She adopts habits she secretly loathes—“fumar unos cigarrillos artesanales […] o beber coñac por las mañanas”—and changes her name to Jose, because “María José Sánchez García [era] un nombre fácil de olvidar” (32). She develops her enacted biography (similar to the kind described in El cielo de Madrid and El mundo visto desde el cielo) at the same time she cultivates in her signature topic, the theme to which she returns over and over again. After painting a portrait of her young cousin Quique, a person with Down’s Syndrome, Jose starts to paint “otros Quiques, que no dejaban de ser él y a la vez eran distintos, a veces niñas, otros bebés, también algún adulto […] y muchos grupos […] en las que todos eran Down” (31). Soon she becomes, to her fellow classmates, “esa chica de pelo largo que pinta familias de mongólicos, ya sabes” (32). Though her work is well received by professors and other students alike, she notes that she had already begun to doubt her own capabilities. When she proposes to paint her own self-portrait “y con síndrome de Down” she immediately realizes that it is “una propuesta radical que no encerraba otra cosa que el primer indicio claro de mi inminente agotamiento” (36). This gnawing reservation eventually comes to paralyze her and convince her that she is not a real artist, but an imposter.

The story of Jose’s artistic trajectory effectively is truncated in the novel after the first section, titled El arte, when she begins her relationship with Marcos and Jaime, a ménage à trois that all three young artists want to believe in, but that ends up falling apart by the novel’s end. This relationship monopolizes the rest of the text—descriptions of their sexual encounters that verge on the pornographic, details of their shared life together a tres, and the relational and
sexual complications that arise as a result of Marcos’s impotence and of Jose’s growing monogamous desire for Jaime. The relationship has two important implications for the understanding of Jose’s depiction as a postfeminist, female artist subject. First, her participation in this “transgressive” or non-normative relationship signals some kind of liberation, but it is not tied to any apparent progress outside of the bedroom. At the same time, a novel that begins as the story of a young women’s artistic dreams and artistic potential turns into one, not only of her frustration, but into the glorification of the typical male artistic genius. As we look at this novel in a postfeminist context, it is easy to see the gains won by second-wave feminism and the Transition to democracy in Spain on Jose’s world. Francoism’s rigid moral code is nowhere to be found and instead, the anything-goes-mentality of the destape takes precedence. Jose lives in the postfeminist era, one that sees “individualism, liberty, and sexual self-expression” as a right, something that, as Genz asserts, would never have been possible without the hard work of second-wave feminists (8). Of course, these changes affect Grandes as an author as well. The depiction of a “transgressive” relationship that challenges the social norms would surely not have made it past the censors decades before. As she reflects on her past, Jose also asserts her belief that such a relationship would not have evolved if she had been born earlier: “Estábamos en 1984, teníamos veinte años, Madrid tenía veinte años, España tenía veinte años y todo estaba en su sitio, un pasado oscuro, un presente luminoso” (74). Yet, as Tsuchiya observes with respect to other texts like Extebarría’s Beatriz y los cuerpos celestes or Grandes’s own Las edades de Lulú, the reader must question if these novels present a vision of women’s liberation “that falsely equates any act of sexual / gender transgression (for its own sake) with the potential for a more profound social transformation” (248). A closer look at the relación a tres between Marcos, Jaime and Jose reveals that Jose remains in a dominated position in the sexual relationship as
well as in her art. The erotic plot and their individual roles in it come to stand as symbols of their own artistic potential, and it proves that Jose is not as free as she believes.

The parts Marcos, Jaime and Jose each play in their sexual relationship mirror their artistic trajectories. In spite of his outward “aspecto vulgar,” Jaime has abundant confidence in his sexual prowess and in his artistic capabilities alike (33). Jose describes him as “un dibujante prodigioso, el mejor que he conocido jamás,” and she admires him for his skill and for his conviction (33). On the other hand, Marcos is “el chico más alto de la clase, […] también el más guapo” and Jose is overwhelmingly jealous of his artistic talent, but his confidence in the bedroom and in the art studio are equally low (35). The first time Jose sees one of his paintings, she remarks that it is “profundo, violento, conmovedor […] y yo nunca llegaría a tanto” (40). When Huf outlined what she considered her archetypal female artist protagonist, that woman whose story advocates for the “smashing of the man-forged manacles on her sex,” she noted that these heroic women “do not idealize men,” but rather, depict the vast majority of them as “despots or dunces who drag her down” (9). Almost always, Huf observed, there is one man who “through his strength or his weakness prevents the artist from working” (9). In Castillos de cartón, it turns out to be true that the men in Jose’s life keep her from working, not because the expressly prohibit her from doing so, but because being with them makes Jose more insecure about her own capabilities and more interested in preserving their tenuous relationship than in preparing for her artistic career. Rather than rebel against them or despise them for it, Jose idealizes them as the artists she could never hope to be or as holders of the genius she cannot access.

Rather than stimulate her creativity, Jose’s cohabitation with Marcos and Jaime wears down her initiative to create and she stops painting all together as relationship consumes her.
When that relationship reaches its inevitable breaking point and falls apart—for reasons that have as much to do with art as they do with sex or love—Jose is left feeling doubly empty and unfulfilled. She no longer feels connected to her art, and the relationship upon which she built her new identity has now dissolved. What is more, as the relationship wears on, it becomes more and more clear that Jose has less agency than it initially seems. Her role in the triangular relationship appears less important than the unspoken battle for dominance that takes place between the two men. Jaime’s bravado where both sex and art are concerned contrast sharply with Marcos’s self-doubt in the same arenas, but it does not take the reader long to see that Jaime’s attitude is compensatory. Marcos is more attractive and a much better artist, even if he is less assertive. For this reason, when Marcos finally overcomes his impotence near the novel’s end—a change that corresponds to his stunning success on the gallery circuit—Jaime responds angrily and jealously. As Marcos and Jaime tacitly wage a war for artistic superiority, Jose becomes the prize to be won in the process. At the outset, Jose appears to represent what Genz calls the “liberating potential of sexual subjecthood,” the shift from “sexual object to desiring subject” that is possible as a result of second-wave feminism (16). Yet it seems that the liberation that “sexual subjecthood” ostensibly denotes may never be fulfilled, especially when we see Jose deny herself for the men in her life. As Genz notes, “‘subjectification’ might just be ‘how we do

Jaime’s attempts to control the relationship are demonstrated by his success in cleverly orchestrating the first sexual encounter. Knowing that Jose found Marcos attractive, but also aware of his friend’s impotence, Jaime left the two alone together, only to enter the room a short while later, saying: “¿Qué tal? […] Fatal, ¿no? Me lo imaginaba. […] No os preocupéis…[…] que esto arreglo yo en un periquete” (64). And with that, Jaime climbs into the bed, “antes de que se [le] ocurriera [a Jose] preguntarle qué estaba haciendo,” he begins the rather strange relationship that will continue until the novel’s end (64). Marcos’s role remains passive, as he observes them “tumbado de lado y pegado a la pared para ocupar el menor sitio posible” (71).

Just as Gloria became the prize in the battle between Juan and Román in Nada, Jose comes to be the trophy—the object, rather than the subject with agency—in the relationship with Jaime and Marcos.
objectification today”” (16). Jose’s choice to participate in an unconventional and “scandalous”
kind of relationship overemphasizes her agency, especially as she becomes doubly dominated by
the two men later on.

Jose is not successful as an artist, and she gives up her dream of ever becoming great
artist. Rather than Jose, it is Marcos who becomes “un pintor grande de verdad” (46). He
eventually becomes “uno de los pintores más caros de su generación,” as Jose learns through her
work at the auction house after they lose touch (43) Jose, on the other hand, censors herself, and
only Marcos openly acknowledges the reason why, after the relationship has been irreparably
damaged:

Ibas muy bien, pero te paraste, y sabías que iba a ocurrir, que te ibas a parar, te
diste cuenta antes que yo. […] Tienes talento. Puedes encontrar otro camino […]
Jaime, en cambio, nunca ha podido ver más allá de sus lápices. […] A veces,
hasta pienso que has dejado de trabajar por eso, porque te importa más
conservarlo [a Jaime] que pintar, porque prefieres que te chupe la sangre a
demostrarle que eres mejor que él. (164)

Jose is forced to acknowledge that Marcos is right. Even though she does not have to battle an
oppressive husband or put children before her own desire to paint, Jose’s desires to please a man
and to not hurt his pride get in the way of her creative activity. Beneath an outer shell that
appears emancipated lie the same attitudes that held women artist characters back in novels of a
previous era. The girl from the novel’s first section who longed to assert her own artistic vision is
gone. Jose is overcome by Marcos’s potential, which she thinks far exceeds her own, and by her
desire to placate Jaime, whose authority and confidence in terms of sex and art dwindle with
Marcos’s success. The novel is not a proud assertion of women’s creative ability, but rather, it
glorifies the traditional male artist in the figure of Marcos, the brooding, solitary, genius creator who eventually takes his own life. The novel ends with Jaime and Jose reunited at Marcos’s funeral, where they reaffirm Marcos’s brilliance and recognize that “solos, [sin Marcos], no llegaríamos nunca a ninguna parte” (199).

Herrero’s novel follows a similar pattern of apparent liberation that camouflages more traditional attitudes. *Todo fue nada* explores a theme common to nineteenth and twentieth century artist novels in a twenty-first century, postfeminist context: the mother-daughter artist plot. DuPlessis observes that “the emergent daughter” is “the main character of the twentieth-century *Künstlerroman,”* a role she steps into after her “thwarted mother bequeaths her ambition to the child” (90-91). Often, it would be left to the daughter to vindicate her mother’s art—often “artisanal” and “in unconventional media”—that has been “muted and unrecognized” (94). In the novel, Lourdes is that thwarted mother, but, living as she does in a postfeminist world, her sacrifices are not immediately apparent to her daughter, who narrates the text. She is a successful art professor and paints often, specializing in large-scale hyperrealistic nude portraits. She has her own studio in the family’s Madrid apartment and her own office at the university, and she considers her daughter a friend rather than a burden. Until she meets Santiago Bari, Lourdes herself does realize what her life was missing. Bari represents for Lourdes, and later for Carmen, the ideal artist, and when she compares her life, her art, and her accomplishments to his, she feels the encumbrance of her husband and daughter for the first time. When Bari pleads with her to leave her family and run off with him to Berlin where they will set up a studio and a life together, in spite of her deep love for him, Lourdes cannot allow herself to hurt her family. She responds to his supplications: “No es tan sencillo como piensas. Tengo una hija, no se te olvide. Romper lazos sin hacer daño resulta imposible” (145). Santiago does not understand her
reservations, but Lourdes knows that Bari “no tiene ninguna atadura, es un ser libre. Yo no. Nunca lo he sido” (200). Huf observes that, even in contemporary artist novels, “one looks hard to find a creative heroine who isn’t perpetually riddled with guilt, to whom being a woman artist doesn’t mean always having to say you’re sorry,” and in this case, Lourdes proves her right (150). On the surface, it appears Lourdes’s guilt is linked more strongly to her desires to abandon her family for true love, but if we consider Bari as an embodiment of the ideal artist and of “true” or “pure” art, then Lourdes’s longing to be with him could also be seen as her longing to give herself completely to her art in a way that her job and her family obligations currently prevent her from doing.

Santiago Bari, the painter with whom Lourdes falls madly in love at first sight, is the charismatic myth made flesh. While the story of his love for Lourdes is at times overwrought and trite, his symbolic role is essential to understanding Todo fue nada as a postfeminist artist novel. Bari is the “Great Artist” Nochlin speaks of, the “one who has ‘Genius,’” that “atemporal and mysterious power somehow embedded in [his] person” (265). Given that women were long believed incapable of Genius, they were also long excluded from the ranks of Great Artist in the pages of art history and of the artist novel, and in Herrero’s novel, this remains unchanged. Lourdes is overcome by the power of Bari’s talent, but also by his selfishness and his contempt for all that would taint the purity and innovativeness of his art: money, critics, painters of the old guard. Nearly all of the elements of the charismatic myth find themselves summed up in his person. Like a good charismatic artist, he has followed his vocation since childhood, and he believes the artist should respond only to an inner voice: “la idea de pintura que anida en mi subconsciente no sólo tiene que tener un mensaje, un contenido, una fuerza, sino que debe ir unida a un golpe interior” (76-77). Bari “despreci[a] a la mayoría de los maestros,” disdains
“todo lo que huele a comercial” (even though he is very successful and has become wealthy from the paintings he sells), and does not believe in the value of any “fórmula académica” in painting (77-78). He admits to Lourdes that he considers himself “el egoísmo personificado,” and like those artist heroes of old, he is not suited for life “en pareja” (130). The artist protagonists in Llamazares’ and Caso’s contemporary Künstlerromane displayed a more nuanced vision of the artist and his relationship to the charismatic myth and to the market, but Bari is more charismatic and Romantic than even the Romantic artists: a caricature of sorts. Thus, Lourdes’s desire to be with him is more than just a wish to break out of the monotony of her life or to find “true love.” Her desire represents her aspiration to grasp, once and for all, that Great Artist ideal, the one that, even in a contemporary art world, continues to be more accessible to men than to women.

From his vantage point as a charismatic artist, Bari cannot understand why, if Lourdes aspires to the kind of love and art he embodies, she does not simply seize it for herself as he has done. At the same time, he explicitly highlights for her the differences between the two of them, devaluing her work in a deceptively “loving” way. Bari reminds her that he, an “artista puro” does not have the luxury of a stable salary like Lourdes does because of her academic teaching job (130). He tells her: “Tienes una faceta de estabilidad que no tenemos los demás. El hecho de dar clases en Bellas Artes te hace diferente del resto. Tú tienes un trabajo más o menos enlatado y te pagan por eso” (130). Bari’s self-professed egoism keeps him from taking on a similar job, and, consciously or unconsciously, he knows that rejecting it is a way to increase in symbolic capital. He understands what Bourdieu says to be true, that “the most favored [agents in the field] are sufficiently secure to be able to disdain a university career and to take on the risks of an occupation which is not a ‘job’” (43). However, because of Lourdes’s familial responsibilities, and because she enjoys her job, she does not give it up in order to dedicate herself wholesale to
painting as a source of income. For this, and for her hesitation when she must decide whether or not to leave her husband and daughter for Bari, the “pure” artist chastises her: “Lourdes, ¿quién ha engañado a las mujeres? ¿Por qué no tenéis procesado en vuestra mente que la responsabilidad no está reñida con la búsqueda de vuestra propia felicidad?” (145). In the end, her responsibilities as a mother come before her love and the promise of dedicating herself to painting full time. The night she has finally made up her mind to leave her husband Manuel, Carmen becomes ill and, as a result, Lourdes misses her midnight rendezvous in the airport with Bari, from where they had planned to set out for Berlin to build shared life. The two never speak again and Lourdes renews her dedication to her family. She becomes the artist character of which Huf speaks, who, after a moment of rebellion through an affair, “choose[s] to remain in [a] largely futile relationship with [a] largely unworthy husband” (157). Carmen learns of all of this only after her mother dies, and, through the diary entries she reads, she makes a commitment to change her own life to vindicate her mother’s.

Carmen realizes that through her model of living and her success as an artist, she can be what Lourdes could not and honor her mother in the process of satisfying herself. When she reads her mother’s words, she feels she has found the reason why her mother wanted to share this experience with her: “Quería que la historia no se repitiera, que rompiera con la tradición femenina de hacer siempre lo conveniente y nunca lo deseado. Aquellas páginas parecían un compromiso de su madre con ella” (146). Just as in the novels in English that DuPlessis studies, it appears that in Todo fue nada, “the younger artist’s future project as a creator lies in completing the fragmentary and potential work of the mother” (94). DuPlessis observes that the daughter’s attempts to carry out the mother’s legacy, her
intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical defense of the mother becomes involved with
the evocation of the preoedipal dyad, matrisexuality […] In these works, the
female artist is given a way of looping back and reenacting childhood ties, to
achieve not the culturally approved ending in heterosexual romance, but rather the
reparenting necessary to her second birth as an artist” (94).

In short, the daughter’s quest becomes linked to a bond between women than trumps any
heterosexual romance plot. However, in the postfeminist world of Todo fue nada, the results of
Carmen’s quest are much different.

Rather than eschew love to find a deeper, primordial connection between mother and
daughter through art, Carmen carries out Lourdes’s legacy through taking up in her absence her
sexual relationship with Bari. Wanting to understand why her mother would have considered
giving up her life with her family, Carmen sets out to find Bari and get to know him, and, like
her mother, falls in love with him, despite the fact that he could be her father.130 Before the
consummation of their relationship, they talk about art and Carmen tries to make Bari see that,
historically, it has been nearly impossible for women to achieve “Great Artist” status, and that
the lack of precedents makes it hard to this day for women to imagine themselves as such. With
“[un] afán reivindicativo,” she tells Bari: “Yo tengo pánico a no trascender, a que mi obra no la
conozca nadie. ¿Te has fijado, Santiago, en que no hay mujeres que destaquen tanto como
Picasso, Velázquez, o el mismo Goya? Ésa es la gran injusticia que ha hecho con nosotras la
historia” (208). She then proceeds to list female artists that had been largely ignored by history—

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130 Like Marta, Carmen enters into a relationship in which her lover uses her as the site on which
to project his desires for another woman. Because of a striking physical resemblance, Juan uses
Marta in order to fulfill his incestuous fantasy to be with his mother. In a similar fashion, Bari
tries sexual relationship with Carmen to access his relationship with Lourdes even after her
death.
Angelica Kauffmann, Marietta Robusti, Judith Leyster—telling Bari that “los hombres siempre os habéis interpuesto en nuestras carreras. Por eso, nos vemos obligadas a elegir entre nuestra profesión o nuestra familia” (210). Then and there, Carmen takes a stand, telling Bari that, given the choice between love and family or her career, she would choose the latter in a heartbeat: “No existe el hombre que me aparte de mi pasión por la pintura” (210). And yet, in a matter of pages, Carmen finds herself involved in an all-consuming relationship with Bari, stepping into her mother’s shoes in the most intimate way.

Carmen’s words are resolute and emancipatory, but the reality of her actions does not match her rhetoric. One would expect that, in light of her pronouncements about a woman’s right to create, Carmen would evolve as an artist and become successful in the way her mother could not. DuPlessis observes that in twentieth-century artist novels, “the proportion of successful artist figures increases, by virtue of a keen change in the terms of the conflict between role and vocation” (94). However, though it appears that Carmen has grasped those changing terms, and even has made a firm pronouncement to live her life according to them, she does not triumph in the novel. Carmen never finds her own voice; near the beginning of the novel, the narrator explains that she “todavía no tenía un estilo personal” (83). She admires the Cubists, especially Picasso, and later admires Bari and his own style of abstract painting which he calls “Dinámica de Alfa Alineaciones” (230), but the reader never sees Carmen come into her own as a painter or even take steps towards it. She complains that women’s art is not taken seriously, and yet, when Bari tries to have a serious discussion with her about art, Carmen is overwhelmed by her erotic desire for him, and stops listening, “en lo único que pensaba era su ritmo cardíaco” (231). For Carmen, it appears that her vow to make her mother proud by doing what she feels and responding to her intuitions, by learning “el difícil camino de ser uno mismo” means having
what ever kind of relationship she wants, even if it is not societally-sanctioned (146). In a way that mirrors Jose’s in *Castillos de cartón*, Carmen’s sexual freedom is gratuitous and it fails to signal progress or freedom in other areas of her life.

In the end, Carmen acquiesces to her father’s demands and gives up her relationship with Bari, but the reader finds out very little about Carmen’s future artistic career. We are left wondering if she ever does find her own signature style, if she creates works that will be remembered by posterity, if she will ever rival Bari in success and popularity. Instead, the novel ends once more affirming Bari’s supremacy and his genius. The final paragraph is the transcription of a newscaster’s announcement that Bari has made it big in New York. He is now famous in and out of artistic circles: “*Una exposición antológica sobre su pintura ha superado todas las previsiones de los organizadores [en el MOMA]. Sus teorías sobre el arte le han llevado a las portadas de la revista *Time* y del periódico *The New York Times.*” (326). While Bari breaks his own records, Carmen watches him from her living room sofa, and as she listens to the report, the narrator tells us that Carmen “sintió una gran satisfacción,” though it is hard to know exactly why when her own efforts have not been rewarded (326). Though Carmen has vowed to pick up where her mother left off, by all accounts, Lourdes has still been more successful in an artistic arena; even if she did not have the time to fully devote herself to her art, she developed her own style and her own point of view. Carmen is young and perhaps she still will, but the reader is given no indication that that is the case. In some ways, *Todo fue nada* is emblematic of the tendency Rosenfelt observes in postfeminist texts, that “they often retain a vision of injustice and a longing to replace it,” but unlike feminist texts, they do not follow a pattern of progress “from oppression, suffering, victimization, through various stages of awakening consciousness to active resistance and finally, to some form of victory, transformation, or transcendence of despair”
Carmen is aware of the inequality, and even vows to change it, but the novel still ends up glorifying the male creative genius rather than seeing him and the historical institutions that created him as part of the problem or taking steps to remedy them.

What is clear after examining Usón, Grandes, and Herrero’s texts is that writing an artist novel is not a feminist act for these contemporary authors. There is no “mythic progression” in any one of the three novels like the one Rosenfelt describes in the feminist novel: “[a progression] from oppression, suffering, victimization, through various stages of awakening consciousness to active resistance and finally, to some form of victory, transformation, or transcendence of despair” (269-70). Rather, these novels are decidedly postfeminist in their trajectories, in that their protagonists are likely to be aware of their limitations but unable to transcend them. While the novels share these postfeminist characteristics, they represent different repercussions of postfeminism on the female artist character. For Marta in Corazón de napalm, a potential identity as wife and mother appears much more appealing than that of failed artist. When she suffers the effects of her inability to accrue symbolic capital, she embraces this typically postfeminist identity, even as she is economically successful as an artist. Jose of Castillos de cartón and Carmen of Todo fue nada both allow their identities as sexual subjects to trump their identities as artists, and they privilege the image of the Great (Male) Artist to the detriment of the female artist.

In short, these novels embody clearly the three topics that, according to Sarah Gamble, are most often identified by critics of postfeminism. The women are either professionals, like Marta, or are on road to professionalization, like Jose and Carmen, but in the texts there is a “victimization of feminine agency, especially in the professional arena” (cited in Pérez 41). Gamble notes that in many postfeminist texts, female characters suffer a “[loss of] autonomy [as
they are] relegated to the domestic arena” (cited in Pérez 41). This is a choice Marta makes (even as she acknowledges being decidedly anti-feminist in her actions), one in which Lourdes feels trapped, and one that Jose and Carmen profess to shun—though the latter two women end up trapped by domestic limitations once they begin to cohabitate with their “great” male artists. Finally, Gamble asserts, postfeminist texts often present an undermining of “autonomy of female personages and usurpation of feminist discourse” (cited in Pérez 41). In none of the texts is this clearer than in Todo fue nada, in which Carmen’s words read feminist, but do not correspond to her actions. These contemporary artist novels present women as unsuccessful, or—in the best case—partially successful, artists. While their male counterparts in novels like those by Caso and Llamazares remain tormented by the art-life conflict that has driven artist novels for centuries, these women still face different obstacles and have unique concerns, even though their playing field is more level than ever. Their relationship to the cultural field and the charismatic myth are not characterized by painful nostalgia, but rather by two extremes: flagrant disregard or abject reverence. Though feminism’s effects and gains are evident in Marta, Jose, and Carmen’s lives, those gains are still not enough to procure their success in the professional, artistic arena.
Chapter 4: Making (Art) History: Two *Novelas Históricas Culturalistas* by Lourdes Ortiz and Eduardo Mendoza

In 2009, *El País* contributor Javier Rodríguez Marcos declared that “la novela histórica […] vive un momento de auge entre los escritores españoles,” describing it as “[un género que] tapa con la argamasa de la ficción los huecos que deja la historiografía” (no pag.). It is true that in recent decades, historical fiction has flourished, not only in Spain, but in many national literary traditions. In the Spanish context, the publishing house Edhasa established a collection dedicated exclusively to the historical novel in 1976 (the first Spanish-language press to do so), but historical fiction and its corresponding subset of novels classifiable as “historiographic metafiction” did not proliferate widely until the early 1990s. Authors of the historical novel remain unrelenting in their pursuit of the past in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Rodríguez Marcos attributes the current spike in the number of readers of the genre to the fact that “historiadores profesionales han empezado a cultivar la novela histórica” (no pag.). He asserts that people want to know about their country’s past and, while literary form is indeed important, readers also prize historical credibility. Contemporary historical novels have found innovative ways to blend style and history, form and function, to draw more readers to the genre. A year later, also in *El País* in an article titled “Defensa de la novela histórica,” Luis García Jambrina pointed to another reason for the reading public’s hunger for history. He notes that “el gran auge que está viviendo ahora este género tiene mucho que ver con lo que podríamos llamar

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131 Critics generally accept Umberto Eco’s 1983 *The Name of the Rose* as a springboard for a renewed interest in historical fiction in the late twentieth century. Rodríguez Marcos suggests that Eco’s novel “dio el empujón definitivo [al] género” (no pag.) and Agnes Heller similarly describes it as the novel which “established a new tradition” in contemporary historical fiction (93).

132 Those historical novels most widely read in Spain until this point were, generally speaking, translations of novels from other countries, leading Rodríguez Marcos to call refer to “un éxito de importación” (no pag.).
la normalización histórica de España” (no pag.). In other words, García Jambrina sees the Manichean polarity which has always characterized “the two Spains” as an impediment to confronting national history honestly, but one which in recent years has begun to give way to a more open reconsideration of the past, on the part of both novelists and historians.

The national past has weighed heavily on Spain for centuries. Gonzalo Navajas describes Spain’s relationship with its history as one characterized by “an apparently insurmountable conflict between the need to permanently cast away the traditional parameters of national history and the imperative to critically study that history and overcome its limitations” (“Curse of the Nation,” 165-66). In Navajas’s estimation, between the 1980s and today, a “rigidly institutionalized version of history” has lost some of its cultural currency (“Curse of the Nation,” 166).133 New ways of thinking about the troubled and traumatic national past have come to characterize the new historical novel in Spain by giving voice to those to whom it was once denied, by probing the past of heroes and vindicating anti-heroes, and through the questioning of the way history is transmitted as such through historiographic metafiction.134 Some novelists have revived and reconsidered important historical figures, such as Lourdes Ortiz in her 1982 novel *Urraca* or Vázquez Montalbán’s *La Autobiografía del General Franco* (1991). Others, like

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133 In the title of his 2008 article, Jordi Gracia calls of the “revisionism” of Spanish history (especially the recent past, i.e. the Civil War and the Franco period) a “a necessary evil.” According to Gracia, this revisionism is observable in the works of novelists and historians alike. As novelists represent visions of the Civil War and Franco years which cause the readers to “reconsider things or at least propose a new, even intentionally naïve viewpoint” (249), the historiographical texts proceeding from Spanish universities “propose perspectives, correct definitions, and shed light on obscure areas of the past” (253).

134 Linda Hutcheon’s succinct definition of historiographic metafiction refers to those “novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (5). Unlike historiographical writing, “this kind of novel asks us to recall that history and fiction are themselves historical terms and that their definitions and interrelations are historically determined and vary with time” (105).
Arturo Pérez Reverte in his *Alatriste* series (1996-2011), have recreated a historical atmosphere and allowed wholly fictional characters to mingle at will with historical ones. Still others have invented a fictional world set against a historical backdrop in which their characters move, such as Eduardo Mendoza’s *La ciudad de los prodigios* (1986).

However, there is yet another modality of historical novel which has emerged in recent years and which is most relevant for my purposes here. Mercedes Rodríguez Pequenõ has called this kind of text typical of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century “*la novela histórica culturalista*.” This kind of novel:

recrea personajes y situaciones de la historia *cultural* para que sean portavoces de
ideas y vivencias, para resucitar comportamientos y valores, como proceso de
búsqueda o planteamiento filosófico, e incluso para vehicular la propia
subjetividad. (7, my emphasis)

The recent proliferation of novels which take as their subjects figures from the literary or artistic past, leads Rodríguez Pequeño to assert that, in such texts, “de la historia no interesan tanto los acontecimientos que consolidaron la novela histórica moderna, como su dimensión humana, cultural, intelectual, e ideológica” (14). The novels I will examine in this chapter—*Las manos de Velázquez* (2006) by Lourdes Ortiz and Eduardo Mendoza’s *Riña de gatos: Madrid 1936* (2010)\(^{135}\)—fit the designation coined by Rodríguez Pequeño and they use different human

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\(^{135}\) There are two other contemporary novels I could have chosen to include in this study which participate in the same general trend. The first is Carlos Rojas’s *El valle de los caídos* (1978) in which the protagonist, an art historian, is trying unsuccessfullly to write a book on the life and work of Goya. I choose not to include this novel here, however, in part because of its chronological distance from the others, its choice of Goya as a historical subject (all the others are focused on Baroque painters), and its use of fantastic or magical realist elements. I might also have considered J.L. Martín Nogales’s *La mujer de Roma* (2008), but have opted to leave it out of the fold, as the protagonist is not an art historian by trade (rather, he is an expert in painting who works in galleries and museums, certifying paintings’ authenticity). This novel speculates on
dimensions of the cultural past to reflect subjective realities of the characters who occupy the narrative present.

The world of Spanish Baroque painting informs these two novels, but rather than set the action of their texts in the seventeenth century Ortiz, and Mendoza cast as their protagonists art historians who study Golden Age painters. There are multiple implications of this move which I will examine in this chapter. Firstly, taking a cue from historiographic metafiction, these authors reveal to us the inner struggles of the historians and the projections of their personal problems and feelings on the material they study, ultimately showing that history is never fixed and always subjectively mediated, even by historians who claim to be objective. However, these two novels also include passages which border, in their tone, on art criticism (one even includes a detailed bibliography at the end), leading to the creation of a uniquely hybrid genre which has one foot in the world of fiction and another in that of scholarly criticism. Secondly, the novelas históricas culturalistas studied here participate in the larger trend of the Spanish historical novel, as they reconsider the Golden Age, a period that had long been taboo due to its associations with Francoist iconography and the Leyenda Rosa.\textsuperscript{136} Ortiz utilizes a contemporary protagonist whose study of the past becomes inextricably linked to the present, while Mendoza sets the action of his text in the days leading up to the Spanish Civil War, a temporal setting which allows him to simultaneously analyze the distant and more recent Spanish past and to draw parallels between Velázquez’s past, his visits to Italy and the possible love affairs he may have had there, all the while comparing the protagonist’s life to the painter’s.

\textsuperscript{136} The Leyenda rosa (o Leyenda blanca, as García Jambrina calls it), refers to the Franco Regime’s glorification of the Early Modern period and some of its most outstanding figures, chief among them, the Catholic Monarchs. García Jambrina notes that the counterpart to this view of history (la leyenda negra) marks the painfully polarized relationship of Spain to its past for many years: “Incapaces de ver [el pasado] con debido distanciamiento, con ironía o con naturalidad, sólo hablábamos de él para idealizarlo o para denigrarlo de forma maniquea: La Leyenda Blanca o la Leyenda Negra” (no pag.).
them. Finally, the depiction of the art historians reveals, not only a preoccupation with history and its construction, but also another distinct facet of the artistic field as Bourdieu describes it. These novels dramatize the struggle between art historians for the dominant positions in their subfield, as well as the relationship between academics and those who hold other positions in the art world (such as connoisseurs, gallery owners, and contemporary artists). In both texts, the struggle for professional dominance combines with personal issues like love, pride, and jealousy to cloud the historians’ judgment and lead to visions of the cultural past which are often less than scholarly.

The historical novel in Spain

Before taking a detailed look at these art-historical novels, it is worthwhile to recount briefly the history of the historical novel in Spain in order to understand better how the novels by Ortiz and Mendoza simultaneously participate in this contemporary trend and innovate it. As Agnes Heller notes, the historical novel did not emerge in Europe until after the French Revolution (88). In Spain, however, it was not the French but the English-language model of the historical novel—namely the work of Walter Scott—that had the greatest impact on the Spanish authors of the nineteenth century who turned to historical themes. 137 Geoffrey Ribbens suggests that Scott’s model produced two camps of historical fiction in Spain. On the one hand, “the realist side of [Scott’s] achievement,” gave rise to the “near contemporary realist development in Balzac, which entered, or reentered Spain with […] Galdós and his contemporaries” (103). On

137 Friedrich Wolfzettel observes that the Walter Scott model of historical fiction did not translate well to the Spanish context in its original form, and rather, served as a blueprint which had to be adapted to the very particular socio-cultural circumstances. Wolfzettel explains the disconnect this way: “Con arreglo a esta concepción, el héroe, sea trágico o no, viene a participar en el sentido objetivo del movimiento histórico cuyo progreso…puede ser interpretado como una ascensión hacia la luz. […] Ante el fracaso del liberalismo en España y la decadencia actual, este modelo filosófico de la historia parece obviamente problemático” (23).
the other, authors who espoused a “Romantic, exotic, or costumbrista” point of view were those who created the Romantic historical novel, typically focused on the medieval past (102). Ramón López Soler’s *Los bandos de Castilla* (1830)—a novel which some have considered a plagiarized version of *Ivanhoe* rather than a mere homage—opened the door for a flood of historical novels set in medieval times. Marco Aurelio Larios maintains that the Romantic historical novel operated on two distinct levels, one “de ambientación que era rigurosamente histórico” and another in which the dramatic action was completely “novelesco” (132). Though the setting may have been “rigorously” constructed to reflect a historical reality, Larios notes that these novels “no tuv[ieron] verdaderas pretensiones científicas por la historia” (132). On this point (and many others) the contemporary historical novel diverges from its historical precedents.

In his recent book *Narrating the Past: Historiography, Memory, and the Contemporary Novel*, Alan Robinson observes that the general shift in the perception and production of the historical novel in the contemporary period is linked to “[its] late modernist or postmodernist reshaping…through metafictional or magic realist experimentation” (25).\(^{138}\) Though Robinson rejects the historiographic metafictional model as an outmoded approach in the twenty-first century, it is hard to deny, at least in the Spanish tradition, the impact which such considerations of the past have had on the way authors write about history.\(^{139}\) While the novels to be examined

\(^{138}\) Perhaps the best example of historiographic metafiction is Javier Cercas’s 2001 best-seller, *Soldados de Salamina*, but others, such as Antonio Muñoz Molina in *Beatus Ille* (1986) or Manuel Vázquez Montalbán in *La Autobiografía del General Franco* (1991) have also used the technique. In Spain, Carlos Rojas is the author whose work best fits the “magical realist” category. His novels *Aquelarre* (1970) and *El valle de los caídos* (1978) both use magical realist elements to explore the cultural past (Goya, Velázquez) and the Spanish Civil War.

\(^{139}\) Robinson laments that the criticism of historical novels (written in English) is “dominated by the model of historiographic metafiction” (xiii). He rejects this model because “it is inadequately
in this chapter are not examples of historiographic metafiction *per se*, their heightened sense of self-consciousness and questioning of historical processes of consecration reflect certain vestiges of a historiographic metafictional tradition. However, at the same time that the processes of historiography are questioned, there is an also an important dependence on the work of historians to support the texts’ claims. Larios notes that the new historical novel “sí tiene una pretendida ‘cientificidad’ alcanzada por un laborioso acopio de documentos y referencias históricos que le permite no supeditar al nivel histórico al novelesco” (133). The fact that more professional historians have taken up the historical novel in Spain, as Rodríguez Marcos has observed, may have a significant role to play in this shift. Given their deep understanding of the period, they are able to create a more nuanced and “complete” historical narrative world without the reader feeling as though they are skimming the pages of a history book. Moreover, as I will examine in greater detail later, the casting of art historians as protagonists provides the author with a perfect excuse to include passages lifted directly—in form and content—from (art) historiographic discourse.

The “normalization” or “revision” of Spain’s recent national past (especially the Civil War and the Franco years) has had important repercussions for a depiction of the more distant one, especially the Early Modern period. Just as authors (and society at large) have begun a more open dialogue about the Franco legacy, the positive and negative aspects of the Second Republic, and the implications which both have on the present, they have been able to divest the Golden

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narrow in reducing historiography to epistemological issues and in neglecting the crucial importance of temporality in the interplay between *past present* and *past future* and *present past*” (xiii).

140 Some contemporary Spanish novels have not been able to avoid this tendency. For example, Luis Racionero’s *La sonrisa de la Giaconda: Memorias de Leonardo* (1999) gives the reader the sensation that he or she is reading a biography of Leonardo rather than a novel.
Age of at least some of the ideological charge it was given by the Regime. As Navajas asserts, Franco and his ministers

found the country’s redemption in the uncompromising reaffirmation of an institutionalized view of history, a view founded on the belief that the country could find a basis for its unique identity only in a primordial and metaphysically defined past. (“Institutionalized,” 166)

The seventeenth century, with its art and literature so closely bound to imperial politics, became for the Regime, “the apex of a glorious period that signaled the universal projection of the country and could be successfully projected into the present” (Navajas, “Institutionalized,” 166). In her study of the Golden Age in Transition and post-Transition literature, Isabelle Touton notes that during the Franco period, there were very few novels written about the Golden Age, and those revisionist authors who did take up the theme had to do so largely in exile (204). She suggests that the Golden Age for the authors of the dictatorship’s dying days saw the seventeenth century as a perfect way to address the theme of “una España negra y degenerada” (205). These novels and the topics they explored could serve as “[una] metáfora del franquismo e interrogan el abuso de poder” (205). Touton provides what she deems a “microevolución de la imagen del Siglo de Oro en la España de la segunda mitad del siglo XX hasta hoy,” in which she details an important shift, leading us to the novels in question in this chapter (204). She points to 1970 as a decisive moment, when the publication of Juan Goytisolo’s La revindicación del conde don Julián made the first great strides toward a demythification of the Early Modern Spanish

141 As Navajas writes, a contrasting use of Spain’s cultural history can be found in the work of Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset (among others). In their writings, “the great cultural referents of the past are used to mitigate the insufficiencies of the present” (167).
past, especially with its profanation of the once-sacred image of the Catholic Kings. She then marks the decades between 1978 and 1996 as a period of liberation and rehabilitation in which authors began to more openly revise the history of the Spanish Baroque period in their works, “mediante una vuelta a narraciones basadas en una intriga, con una condena al integrismo católica, de la Inquisición, de la política interior de Felipe II” (206). For Touton, 1996—the date of publication of Perez-Reverte’s first Alatriste novel—is a significant modern turning point. It marks the reopening of the Golden Age as an era of military heroism, “valores caballerescos” and artistic splendor, even as it critiques the most egregious corruption and injustice of the period (207). Alatriste, then, is the pioneer of the kind of literature centered on or set in the Golden Age which continues into the present: a more balanced, depolarized or revisionist look at the reign of the Hapsburgs, of the court intrigue in which Quevedo, Velázquez, and their contemporaries were embroiled and the art and literature which made Spain famous. The years since 1996 have even seen a rehabilitation of the very term “Siglo de Oro,” which Touton notes “se consideraba sospechoso tras la muerte de Franco” (208).143 The novels which I will examine in detail in the

142 In Reivindicación, Goytisolo first describes Isabel’s legacy as a “[mujer] generosa, expansiva, justiciera, alegre […] oye misa diariamente, cumple con las horas canónicas[…] su padre le ha enseñado[…] a ser grave y veraz, casta, continente” (163). He then profanes the regime-sanctioned image of Isabel by inviting the reader to visit the “Remota, Fantástica, jamás Explorada por Viajero Alguno Gruta Sagrada” (166). Randolph Pope describes this as “a Disneyland-like attraction featuring a visit to a large model of Isabel the Catholic’s vagina” (105). The tourists who have come to visit “la gruta” then see it promptly invaded and “reconquistada” by “el hueste de Tariq” (172).

143 Touton observes and identifies three general modalities of the Golden Age as it appears in Spanish novels after 1996. The first of these are novels which continue the earlier trend of featuring “los silenciados” and which “valoran diferencias y son himnos a la tolerancia” (208). Another subset features “biografías ficticias de grandes personajes centradas en la valoración afectiva del individuo en su vida privada y en sus pulsiones más íntimas, y por consiguiente, su humanidad” (208). Finally, Touton cites a grouping of novels which have returned to a manifestation of “un nacionalismo exacerbado y un catolicismo extremista,” written “con un barniz erudito” (208). Gracia mentions that these texts “tend to find their readership among the
following pages are situated in the more permissive environment Touton describes and strike a balance between praise and critique of Spain’s “glory days.”

The rise of the *novela histórica culturalista* since 2000 corresponds with this revitalization of the Golden Age in contemporary fiction. As Touton has noted, the emphasis on the cultural (artistic, literary, philosophical) history of Spain is a feature which was never present in the historical novel of the nineteenth century. In the present, she writes, readers can find “una interconectividad casi sistemática con la pintura del Siglo de Oro, sobre todo con Velázquez” (198). Through the use of these “cultural” elements, Rodríguez Pequeño maintains that, far from being a literature of evasion devoid of a critical viewpoint, the novels of this type work to “rehabilitate” the artistic past as they offer “la histórica artística y cultural como modo de conocimiento, explicación y valoración de la realidad, con actitud conservadora y a la vez crítica, porque se plantea el pasado y porque busca modelos de comportamiento éticos y

many Spanish families who have inherited the active and passive Francoism of the previous generation” (255).

144 *Las manos de Velázquez*, for example, Mónica provides the critical counterpoint to Teodoro’s admiration. When she criticizes him for devoting his professional life to this period, she notes that it is “una época que aúna lo mejor y lo peor de esta España” (331). The result of the lives of the artists and rulers, their hopes, fears, and desires was “tu querido siglo XVII. Siglo de Oro en las artes y en las letras, pero también de ruina y cenizas” (331).

145 Many critics are quick to distinguish “real” historical novels from those thriller novels in the guise of history, similar to Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* (2003). In Rodríguez Marcos’s *El País* article, he marks the difference between the history novel and “la novela de misterio seudohistórica, que usa la historia como telón de fondo para dar prestigio a tramas de templarios, sábanas santas, y últimas cenas” (no pag.) This final reference to Last Suppers may perhaps refer to Javier Sierra’s best-selling *La cena secreta* (2006), the kind of novel which Martin Steenmeijer calls “*thracul,*” or “*thriller histórico religioso aventurero cultural*” and which he asserts now has an established market in Spain. Rodríguez Pequeño is also quick to distance her *novela histórica culturalista* from *thraculs*, as she states: “los personajes, tramas, espacios o tiempos de la historia no son simple objeto y mera disculpa sobre los que articular la trama (como *El código da Vinci* o *La sombra del viento* [de Carlos Ruiz Zafón])” (14).
estéticos” (18). In the novels I will explore here, the added “meta-historical” perspective of the art historian characters also problematizes the ways in which history is written and transmitted. While the scholarly protagonists examine the elements of the Baroque cultural field which shaped the artists they study, the readers are also afforded a window on yet another aspect of the contemporary artistic field, namely the way that the art historians’ interest in maintaining or gaining a more advantageous field position influences their production of (art) historiographical documents.

The art historian in the cultural field

Novelizing the art of the past and its practitioners sometimes takes the form of a traditional historical novel set in the period in question. These novels may try to recapture the essence of the past, reviving attitudes, motivations, and contexts which are lost to the modern reader. They are also effectively lost to the authors, however, and, as Heller asserts, there is a “necessary anachronism” from which they cannot escape (90). She observes:

> even if a writer tries to remain true to the consciousness and self-understanding of the historical epoch she portrays, she cannot achieve her aim. Unwittingly, the self-understanding of her own age will impede her understanding of the past. (90)

However, even within the parameters of the novela histórica culturalista, a new modality is emerging which allows authors to acknowledge this anachronism more explicitly and use it to draw parallels between the past and present. Because of the impact of historiographic metafiction on the historical novel, authors began to represent the past in more subjective ways. A growing number of art historical novels featuring art historians who reflect on the past call for the readers

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146 Two salient examples are Jesús Fernández Santos’s *El griego* (1985), which is set in the era of El Greco, and Almudena de Arteaga’s recent novel *Capricho*, set in the nineteenth century and focusing on the female contemporaries of Goya (who often appears as a protagonist).
to acknowledge the subject position of history writers and, thus, to understand the “necessary anachronism” more clearly. In the two novels of this type which I have chosen to explore in this chapter, the anachronism comes to the fore as both of the art historian protagonists face academic and professional derision for allowing their own personal experiences and twenty-first century understanding of the world to color their interpretations of seventeenth-century art. They both recognize that too much subjective identification with their object of study is akin to professional suicide and that certain narrative strategies encouraged, even expected, in fiction are not valid in academic writing.

By bringing to light the possible negative repercussions that art historians face, the authors also reveal important aspects of the inner workings of a different facet of the cultural field not yet explored in this study. Though the factors which allow agents in the field to move between positions is significantly different for art historians than it is for artists, their subfield is also one composed of “position-takings.” The system which underlies the art world is thus not constituted by “coherence-seeking intention or an objective consensus (even if it presupposes unconscious agreement on common principles), but the product and prize of permanent conflict” (34). As explored in Chapters Two and Three, artists and writers are driven by a quest for newness and difference which at times obeys “the gratuitousness principle” (newness for the simple sake of newness) in a world in which success is equivalent to distinction from other producers (Bourdieu 119). Given that art historians are part of the system of consecration and legitimation of artists, it would seem that consensus would be an important part of the functioning of their subfield as they determine which artists should be recognized by their establishment. In reality, there is still just as much struggle for the right to name those recognized artists for dominance among their ranks as there is among those who produce art. As Randal
Johnson explains, the art historian or art critic’s task is not simply one of naming or describing; rather, it is always underwritten by a conscious or semi-conscious strategic position-taking: “All critics declare not only their judgment of the work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art.” (36). Johnson also notes that in the context of criticism or other academic writing, unless these positions—and the intellectual skirmish taking place to obtain them—are openly acknowledged, scholars will produce nothing more than “weapons to advance a particular class of specific interests” (36).

To summarize, then, the profession of the art historian, from the perspective of Bourdieu’s cultural field, can be understood in terms of the struggle for the right to confer legitimation on artists and their work. Bourdieu describes a tripartite structure of artistic legitimation or consecration. Cultural legitimacy can come from other producers (“the specific principle of legitimacy”), by the “mass audience,” (the “popular” principle), or by “bourgeois taste” (50-51). As they generally belong to the academies, which Bourdieu says, “sanction the inseparably ethical and aesthetic (and therefore political) taste of the dominant,” the art historians generally fall into the latter category (51). The task of the art historian is different than that of the contemporary art critic, however. Bourdieu refers to “avant-garde critics” who live “haunted by the fear of compromising their prestige as discoverers by overlooking some discovery” (123).

Academics and museum curators, on the other hand, “are obliged to combine tradition and

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147 This is clearest among critics who deal with contemporary artists, and therefore grant those producers the power to call themselves artists. However, they can also determine which artists of the past are worthy of academic study. When studying past artists, these choices are often dependent on the complexity of the interpretations which can be derived thereof. Elkins notes that “the image on which art historians spend most energy are strictly different from the overwhelming majority of ‘simple’ portraits, still lifes, landscapes and academic histories that crowd the auction catalogues in tens of thousands but scarcely appear in art historical texts” (51).
tempered innovation” (123). This “tempered innovation” may take the form of recovering and asserting the value of the work of artists once marginalized either by the criticism or by other artists. Or, as James Elkins suggests, this originality may take the form of a hunt for complexity in even “the most simpleminded picture” (2). Elkins, himself an art historian, observes that today’s scholars write so much more than their predecessors, in part because of “the number of historians who must write in order to find jobs, or improve their jobs” and that there are relatively few “who have no immediate pressure to write” (29). Therefore, mirroring the “gratuitousness principle” in contemporary art which pushes artists to create something new or different simply to be different, art historians must “discover” new interpretations, hidden meanings, or biographical data which illuminates the artist’s work in an original way. This quest for difference is discernible in the books, articles, and other materials the scholars produce:

Few works do not bear within them the imprint of the system of positions in relation to which their originality is defined; few works do not contain indications of the manner in which the author conceived the novelty of his undertaking or of what, in his own eyes, distinguished it from his contemporaries and precursors.

(118)

Just as artists produce works of art they know will be evaluated by other artists, art historians also write for “a public of equals who are also competitors” (116). While artists depend upon the recognition conferred upon them by their peers in order to achieve “specific legitimation,” art

148 Elkins makes clear that though this veritable explosion of critical writing is not a “malady to be exorcised” (13). Rather, he sees it as nothing more than a component part of the current era: “We live in a period whose sense of pictures is significantly different from anything that has gone before—but we live in the period, so it cannot make sense to look for some new model of pictorial meaning” (13). He also points out that this trend of complex and copious academic writing is symptomatic of the humanities in general and can also be found in literary studies, music, and history (15).
historians and intellectuals also depend on the opinion that other consecrated scholars in the field have of them, since their acceptance or rejection may be the art historian’s ticket to success or fast track to professional ridicule.\textsuperscript{149}

One significant difference between art historians and artists as they vie for dominance in the field hinges on the way others perceive their motivations. For artists, consecration often depends on their apparent rejection of money and fame, as well as their embracing of the “charismatic myth of the artist.” Bourdieu debunks the notion of vocation the myth embodies by suggesting that actions attributed to it are “merely reconversions aimed at ensuring the best possible economic or symbolic return on a determinate kind of cultural capital” (137). Though the idea of vocation is less frequently attributed to choices made within the academy, in practice it follows a similar logic to the one that governs artists’ choices:

the interest which different categories of researchers manifest in different types of practice […] is dependent, first, on the ambitions which their formation and scholastic success and, thus their position in the discipline’s hierarchy allow them to form by assuring them of reasonable chances of success. Secondly, it is a function of the objectively recognized hierarchy of the very different material and symbolic profits which particular practices or objects of study are in a position to procure. (137)

\textsuperscript{149} In his book \textit{Why Are Our Pictures Puzzles?}, Elkins points to some of the reasons why art historians may become the subject of scorn among their peers. Elkins cites the case of Birger Carlström, an art historian who sought out political messages in Renoir’s most innocuous paintings. He lists the four most common objections to Carlström’s line of reasoning: “He is seeing things,” He suffers from “intellectual isolation,” he “has no fixed method,” and “he works too hard and finds too many meanings” (9-10). Elkins tries, however, to play devil’s advocate and asks, “How different are his concerns from those of more mainstream art historians? He looks very carefully at paintings, and he sees things in them that untrained observers might not” (10-11).
This could manifest itself in the choice to study contemporary art rather than the art of the Renaissance, or even the choice to work with one theoretical or analytical apparatus over another. Lourdes Ortiz’s novel dramatizes the repercussions of these choices as the protagonist grapples with his choice to study Spanish Baroque art instead of following his wife’s advice to research a younger generation of painters.

Finally, in order for art historians to gain symbolic capital, or recognition needed to advance their careers, they must possess a particular kind of cultural capital. The component parts of this cultural capital are historically variable and determined by specific subsets of the profession, but it can be loosely defined as “a form of knowledge, an internal code, or a cognitive acquisition for competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts” (Johnson 7). James Heffernan refers to this form of knowledge as with the neologism “picturacy” a word that denotes “the visual counterpart of literacy” (1). In order to “read” pictures and to demonstrate their understanding of picturacy, scholars are expected be objective. Elkins defines the profession as “the ivory tower of tearlessness,” as he asserts that art historians are “fascinated by pictures, but [they] don’t let them upset [their mental] balance” (Pictures and Tears, 90-91). According to Elkins, art historians use history as if it were a drug, and he says of himself: “history takes me out of myself, saves me from myself. It shelters me from the raw, unpredictable encounter with artworks” (Pictures and Tears, 107). Art historical writing which relies on personal interpretation “does not make for good scholarship,” says Elkins, but it seems nearly impossible to aver that there will be no personal reaction which impacts scholarly interpretation (Pictures and Tears, 104). It is for this reason, as Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy note, that Bourdieu was skeptical of “scholastic reason” and any kind of ostensible academic objectivity (189). It is essential to any attempt to analyze and write about cultural
production to “analyze and understand the field in our own terms, but part of that understanding must involve grasping the artistic field and object as they were understood in their own terms” (189, emphasis in original). Furthermore, the researcher must also be aware of his or her own position in the field and, in a sense, counteract a “certain ‘detached’ disposition” (in essence, another way of referring to objectivity) which Bourdieu defines as a product of postmodernism (189). This brings us full circle: the art historian who recognizes how the positions in his or her subfield are constituted and how he or she fits within them will produce more than “weapons” in the struggle for symbolic capital.

As my analysis of the novels will reveal, Ortiz and Mendoza both paint a portrait of the art historians’ attempts to acquire symbolic capital, but also the danger of too much subjective interpretation which puts their chances for advancement in danger. In both cases, the emotional and personal nature of these interpretations lead to speculations that make the art historians tread the territory of fiction. In fiction, the narrator has access to the characters thoughts and motivations, can leave “gaps and silences” in its discourse, and has the power to “make things happen” rather than being limited to “what really happened” (Robinson 31-35). By choosing art historian protagonists, the authors are able to combine both levels of discourse and problematize them at the same time; they challenge the reliability and objectivity of historical discourse and concurrently question just how much of the “fictional” world we experience in the

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150 James Heffernan points out that this kind of objectivity was not always a requirement for art critics. He cites sixteenth-century critic Denis Diderot as an example, noting that in his writings about paintings “the story of a picture usually usurps the technical attractions of color, composition, and line, which hardly affect him as much as the purely emotive appeal of the painter’s subject matter” (Cultivating Picturacy 51).

151 As Robinson points out, these differences are made possible by the fact that the fictional narrator is a speaking entity distinct from the author. In the case of historical or historiographic writing, the narrator and author are considered one and the same (31).
text has connections to the “real” world. A more detailed analysis of Las manos de Velázquez and Riña de gatos: Madrid 1936 will reveal striking commonalities in the way authors set the stage for their stories: In each, an art historian facing professional failure or academic derision is presented with, and subsequently misses, an opportunity to accrue the symbolic capital necessary to achieve a more dominant position in their subfield. As they question the very notion of objectivity in historical writing, their divagations from the scholarly norm come to mark the texts we read as novelas históricas culturalistas.

Lourdes Ortiz’s Las manos de Velázquez

That Lourdes Ortiz would write a novel featuring an art historian protagonist is not particularly surprising, given that it is a profession she has seen from the inside. Trained in the fields of history and geography, Ortiz has worked at the Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático (RESAD) where she has held the position of cátedra in art history and theory since 1976 (Morgado 11-15). Las manos de Velázquez (2006) is Ortiz’s most recently published novel, though not her first to explore history or art. Her best-known novel, Urraca (1982) gives a voice to the medieval queen of Castile by the same name by allowing her to tell her own story from a feminine perspective, and La liberta (1999) is set in Rome in the age of Nero. On the other hand, Ortiz’s 1986 novel Arcángelés incorporates art as an integral part of the way the story of young political dissidents is told through the ekphrastic recreation and dramatization of a selection of famous paintings. In Las manos de Velázquez, these two currents of art and history meet, mediated by the perspective of art historian Teodoro.

Las manos de Velázquez is dedicated to “todos mis alumnos de la RESAD, con los que durante tantos años aprendí a mirar y amar la pintura” (5).
Las manos de Velázquez is both a novel about the past and the present. On the one hand, it is the twenty-first century story of Teodoro’s stagnating professional life and his anxiety about his personal (and especially, amorous) one. On the other, it is the story of Velázquez’s life and work, transmitted to the reader in a fragmentary, nonlinear way. In seventeen chapters in which the narrative voice oscillates randomly between second and third person, the reader gets to know Teodoro, the neurotic middle-aged art historian who is tormented by his failure to write a transcendent and definitive work of art historical criticism, by jealousy and suspicion that his much-younger wife is unfaithful to him, and by a host of smaller concerns that crop up in the course of the narration. The reader encounters moments in Velázquez’s life and descriptions of his paintings within what Martínez calls the “discurrir moroso de los pensamientos del protagonista,” and those thoughts become increasingly introspective and self-centered as the novel progresses (49). The text’s insistence on Velázquez never wanes, but Teodoro’s assertions about the painter increasingly move away from the domain of history—from the pursuit of “truth of the past through the objectifying sanctions of human knowledge”—and into the realm of fiction (Herzberger 4). Las manos de Velázquez engages in what David Herzberger refers to as “scumbling,” a process that “overextends the folds of one thing (fiction) into those of another (history) without eliminating entirely the discreetness of each” (6). It is Teodoro’s profession as an art historian and the scholarly, art historical discourse Ortiz at times employs that helps keep history and fiction discreet from one another in the text. At other times, the contours of history bleed into those of imagination through Teodoro’s personal identification with Velázquez. However, it is his subjective self-identification at the level of micro-history with his object of study that makes Las manos de Velázquez the novela histórica culturalista it is by permitting the contemporary reader to imagine the great painter in a more human dimension, to understand him
in a way that history books do not allow. My analysis in the following pages will center on two distinct, but interrelated dimensions of Ortiz’s novel. Firstly, I will explore how the detailed depiction of the art historical profession’s intricacies and Teodoro’s (largely failed) attempts to achieve his professional goals make this a historical novel that displays a preoccupation with the way history is written. Secondly, I will examine how the historical events in Velázquez’s life that Ortiz (and Teodoro) choose to write about present a demythified vision of the painter that complements the demythification of the fictional artists addressed in the previous chapters.

The reader learns in the novel’s first chapter that Teodoro is an intellectual and a scholar, but that he has never been able to achieve the professional success he desires. He has been “un buen y comedido profesor de Historia del Arte, sin muchas publicaciones, sin grandes tratados,” but he aspires to something greater (9). The cátedra has remained elusive and to obtain it he has to publish a book, and it is this task upon which he is embarked throughout the entire novel. However, the reader also learns at this early stage that Teodoro’s motivations for writing this book are contradictory. He wants to write a serious academic treatise about Velázquez that will make his art historian contemporaries notice him and that will ensure his promotion in his department, but he feels very limited by the research methods and style of writing he will need to employ to make that happen. He admits that, especially since so many details of Velázquez’s life remain mysterious, scholars have limited themselves primarily to an analysis of his paintings: “Es de la obra de lo que se trata, de lo que se ha tratado siempre. Los datos biográficos, los pocos que existen son para reírse” (7). Teodoro longs to transcend “lo ya cacareado una y otra vez,” to figure out what made Velázquez paint what he did, travel where he did, love whom he did, to “atrapar el alma, fundirse con el pintor, oír sus latidos, sus miedos, sus satisfacciones” (8). The incongruous nature of his authorial fantasies has left Teodoro with a bad case of academic
writers’ block that he spends the rest of the novel trying to resolve. Though, in his frustration, he contemplates giving up—“más vale que tires tu trabajo, o el proyecto del trabajo, a la papelera,” he tells himself—he knows that to do so means that he will have to forego “el éxito, […] la cátedra, los aplausos” (9). The consequences of abandoning his project are akin to professional suicide and will lead only to “anonimato, silencio, olvido. Cuando no el castigo” (13). It is here that the reader gets the first glimpse of Teodoro’s struggle to secure a more advantageous field position. As it stands, he is in a dominated position, and, as dissatisfied as he is with the parameters of academic writing, he cannot change the rules which govern the scholarly establishment. The power to determine what and how academics like him are “allowed” to discuss, and the accompanying power to ban other topics or writing styles from consecration is left to others in more dominant positions.

It is Teodoro’s personal conflict that gives rise to a blend of discursive registers in Las manos de Velázquez. As Rodríguez Pequeño observes, this kind of narrative hybridity is typical of the novela histórica culturalista which often is represented by “textos de estructura fragmentaria y la mezcla de discursos, y [que] remite[n] a un hibridismo genérico” (17). With little warning, the novel switches between impassioned personal, sometimes irrational, musings and dispassionate discourse that is evidence of scholarly remove. The latter is epitomized by the long bibliography included the novel’s final pages, which gives testimony to its pretention towards historical accuracy. This move is also standard in the novela histórica culturalista, which as Rodríguez Pequeño notes, is often extensively documented, “hasta el punto de que el autor se nos muestra como investigador” (21). In a note that precedes the bibliography, another narrative voice explains that the texts that follow are “obras claves sobre los sucesos históricos del momento […] y estudios contemporáneos sobre Velázquez y sus coetáneos […] que
[Teodoro] tenía siempre a mano […] durante el tiempo de la elaboración de su libro” (347).153

At times, Teodoro cites his sources in the text. For example, in one section he speaks of a fresco series of Pandora that Velázquez is known to have completed for the Alcázar in Madrid, which burned to the ground in the early eighteenth century. In order to ground his analysis of the paintings he can no longer observe first hand, Teodoro cites both the eighteenth-century writer Palomino and early twentieth-century art historian Erwin Panofsky on the Pandora theme in Western art. At other times, he does not cite his sources directly, but the discourse he employs appears lifted from some of the history books he cites. This is the case in an episode near the beginning of the novel when Teodoro explains the intrigue at court surrounding the assassination of Juan de Tassis in 1622 in great detail.

However, the passages that utilize academic discourse almost always break down and lead to digressions in which Teodoro begins to speculate about Velázquez and his era in ways the books in his bibliography cannot. The Velázquez that emerges from the texts limited by objective facts is hermetic, undecipherable, “un tipo flemático, un tipo callado, sin anécdotas, sin concesiones a la posteridad” (7). Teodoro wants to know not only the things Velázquez did, but why he did them, what he was thinking when he made his choices. He expresses his desire saying, “Ponerme en su piel. No te jode. De eso se trata, de meterse en la piel ajen, de captar la energía de sus manos” (7). However, if he hopes to use this material for his book, Teodoro

153 The bibliography, titled “Noticia para ayuda de lectores y curiosos” is divided into three parts. The first contains a list of texts “sobre los sucesos históricos del momento, Fuentes literarias de la época […] y estudios contemporáneos sobre Velázquez y sus coetáneos” (347). Ortiz also notes that these texts are included in case the reader “quiere confirmar o rebatir con criterio las tesis de Teodoro” (347). The second part of the list includes, “¿cómo no? obras que son citadas directamente por Teodoro o alguno de los personajes” (349). Finally, the third section of the bibliography is composed of just two texts which form part of the “rarrezas múltiples que le gustaba consultar o recordar a lo largo de su trabajo, aunque no tuvieran aparentemente relación directa con él” (350).
knows it will not be well received by his colleagues: “Subjetivo, dirán. Más o menos encantador. Poco académico” (7). As a historian, Teodoro faces the limitations Robinson describes: “In seeking to reconstruct the actual reasons for past actions, historians have as evidence only the results of those actions, both in terms of their practical consequences and in the form of retrospective commentaries or reports to which they may have given rise” (32). However, if he were to write fiction, he would have license to speculate and invent, since, as Dorit Cohn observes in “Signposts of Fictionality,” “the minds of imaginary figures can be known in ways that those of real persons cannot” (cited in Robinson 31). If he wants to write about what Velázquez thought and felt, Teodoro would only be able to “mover con intuiciones, pero las intuiciones son… ficción” (8). And, he is quick to add, “No voy a escribir una novela” (8).

While Teodoro may not have pretensions of being a novelist, it is precisely his digressions from the historical texts that allow Ortiz to create the novela histórica culturalista she does. By setting a large part of the text in Teodoro’s mind, the “novelistic” paragraphs he knows he cannot publish become part of the novel we read, where such divagations are permitted.154 What is more, as Ortiz focuses the narration on Teodoro’s conflict and the choices he makes about which topics to include in his book—and which he must discard—she also provides a window onto the writing of history and the art historian’s attempts to secure or improve his position in the field. As Herzberger observes, both history and fiction require the author to be selective in the series of events he or she wishes to narrate:

154 Teodoro grapples with this issue throughout the entire text, but this internal struggle provides Ortiz with a platform for fictionalizing Velázquez and his contemporaries, writing them into dialogues with one another, and imagining their thoughts and feelings. For example, after imagining the conversation Felipe IV may have had with his court painter before sending him to Italy, Teodoro remarks: “No estaría mal un párrafo así. Pero no es una novela lo que está haciendo. No es ficción. La ficción es trapichera y produce indignación en la Academia” (152).
In both historical and fictional narration the author chooses what is relevant for inclusion in the desired configuration, as well as what elements are appropriately excluded, either because they are considered tangential to the material at hand, or because their inclusion runs counter to the story as the narrator wishes to emplot it. (6)

The choices Teodoro makes about which elements of Velázquez’s life and work to study come from two contrasting motivations. Some of them arise from a desire to produce work that is new and groundbreaking to his colleagues, such as his idea, based on similarities in color and form, as well as a confluence of dates the two spent in Rome, that Velázquez and Artemesia Gentileschi were lovers and artistic inspirations for one another. Others are motivated by an idiosyncratic identification with Velázquez that leads to questionable scholarship, but which forms the cornerstone of the novela histórica culturalista. By exploring both Teodoro’s “interested” need to find topics about which to write and publish in order to preserve his job and his very human, personal interest in Velázquez’s biography, Ortiz reflects on the writing of history as a process that is always subjectively mediated.

In order for Teodoro to write what he calls “el trabajo de mi vida,” he has to choose a topic that is sufficiently innovative in its findings, but that still conforms to the stylistic and thematic parameters of his discipline (7). His young wife, Mónica, does not understand her husband’s fascination with the Golden Age—for both professional and ideological reasons—and she urges him to branch out into a new field of study. According to Mónica, there is little left for him to discover: “Es un tema manido. Poco más vas a descubrir a no ser que tengas la potra de encontrar algún documento que desvele por fin la personalidad de la Venus…¡Ya está bien del
XVII!” (15). She suggests that he dedicate himself instead to a field that promises a better return on his cultural capital, in both economic and symbolic ways. She asks him, “¿Por qué no haces un trabajo sobre la generación de los ochenta, por ejemplo, que todavía hay mucho que decir y tienes la ventaja de que puedes hablar con los artistas, ya que casi todos siguen vivos?” (15). As Bourdieu notes, “the interest which different categories of researchers manifest in different types of practice” is dependent on two different factors: “the ambitions […] their position in the discipline’s hierarchy allow them to form by assuring them of reasonable chances of success” and the “objectively recognized hierarchy of the very different material and symbolic profits which particular practices or objects of study are in a position to procure” (137). While Teodoro’s accumulated cultural capital—the cultural knowledge and dispositions he possesses—places him in a better position to write about the Baroque period, Mónica’s frustration with her husband’s field of study lies more in the “objectively recognized hierarchy” of which Bourdieu speaks. In the academic climate they inhabit, she believes that studying contemporary artists is more profitable and encourages him to rethink his choices. However, Teodoro’s personal obsession with crafting his “pequeña, pero digna aportación a Velázquez” keeps him from shifting positions to a field of study that even he knows is more symbolically lucrative (8).

Perhaps more important for my consideration of Las manos de Velázquez as a novela histórica culturalista is the way Teodoro’s conscious (and, at times, unconscious) projections of his own personal and professional life onto Velázquez’s helps Ortiz to humanize the painter.

155 Mónica refers here to Velázquez’s famous Venus del espejo, also known as the Rokeby Venus, whose model has never been convincingly identified. It appears that this theme of transgressive nudes of uncertain identity, painted in other ages, is an attractive topic for novelists. Martín Nogales’s La mujer de Roma (2008) is centered around this question of the Venus’s identity, as is Riña de gatos by Mendoza, which will be further examined in this chapter. Antonio Larreta’s Volvaerunt (1980) and Almudena de Arteaga’s Capricho (2012) ask the same questions about the true identity of Goya’s Maja desnuda.
Teodoro’s professional conflict is key in this situation, because one of the cornerstones of the book he would need to write for promotion is a dispassionate tone, and the majority of Teodoro’s descriptions of Velázquez’s paintings and actions are anything but. As Elkins notes, “people with intense emotional reactions to paintings don’t care for the way historians talk, and the feeling is mutual” (94). However, Teodoro allows his own personal circumstances to impede his cold appraisal of the paintings, infusing them with his own subjective interpretations that correlate to his own experiences. This begins with his insistence on Velázquez’s biography in his analyses. Patricia Emison observes that when historians focus on an artist’s biography, they “make the past easily accessible: people love, get angry, have money troubles and have strokes of luck” (10). It is precisely this element of biography that stands out in the novela historica culturalista, as Rodríguez Pequeño explains, using similar terms. The authors of these novels “recurren a figuras prestigiosas que en el imaginario cultural encarnan diversas experiencias, amores, amistades, rencores, vergüenzas, con los que el narrador puede enmascarar su intimidad, sus deseos y sus preocupaciones” (15). Here, there is little masking of Teodoro’s desires and fears that are projected onto those of Velázquez, which make for good fiction, but which impede his scholarly advancement.

Each chapter of Las manos de Velázquez follows a similar formula. Teodoro describes a facet of his personal life—encounters with Mónica, his ex-wife Luisa, his children Carlos and Magdalena, and later, his lover Caterina—or his professional one—conferences, relationships with other scholars, and his frustrated attempts to write. Then, the focus shifts to either an ekphrastic description of a Baroque painting or the description of an event in Velázquez’s life that Teodoro contemplates as a possible topic for his book, a topic that often echoes problems in his life. For example, in the third chapter, Teodoro becomes distracted as he is analyzing
Velázquez’s *La fragua de Vulcano* by fears that his wife is cheating on him with her young artist friend Beltrán. As a result, when he looks at the painting, he sees himself as Vulcan—older, gruff and somewhat haggard—receiving news from Beltrán who has assumed Apollo’s form. He begins his musings focused on the historical context, describing the products created in the forge, armor and helmets worn by “ese rey, ese Felipe” (74). In the span of a sentence, though, the focus has shifted to the present and to a new cast of characters. “Mirale a él,” Teodoro sneers, “a ese que dice ser Apolo y que se pasea con túnica de naranjas y esa ridícula corona de laurel, en plan yo nunca sudo” (74). Apollo-Beltrán has come to announce “lo que ya todos sabemos desde hace mucho tiempo: que ella es una puta, una cualquiera, que se lo hace con el guerrero, con el vencedor, mientras tú, viejo, está aquí, puteado y renegrido” (74). This personalized description of Velázquez’s painting underscores Teodoro’s insecurities, his fear that his wife is tired of being married to an “old man” and that she would rather run off with “cualquier pintorcillo de culo prieto y ademanes audaces” (57).

In beautiful prose which artfully combines Teodoro’s neurotic stream of consciousness and encyclopedic knowledge of the Golden Age, Velázquez’s paintings come to life through this series of ekphrases like these. In Aesop’s painted eyes, he sees the eyes of his ex-wife and thoughts of his father, and his relationship to his own son Carlos, lead Teodoro to describe and reconsider the portrait of Pope Innocent X, as well as Francis Bacon’s version of the same painting. Through these subjective and transformative ekphrases, Ortiz reimagines the paintings in a contemporary setting, but she also draws attention to the voice of the art historian that underlies all critical analyses. As James Heffernan avers, “the history of art cannot be told without ekphrasis,” but often the voice of the critic or art historian becomes effaced by the purported objectivity of the discourse (*Cultivating Picturacy* 40). He reminds us, however, that
“the interpreter never disappears, that his distinctive voice is audible in everything he says about a work of art” (43). Through more drastic examples, like the reinterpretation of the *Fragua de Vulcano* image, Ortiz reminds us of the speaker behind the ekphrastic descriptions, revealing the preconceptions which condition his interpretations.

In other cases, Teodoro identifies with Velázquez on a personal level rather than through his art, and it is this way that Ortiz is able to adopt “the experiential perspective of historical agents or characters […] which readers, through immersion and sympathetic identification, can potentially share” (Robinson 35). The emphasis on a historical character’s biography can often lead to “an exaggeration of the heroic aspect, in order to justify such attention paid to a single individual,” but given Teodoro’s low estimation of himself and the recognition of his dominated position in the field, his identification with the painter actually deemphasizes the heroic (Emison 13). The self-identification begins cautiously. Teodoro asks himself, “¿Es que acaso te atreves a compararte con él?” (9). But he starts to see similarities as he compares their professions: “Funcionarios los dos. He ahí otra similitud” (9). Rather than describe Velázquez as a Romantic, charismatic genius, he tries to put him in his historical context: “Cualquier carguillo más importante que ser pintor del rey. Un artesano, al fin [y al] cabo, alguien que trabaja con las manos y se las mancha” (10). In Velázquez’s aspirations to transcend his position as just a court painter for something greater, Teodoro sees his own less-than-satisfying career reflected.

Later in the text, another event in the present prompts Teodoro to consider Velázquez’s attempts at social climbing in a different context. Much to his chagrin, Teodoro attends a party to which his wife has been invited, hosted by her friend Ñaqui, an art collector. After spending several miserable hours at the party with a group of “esnobs de mierda,” Teodoro convinces his wife to leave with him (143). As they go, Mónica asks her husband: “¿No estás de acuerdo? […]
Si no fuera por los coleccionistas, por los amantes de todo lo bello, como Ñaqui, el mundo de la pintura, de la escultura, se iría al carajo” (143-44). Though he refuses to dignify Ñaqui’s profession to Mónica—he is sure the two are romantically involved—his wife’s comment leaves him thinking about the task of the collector, which in turn leads him to think about Velázquez: “Y de pronto una luz: él también, como Ñaqui, coleccionista, coleccionista para el rey; labor metódica de selección, de búsqueda. En Italia” (150).\footnote{Another point of comparison Teodoro finds between Ñaqui and Velázquez is their economic and social positions, and the opportunities it afforded them. He notes that Ñaqui’s “‘estilo’, esta altanería y ese saber estar le vienen de familia, esa nonchalance que da el dinero, un alarde sin estridencias del que está donde debe estar y todo se le da fácil” (150). Bourideu observes the importance of prior economic capital in order to assume risky field positions: “Economic capital provides the guarantees which can be the basis of self-assurance, audacity, and indifference to profit—dispositions which, together with the flair associated with possession of a large social capital and the corresponding familiarity with the field [...] point towards the outposts” (68). For Teodoro, the fact that Velázquez did not have that same kind of social capital and yet was given such a post by the King was a mark of his exceptionality.} By linking events in the present (in this case, the Ñaqui’s party), with events of the past (Velázquez’s trip to Italy on a diplomatic mission), Ortiz is able to transition seamlessly between two historical eras in the same paragraph.

By acknowledging Velázquez’s attempts to improve his social status, Teodoro emphasizes the painter’s “interestedness.” He considers the conscious strategies that Velázquez employed in order to get close to the king and climb the ladder: “Pintar. Pintar y callar. Una oportunidad que hay que aprovechar, pasando de cotilleos y maledicencias. […] Llegarás hasta el rey. […] No reveles ni una sola de tus emociones. No dejes testimonios, no escribes cartas, no comentes” (83-85). Teodoro sees in Velázquez’s careful and calculated ambitions in his own attempts to follow the rules, bide his time, and advance in his discipline. By equating the somewhat hapless and neurotic Teodoro with Velázquez, Ortiz depicts an unromanticized image of the painter and is able to consider the cultural, intellectual, and ideological factors that motivated him.
In the end, Teodoro is presented to us as a failure and a broken man for a variety of reasons. His extreme jealously and his own extramarital affair leads to his divorce and the novels ends with his book still unfinished. What is more, Teodoro has progressively given himself over to the speculative and imaginative in his writing. He has given himself over to fiction. In the last chapter, Teodoro attends a conference in Zaragoza where he presents research he knows will cause controversy. His paper is based on “un tema no académico, sino para un ensayo o una novela, mientras el dato concreto, la fuente encontrada, no confirme o desmienta lo que para [Teodoro] ya es certeza” (339). He ultimately retreats from the domain of scholarly objectivity, and, consequently, from his hopes of promotion. These hopes are decidedly dashed when, as he rises to give his presentation to a packed room of professors, Teodoro begins to cry: “Los ojos empañados, las lágrimas inoportunas, a destiempo, improcedentes” (340). He has become “el profesor chiflado” whom no one in the field will take seriously ever again, both because of his far-fetched research and his histrionics (345). He is unable to remain inside what Elkins calls the art historian’s “ivory tower of tearlessness” (90). However, because he cannot, the novel we read is enriched and we are able to imagine Velázquez’s “pulsiones más íntimas, y por consiguiente, su humanidad” (Touton 208). Ortiz’s novel makes the cultural past accessible to readers through Teodoro’s personal projections and professional conflict in a way that combines historical accuracy and imagination. At the same time, it provides an intimate look at the art historian’s profession and the way his or her writings inevitably bear the marks of personal circumstances and struggles for field position. Teodoro may fail to achieve his desired position in the field, but because he does, we read a novel that makes Velázquez seem real, a

157 Teodoro describes the topic of his presentation as “la posible influencia de la escuela holandesa, concretamente la escuela de Delft—y no de Rembrandt, señala—en el cuadro más famoso, más estudiado, más admirado, en Las Meninas concretamente” (336).
man who dreamed of success, fell in love, made mistakes and had regrets. Ortiz’s final lines in
her author’s note at the end of the novel synthesize well the vision of history, fiction, and the
writing of both that her novel represents: “La tarea del investigador es modesta y la vida rica,
mentirosa, y trabucante. Nos desmiente y nos voltea. Eso es lo que la literatura añade, que no es
poca cosa” (350).

**Eduardo Mendoza’s *Riña de gatos***

While Eduardo Mendoza’s 2010 novel, *Riña de gatos: Madrid 1936*, winner of the
Premio Planeta of the same year, also features an art historian protagonist who studies
Velázquez, some significant differences set it apart from Ortiz’s novel. Although still classifiable
under the umbrella of *novela histórica culturalista*, *Riña de gatos* is also a *historical* novel in a
more literal sense than the one described above. As the title suggests, it is set in 1936, in the days
leading up to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and places Anthony Whitelands, a British
art historian visiting Spain, amid the fray. Anthony, like Teodoro in *Las manos de Velázquez*,
spends the novel jockeying for field position, but more is at stake than obtaining the coveted
cátedra; Anthony risks even his life in his attempt to decipher a picture puzzle. 158 Furthermore,
Anthony’s personal and professional struggle become the mirror Mendoza uses to reflect what he
considers the most important elements of the conflict in Spain.

Mendoza is no stranger to writing about history. With the publication of *La verdad sobre
el caso Savolta* in 1975 and *La ciudad de los prodigios* in 1986, he established himself as a

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158 Ángeles Saura’s *La duda* (2000) is the recent *novela histórica culturalista* that features an art
historian character most willing to risk and sacrifice in order to protect his dominant place within
the field. Art historian César Rinconeda, the foremost specialist in the still lifes of invented
Baroque painter Francisco Meltán is willing to kill the rival art historian who (respectfully)
challenges the ideas which have given him his consecrated place in the field. He tricks her into
handing over her research, poisons her, and burns the evidence, even as he realizes that she was
very likely correct in her assertions. In order to protect himself yet again, César alters the
painting itself to protect his reputation.
master of the postmodern historical novel. As Mario Santana has observed, even Mendoza’s early work was a smashing commercial success, but was received with ambivalence among critics.\footnote{Santana defends \textit{La verdad sobre el caso Savolta} from those who would call it “literatura ‘light.’” He notes that through parody Mendoza imposes a mode of reading which is “placentera pero exigente, que requiere del lector una múltiple competencia lingüística, literaria, e incluso ideológica (pues su comprensión presupone asimismo una familiaridad crítica con valores culturales y sociales)” (141). He explains the critical ambivalence towards the novel because of the strong contrast between Mendoza’s attempts to reach out to the reader, rather than to push him or her away, as much of the experimental fiction of the period did (139).} Both novels borrow from different literary registers (though this is most evident in \textit{La verdad}) ranging from the nineteenth-century realist novel to detective fiction to the picaresque, among others. \textit{Riña de gatos} is also composed of elements borrowed from a wide assortment of genres. Justo Serna describes it alternately as “una novela histórica con trasfondo político,” “una ficción de intriga,” “una novela romántica,” “una comedia de enredo,” and “un relato de acción” (25). The protagonists of \textit{La verdad} (Javier Miranda) and \textit{La ciudad} (Onofre Bouvila) also share an important element with Anthony in \textit{Riña de gatos}, one which impacts the novel’s point of view. All three characters serve as “neutral” men who can navigate different strata of their society which would be denied to others. Onofre’s ostensible lack of affiliation with any ideology or political party allows him to associate with anarchists, capitalists, and the poor, while this same uncommitted attitude allows him to make decisions (many of which are unscrupulous) based solely on his own personal gain. It is precisely Onofre’s cunning and egoism which permits him this access, while Javier Miranda’s provincial innocence in \textit{La verdad} allows him also to infiltrate various levels of Barcelona’s society, often as a pawn. In \textit{Riña de gatos} Anthony’s nationality and profession are markers and causes of his neutrality in the charged political atmosphere he inhabits. Mendoza has called Anthony “uno de mis antihéroes, más testigo que actor. En este sentido me servía para pasear, en tanto que personaje neutral, por todo
el abanico de fuerzas. [...] Es neutral, pero no amoral” (22). Such characters are an essential part of what Navajas calls “la nueva estética” in postmodern historical writing which recovers “el pasado pero lo hace de modo subjetivo, filtrando la objetividad de la reflexión histórica a través de la mirada personal de un observador que altera su conexión con ese pasado por medio de la transfiguración de sus procesos mentales” (Más allá 28). Though Riña de gatos is narrated by a third-person omniscient voice, many of the considerations about Spain are filtered through Anthony’s supposedly impartial point of view.

Before examining Anthony’s character in detail and the repercussions of his profession and nationality on the story’s perspective, it is also worthwhile to consider the chronological setting of this historical novel. While, in the past, Mendoza had centered his attention on the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, this novel is set in the years still reserved for many “novels of memory.” As we find ourselves in the second decade of the twenty-first century, however, many of Mendoza’s readers have no memory of the Civil War (Mendoza himself was born in the postwar period) and it has, in effect, become a “historical” period for a growing sector of the reading public. In a 2010 interview with the Spanish literary magazine Mercurio, Mendoza describes his interest in this period, and especially in the character of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, founder of the Falange, as the product of distanced reflection rather than as an exorcising of personal demons: “La figura de José Antonio me intrigó cuando en mi época de estudiante me fui de España y empecé a estudiar la historia reciente con tranquilidad y la perspectiva de la distancia” (22). When asked about his choice to set the novel, not in the middle of the war or in the early Franco years, but in the moments before the war broke out, Mendoza replies: “Siempre me ha interesado mucho más la Historia antes de saber cómo acaba. Los días que narro en la novela demuestran que todos creían que se podía dar un
paso más sin que ese fuese el decisivo” (22). Mendoza uses cleverly placed ekphrases to echo this sentiment, which, in a novel about art, history and passion, fit seamlessly into the narration.

There are many ekphrastic passages in Riña de gatos, most of them related to Anthony’s visits to the Velázquez rooms of the Prado or his mental recreations of the painting around with the entire novel revolves. However, one painting is described ekphrastically more times than any other: Titian’s La muerte de Acteón, a copy of which hangs in the Duke of Igualada’s palace, captivates Anthony repeatedly throughout the course of the text. The narrator provides a lengthy description of the painting in the second chapter:

Tiziano representa la escena de un modo incoherente: Diana todavía conserva su ropa y en vez de maldecir a Acteón parece como si se dispusiera a lanzarle una flecha o se la hubiera lanzado ya la transformación del desdichado cazador no ha hecho más que empezar: todavía conserva su cuerpo de hombre, pero le ha salido una cabeza de ciervo desproporcionadamente pequeña; esto no impide que los perros ya le ataquen con la ferocidad que habrían puesto en una pieza de caza ordinaria, aunque en rigor debería haber reconocido el olor de su amo. (32-33)

Much later, and after the painting has resurfaced multiple times in the narration, Manuel Azaña, the ill-fated present of the Second Republic, describes it and contemplates its significance:

Azaña, who professes to be an avid art lover, explains that he attended a conference on this painting given by none other than Anthony’s rival, Edwin Garrigaw. Feeling defeated and

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160 This painting becomes a touchstone in the novel and Anthony has the opportunity to reflect on it almost every time he visits the Duke’s palace. On one occasion, he muses about the differences between Titian’s style and the style of his own beloved Velázquez, suggesting that Velázquez would never have painted a such an ambiguous scene, as his world was “compuesto de hechos cotidianos, cargados de una vaga melancolía” (178). On another visit to the house, after he has become deeply involved in political matters that concern him very little, he notes that this painting of a man pursued “tenía mucho en común con su propia experiencia” (306).
knowing that his country could fall headlong into civil war at any moment, Azaña contemplates the painting and muses:

Para pintar ese suceso, Tiziano elige un punto medio en el decurso de la fábula: lo esencial ya ha ocurrido o está por ocurrir. Quien no sabe el principio y el final del cuento se queda en ayunas. […] Alguna razón llevó el pintor a elegir ese momento y no otro. El momento en que la falta ya ha sido cometida y la flecha ha sido lanzada. Lo demás es cuestión de tiempo: el desenlace es inevitable. (337)

This ekphrastic description highlights the reason Mendoza chose this historical moment over any other, the moment in which the metaphorical arrow has already been launched: the two sides—the two Spains—have drawn their battle lines, but there are not yet any clearly defined winners or losers. The results of the stands being taken and the challenges being leveled are known to us, the contemporary readers, but not to the characters. As Robinson observes, the tension a scene like this one creates is made possible because “the historical novelist’s retrospective vantage point grants her insights unavailable in the past, when the working out of actions had not been finalized and their full significance could not be appreciated” (36). Mendoza seizes on this moment in time, and its expression in this ekphrastic passage, precisely because the characters cannot know what repercussions their bellicose actions will have. We know that the outcome is inevitably determined, and hold our breath, waiting to find out which of them will make the fatal flaw, take the decisive step, or become a casualty of the war awaiting them.

Although the readers know what will happen in the end—the Spanish Civil War will break out, thousands of lives will be lost, and Spain will continue to be irremediably polarized for decades to come—the fate of the fictional characters remains a source of narrative tension. With respect to historical fiction in general, Robinson asserts that “although the invented
characters’ lives are generally mapped out within the constraints of familiar, documented events, their particular fates are unknown” (35). *Riña de gatos* is a paradigmatic example of a text in which a historical context is faithfully recreated and in which fictionalized, well-known historical figures make appearances (sometimes cameos, as in the case of Azaña, sometimes in prominent positions, such as José Antonio Primo de Rivera) alongside entirely fictional characters. The product of blending these two planes—the “real” or referential world with the narrative world of the text—produces what Robinson calls “ambiguous referentiality of historical fiction” (29). Anthony appears more “real” for his interactions with historical personages while, at the same time, his imaginary world fictionalizes them.

It is perhaps the very fact that the Civil War in Spain is increasingly viewed through the lens of history rather than memory which has lead to “depolarization” in Civil War literature, a trend in which *Riña de gatos* participates. Novels of this type attempt show both sides of the story rather than overtly sympathizing with one group or another. Gracia observes a change in the tone of many novels written about the Civil War and the Franco period in the twenty-first century.

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161 Referencing the work of Hilary Dannenberg, Robinson asserts that there are two different types of reader responses to the “coexistence of real-world ‘prototypes’ such as Napoleon, and invented characters” (29). The first is a “transworld identification,” or the “recognition that certain characters have real world counterparts. The second is a “transworld differentiation” which asks readers to “appreciate the divergence between the actual historical past, with which they are to some degree familiar, and its fictional rewriting” (30).

162 Though critics like Gracia, Hans L. Hansen, and Robert Spires have all observed this trend in an important selection of novels using different terms (“revisionism,” “multi-perspectivism,” and “depolarization,” respectively), some authors (especially those favoring the Republican side) continue to publish militant texts committed to revealing “what really happened” during the war and what had been so long occluded by the Regime. Dulce Chacón’s *La voz dormida* (2002) and Benjamin Prado’s *Mala gente que camina* (2006) are but two examples of this kind of politically committed novel. On the other hand, Gracia also speaks of what he calls “an outbreak of neo-Francoism” in literature, though rather than a cause for concern, he sees these texts as “part of the price to be paid for the success of the Transition, in terms of history and awareness of the past” (255).
century, noting that “the literary evocation of the past has lost (or at least shed part of) the sectarian and combative spirit it still had in previous years” (248). Mendoza achieves this in various ways, including the displaced temporal focus just described, the creation of a “neutral” foreign protagonist, and the repeated emphasis on art history which (seemingly) shifts the readers’ focus away from the conflict. However, as I will demonstrate, the two plot lines are much more intricately intertwined than they may seem at first glance. Mendoza’s use of an omniscient, third-person narrator is another significant tool in the “depolarizing,” revisionist, or multi-perspectival vision of the period he creates. Returning to a technique he used in La ciudad de los prodigios, the novel departs from the first-person narration which has become standard in much contemporary historical fiction. Speaking specifically of La ciudad, but referencing other texts as well, Navajas declares: “No hay otro narrador tan omnisciente en la ficción contemporánea como el de las novelas reconstructivas de Eduardo Mendoza” (Más allá, 36). In the case of Riña de gatos this omniscience combined with the political and ideological neutrality of the protagonist, allow for a more balanced view of the Spanish conflict in which Anthony suddenly finds himself embroiled.

Though he plans to be in Madrid only a few days to appraise an art collection belonging to an illustrious member of the Spanish aristocracy, the Duke of Igualada, his stay becomes indefinitely prolonged. The same emotional reserve, aloofness, and self-centeredness which brands Anthony as a neutral figure gets him roped into an international fraud scheme which makes him a person of interest, and at times a pawn, to the Spanish police, the members of the British embassy, the Communist party, and the Falange—Bustil and Martín call the art historian “el punto de colisión de todas las fuerzas de la historia de España” (22). The normally cautious

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163 Heller rather broadly asserts: “the omniscient narrator disappears in contemporary historical novels. The stories are frequently told in the first person singular” (92).
Anthony accepts the appraising job, even though he recognizes that there could be illegal dealings afoot, as a way to escape a tortured love affair and to infuse new life into his tired routine. The longer he stays in Madrid, however, the more entangled he becomes with the political figures who represent the different sides of the ideological battle in which the Spaniards are engaged. In these descriptions of the differing points of view expressed by the right and left alike, the reader immediately notes the “depolarizing” balance the novel intends to strike. It becomes impossible to determine who is right, given that each side is so strongly convinced of their own arguments’ validity, and Anthony expresses little desire to sift through those arguments in order to take sides. He is first exposed these conflicting ideas in a bar on one of his first nights in Madrid, where the clientele fight for his attention to “ofrecerle su irrefutable diagnóstico sobre los males de España y su sencilla solución” (54). Anthony discovers that the Falangistas are “pocos, […] jóvenes y por consiguiente, impetuosos e irreflexivos” (55). Another opines that “la raíz del conflicto estaba en la actitud de los catalanes” (56). Yet another observes: “a aquellas alturas ya no quedaban justos ni pecadores. Era fácil acusar a los falangistas de todo lo malo, pero no había que olvidar quién les había abonado el terreno; los atentados, las huelgas y los sabotajes, la quema de iglesias y conventos, las bombas y la dinamita” (55). Anthony leaves the bar just as the men who have been trying to convince him begin to fight among one another, and a catfight like the one to which the title makes references breaks out right in front of him.164

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164 The title Riña de gatos is also surely a reference to the nickname of “gatos” given to madrileños for centuries. In a 2000 article in El País, Ruth Toledano attempted to find the source of this nickname, with little conclusive success. She ends the article inconclusively stating, “En fin, los madrileños son gatos y no saben por qué” (no pag.).
Later, Anthony has the opportunity to learn more about the opposing viewpoints, sometimes from members, sometimes from leaders of those very groups. After meeting José Antonio in the Duke of Igualada’s house, the two men become friends. The leader of the Falange tells Anthony that his group is neither right nor left-wing and that they are simply misunderstood and thus, feared: El gobierno español no escatima esfuerzos para silenciarnos. […] Nos combaten porque nos temen. Y nos temen porque la razón y la Historia están con nosotros” (158-59). On the other hand a fictional communist, Higinio Zamora Zamorano tries to explain to Anthony the plight of the proletariat in Spain and the need for a communist revolution:

Si los proletarios piden algo, si reclaman un derecho o una mejora salarial, se asustan. […] Pero el proletario no sólo quiere dinero. Quiere justicia y respeto. […] O el proletariado se hace con la riqueza y el poder por la fuerza o aquí no hay cambio que valga” (202).

When asked in the interview with Mercurio why he chose to represent these “luchas y conspiraciones de la derecha, Falange, y la izquierda,” Mendoza responds: “El poder me obsesiona. Y en especial la característica fundamental del poder: que no admite ser compartido. […] En las fechas que cubre mi novela, bandos, facciones y subfacciones se disputaban ese poder” (22). However, as those around him vie for this power (and for the Englishman’s sympathy), Anthony continues to maintain his neutrality, the same neutrality which allows him access to these different circles. He responds to both of his impassioned interlocutors by noting

165 The reader does not learn immediately that the person introduced in the text as “[el hombre de unos treinta y pocos años, moreno y bien plantado, de facciones viriles, ojos grandes e inteligentes, frente despejada, cabello negro y el porte distinguido y sencillo de la aristocracia española” is José Antonio (70). Referred to as “el marqués de Estella” only, his family name and political affiliations are not mentioned until several chapters later. By divesting José Antonio of the fiery rhetoric and familial ties to politics, Mendoza allows us to see a more human side of the Falangista.
that his position as a visiting foreigner impedes him from weighing in on matters of international politics. For Anthony, the most important thing is art, which leads him to rather comment coldly: “Que los españoles se las arreglen entre ellos como les plazca o como puedan, aunque se maten los unos a los otros, cuando pase la tormenta, Velázquez seguirá aquí, esperando mi regreso” (83). As tensions mount, however, and even the fate of the Prado is put in question, Anthony is forced to face that his beloved painter may become a casualty of war.

Anthony is an expert in Spanish painting and enjoys his work, but his character is marked, from the very start, by his sense of pride in his own emotional remove, something which he deems necessary for the cold appraisal of art. In the novel’s opening chapter, Anthony describes his own professional activity in detached terms, explaining “Soy especialista en arte y más concretamente en pintura española. No compro ni vendo. Escribo artículos, doy clases y colabo ro con alguna galería” (14). When he is accused later in the text of a passionate response to a question he has been asked about Velázquez by someone who is outside the field, he answers, almost offended: “Mi discurso no tiene nada de apasionado. Soy un estudioso, un universitario, más aplicado al dato escueto que a la apreciación vehemente” (72). Thus, Anthony perfectly lives up to his training. According to Elkins, the “evidence is there, in the field itself: art historians are trained to be dispassionate and to avoid judgments of quality” (Pictures and Tears, 103). Such descriptions initially lead the reader to believe that Anthony is far removed from the political or ideological passions that run so high around him, especially as he begins to fraternize with the likes of José Antonio Primo de Rivera and Zamora Zamorano. In short, we see Anthony as different in many ways from the Spaniards he meets. This difference is described at times as a result of Anthony’s profession, as the above examples demonstrate. At other times, this difference from his Spanish peers is described as a virtue of his nationality. The first
Spaniard whom Anthony encounters while on the train explains to him, clarifying that he does not speak English, “España muy diferente de Inglaterra. Different. España, sol, toros, guitarras, vino. Everibodi olé. Inglaterra, no sol, no toros, no alegría. Everibodi kaput” (9).

While very little about Anthony’s trip to Madrid happens as he expects, the novel’s plot hinges on one event which either promises him the professional opportunity of a lifetime or threatens to jeopardize his career and his life. The same event awakens Anthony’s apparently dormant passions in more ways than one. He quickly learns that he has been tricked into coming to Madrid, not to appraise a collection of landscapes with little market value, as he has initially been led to believe. After establishing his trustworthiness, the Duke’s lovely and impertinent young daughter, Paquita, with whom Anthony quickly becomes infatuated, leads him to the dimly lit basement where she reveals to him a never-before-seen painting of a female nude. The painting is supposedly by Velázquez and not only would be a shocking discovery which could put Anthony on the professional map, but it could also be one important step towards solving one of the greatest Velazquezian puzzles: the identity of the Rokeby Venus. Anthony describes the painting this way:

En el centro, un desnudo femenino, ligeramente ladeado hacia la izquierda. La mano derecha sostiene una tela azul a la altura del regazo. La postura recuerda en algo la Dánea de Tiziano […] La paleta es idéntica a la utilizada para la Venus de Rokeby y sin duda trata de la misma mujer” (267).

It is this event which, for Anthony, promises to transform his life if he can solve the mystery, taking him from being a “humilde y fastidioso profesor” to a world-renowned art historian (74). Heller notes that in the contemporary historical novel, “all the stories or segments of stories are riddles, for we do not know whether the memory of the storyteller is precise, and if he errs,
which we presuppose anyhow, what has been distorted and to what extent?” (93). While the omniscience of Mendoza’s narrator seems to preclude the existence of such riddles, the onus of deciphering a puzzle is shifted to Anthony. We are less concerned with the precision of Anthony’s memory and more with the objectivity of his analysis of the painting, we are forced to question his motivations, especially the way his own personal circumstances impact his “academic” puzzle-solving with respect to the supposed Velázquez.

These personal and professional motivations which move Anthony are many. On the one hand, his infatuation with Paquita and her connection to the painting (he is first shown the canvas while in her company) keep him longing to visit the palace to see both the painting and the girl. On the other, his desire to finally achieve definitive professional success makes him fervently desire to see the Rokeby Venus model in the woman depicted in the painting. The reader learns early on that there is one art historian in particular with whom Anthony competes for field position: an older, respected scholar and his former professor, Edwin Garrigaw. Anthony describes Garrigaw as an expert in Spanish painting like he is, noting “nos hemos peleado en algunas ocasiones, no personalmente, claro; artículos en revistas especializadas y una vez cartas al Times […] Él no me aprecia” (105). Anthony believes that the antipathy between them is rooted in Garigaw’s fear that he will one day usurp his hard-earned position in the field: “[Garrigaw piensa que] me gustaría ocupar su cargo, y no niego que unos años atrás la idea me pasó por la cabeza” (105). Though Anthony and Garrigaw are supposedly working towards a similar goal—better understanding of Spanish Baroque painting—the works they produce, such as the letters and articles Anthony mentions, are representative of Bourdieu’s descriptions of the “field of struggles” which constitute subfields and the field as a whole. As Bourdieu notes, when younger position-holders make their appearance in the field, “they necessarily push back into the
past consecrated producers with whom they are compared” (107). Anthony suspects that Garrigaw sees him encroaching on his position, threatening to relegate him to a past generation of researchers, and for this reason, he interprets all of his former professor’s comments as attacks. They become engaged in a struggle for the right to speak definitively about the mysterious painting, and it comes to mirror the political conflict that unfolds around them.

Thanks to a member of the British Embassy who shares Anthony’s secret, Garrigaw finds out about the painting’s existence and comes to Spain to confront his rival about it. They meet in the Velázquez rooms of the Prado where the strategies to grasp or keep advantageous field position are brought to life in the art historians’ showdown. Garrigaw forces Anthony to confront his emotional and unscholarly biases—which Anthony has thus far denied—but the insecurities of both researchers are revealed as they debate the possible origins and meanings of the painting. Anthony’s blood runs cold when he sees Garrigaw, because he is sure that he has come to Spain to force him to share, or perhaps even to rob him of, a major discovery that he needs for his career: “[Garrigaw ha venido] para llevarse un trozo del pastel, si no el pastel entero” (263). Garrigaw, however, maintains that he has no interest in researching the painting himself and he alleges that he has made the trip to save his former pupil from making a huge mistake that could ruin his career. The painting could be false, it could be of the period, though painted by someone else, but it is in no way a Velázquez, he claims. Garrigaw’s altruism is questionable; he seizes every opportunity to take jabs at Anthony for his stagnant career and remind him of his own consecrated position in the field. When Anthony accuses him of stealing his thunder, Garrigaw retorts haughtily, “Soy conservador de la National Gallery, soy una personalidad, si me permite la modestia, de renombre universal y me falta muy poco para retirarme. ¿Comprometería la reputación de toda una vida por una aventura de incierto resultado?” (262). Yet, though he does
not admit as much to Anthony, he feels a gnawing sense of doubt that one of “los jóvenes [que] creen haber descubierto la luna y lo cuestionan todo” may one day replace him as “[el] amo indiscutible” of the Spanish paintings in the National Gallery (147). Anthony’s desire to improve his field position meets with Garrigaw’s desire to conserve his reveal the “interestedness” that motivates both of their actions. Regardless of his motives, though, Garrigaw does cause Anthony to reflect on the incentives that drive him and their consequences for his scholarship.

Anthony prides himself throughout the novel for the scholarly remove that he considers an inalienable part of his professional identity, but Garrigaw quickly demonstrates that Anthony is less objective than he would like to believe. The old professor knows that Anthony’s “falta de éxito profesional” is at the heart of his desire to identify the woman in the mysterious painting (263). Anthony believes he sees the Rokeby Venus model, Garrigaw observes, because of “un deseo irresistible”—to redeem personal failures, to win Paquita’s love, to discover something his rival never could (265). His once-dispassionate and cerebral approach to art history has given way to a more emotional one that is blinding him to reality. Garrigaw listens patiently as Anthony outlines his theory: the woman who served as the painting’s model, Antonia de la Cerda, the wife of Felipe IV’s privado, Don Gaspar Gómez de Haro, fell in love with Velázquez and he with her. He suggests that Velázquez painted her to keep her memory close, took the painting with him as he escaped to Italy so it would not be discovered, and then guesses that it eventually fell into the hands of a Spanish cardinal. “¿Qué hay de inverosímil en la historia?,” he asks Garrigaw. The old historian replies: “De inverosímil, nada; de real, muy poco. Todo es fruto de su imaginación. Podría haber sucedido esto o algo diametralmente opuesto” (269). He accuses Anthony of being duped by “los engaños de la emoción […] contra los [que los profesionales] hemos de luchar” (265). In a sense, Garrigaw reproaches Anthony for allowing the thrill of
solving a picture puzzle and the hopes of reaping symbolic, economic, and even romantic rewards to impede him from doing his job as a scholar.

Garrigaw describes the possibly deleterious effects of seeing pictures as puzzles which need to be interpreted and deciphered by those trained in reading pictorial codes. As Elkins explains, the tendency to consider paintings riddles to be solved is directly related to the posts available in the field: “If we see pictures as puzzles it is because the illusion affords us a chance to create elaborate interpretations” (16). Those elaborate interpretations, in turn, allow individual art historians to shine, and in the best of cases, to be conferred recognition by others in their field, moving them to position of greater power within it. In the worst of cases, if the interpretation is not accepted by the art historian’s peers, he or she could face anonymity or public derision. Garrigaw acknowledges this as he exclaims: “¡Cuánta atribución precipitada! ¡Cuánta datación errónea! ¡Cuánta interpretación simbólica, cuántas revelaciones ocultas en un detalle del paisaje […] ¡El desmedido afán de descubrir e interpretar lo que, por definición, es misterio y ambigüedad!” (265). He alleges that Anthony is destined for precisely this kind of ridicule if he presents his hypothesis to the scholarly community. He accuses Anthony of seeing things, of cobbling together an interpretation which serves his own personal interests, rather than the interests of scholarship.

Anthony and Garrigaw’s battle for the right to make a definitive pronouncement about the painting comes to mirror, in tone and language, the same kind of political battle brewing in

166 Bourdieu has spoken of these “codes” which structure the “science” of art history, which is “an act of decoding—with the goal of reconstructing the artistic code, understood as a historically constituted system of classification […] which is crystalized in an ensemble of words permitting us to name and perceive differences; that is to say more precisely, the goal of writing these codes, instruments of perception which vary in time and space, notably as a transformation in the material and symbolic instruments of production” (cited in Grenfell and Hardy, 189).
the streets of Madrid. Anthony is exasperated that Garrigaw so quickly dismisses his hypotheses when he has not seen the painting in person, as it is still hidden in the Duke’s basement. Yet, Garrigaw maintains that it is precisely because he has neither seen the painting nor felt the emotion that he can debate with Anthony: “Si lo hubiera visto, quizá habría sido fulminado por el brillo cegador de la falsedad, como usted. Lo más fácil del mundo es ver lo que uno desea ver” (265). Garrigaw thus alleges that Anthony’s desire to finally achieve definitive professional success has blinded him to the reality before him. The highly emotional conditions under which he has seen the painting have impeded the triumph of cold erudition in his assessment, while the poor lighting and the brief time he had to evaluate it make issuing any definitive statement dangerous. Anthony sees in the painting what he needs to see: a professional opportunity and the prospect of a new romance if he can prove the model’s identity and conclusively cite reasons for the painting’s origins. In this way, an explicit parallel is drawn between the apparently distinct realms of art and politics; though Anthony is repeatedly frustrated by the attitudes of the different players in the political conflict who see the crisis in their country in the way that is most convenient for their own belief system, he unwittingly finds himself in the same position with respect to his own power struggle, one he ultimately ends up losing.

The novel ends with Anthony’s discovery that there has been a fire in the basement of the Duke’s palace and that everything in it—including the painting—has been turned to ash. The employees of the British Embassy relay the news to him as Anthony struggles to keep his composure, and he notices the “sonrisa burlona en [los] labios [de Edwin Garrigaw] retocados de suave carmín” (417). Garrigaw then tells him the “good” news: the painting was not, in fact, a
Velázquez, but rather, it was painted by his apprentice (once his slave) Juan de Pareja. However, the omniscient narrator never corroborates Garrigaw’s story, nor does Anthony visit the burned basement. The embassy’s rush to remove him from Spain as quickly as possible to protect him becomes a convenient excuse for the narrator to leave the reader wondering. As the story ends abruptly here—the war is about to break out at any moment—we never find out what Garrigaw does (if anything) with the “discovery.” However, it remains an important ambiguity; was Garrigaw telling the truth or simply creating more “weapons in the struggle” meant to distract Anthony from his pursuit of the painting? The disappearance of a painting which once was intended to be sold in exchange for real weapons for the Falange becomes a symbolic weapon in the struggle between the two art historians.

It is, perhaps, Paquita who is in the most “innocent” position to comment on Anthony’s motivations. While she cannot refute or sanction his assessment of the portrait, she forces Anthony to more openly recognize his own position in the field. Siting in a café with the young woman, Anthony painstakingly lays out all the details of his theory as to the origins of the painting housed in her basement and explaining its supreme importance for Velázquez studies. At the end of his long hypothesis, he sighs, “Andando el tiempo, alguien se hizo con [el cuadro], lo trajo a España, y ahora está ahí, a pocos metros de esta cafetería, esperando…” (192). Paquita interrupts him with a pointed observation: “A que Anthony Whitelands lo dé a conocer al mundo entero” (192). Paquita’s comment forces Anthony to recognize the real reasons for his motivations and she makes him confront his own position in the field. In effect, Paquita causes Anthony to objectify himself as the subject of objectification, to borrow from Bourdieu’s

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167 Anthony seems to come to terms with the loss of the painting in the final pages, in fact seeing it as a blessing: “Si verdaderamente el cuadro lo pintó un moro, habría hecho el ridículo más espantoso” (424). At the same time, such a comment reveals the bias of his era, as today the paintings of Juan de Pareja are considered quite valuable, historically and economically.
lexicon. Bourdieu explains this position in *The Rules of Art*: “To adopt the viewpoint of reflexivity is not to renounce objectivity, but to question the privilege of the knowing subject, which the antigenetic vision arbitrarily frees, as purely noetic, from the labor of objectification” (207). This is achieved primarily by “situating [the scientific subject] in a determined place in social space-time,” in order to increase the awareness of one’s “interests, motives, assumptions, beliefs” (207). Anthony is honest, both with himself and with Paquita—a person who is not his professional competitor—and he admits:

Estoy estancado, en lo profesional y en lo personal, y la situación no lleva trazas de variar. [...] Y de repente, el modo más inesperado, se me presenta una oportunidad única, en mi vida y en el mundo del arte en general. [...] Si a pesar de todo me saliera bien, si por una maldita vez este asunto saliera bien, yo conseguiría algo más que saciar mi ridícula vanidad académica. Obtendría prestigio. Y dinero, sí, dinero para comprar mi independencia y mi dignidad. Por fin podría dejar de mendigar…” (194).

Though he does not make the connection Garrigaw later does—namely that this overwhelming desire is enough to make him see things which are not there—Anthony comes to terms with his own position in the field, openly admitting to Paquita that he is not a disinterested researcher.

It is evident that Mendoza uses the conflict generated in Anthony and Garrigaw’s profession to mirror the political battles brewing in 1936. However, like Ortiz, Mendoza also uses ekphrastic passages strategically placed throughout the novel to link the Golden Age to the happenings of the Republic’s last days, as well as to historicize Velázquez. Whereas in *Las manos de Velázquez* the ekphrastic descriptions of paintings are worked into the text in nearly every chapter, practically becoming the objective correlative of Teodoro’s neurosis, the
ekphrastic passages in Mendoza’s text are rooted in more concrete circumstances. Anthony makes various trips to the Museo del Prado while he is in Madrid, always heading straight for the Velázquez rooms, and these visits always include at least one detailed ekphrastic description of a famous painting that becomes an affective link between two eras. As Elkins notes, historians studying art of the past “tend to expect fairly stable starting meanings” in the paintings they study, “even as they relish the branching ambiguities that may come afterward” (Why Are Our Pictures Puzzles?, 94). This is true of the paintings Anthony, and Garrigaw on one occasion, observe and describe ekphrastically; all of the ekphrastic descriptions refer to portraits by Velázquez, whose historical subjects are known, even if little about them is. If the paintings were to be reproduced in the text (or even if the reader looks at a reproduction of the painting while reading), the range of meanings able to be derived from the image is reduced. Through ekphrastic, and thus, mental recreation of the image in the mind of the reader, the images are freed from a seemingly stable and determined meaning. As descriptions always imply interpretations, the authors can choose the parts of the painting to describe that are most relevant for their purposes in the ekphrastic passage. As in Las manos de Velázquez, the ekphrases in Riña de gatos usually start out mimicking art historical discourse, but almost always tie the historical circumstances into the narrative present through the literary transformation of the picture. According to Lund, the transformation of pictures can have many functions, least among them being the “aim to interpret pictorial art” (40). In the case of Mendoza’s novel, two characteristics from Lund’s list of functions are particularly relevant. First, the ekphrases are

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168 Lund uses the term “literary transformation of pictures” to describe texts which combine ekphrasis and “iconic projection.” He defines ekphrasis as a “text describing and interpreting real or fictitious pictures,” while “iconic projection” is defined as a text “describing and / or interpreting the outer reality qua picture” (16).
used to “link figures, events, and ideas in the text to social conditions and to historical bases and parallel phenomena” (40). They are also utilized to “signal future events in the epic process or tie bits of text together,” as a brief look at several of these specific ekphrases will reveal (40).169

As we have seen, the novel’s title—_Riña de gatos_—points to a brutal and futile fight, one which the author (and the readers) knows will end in many lives lost and decades of suffering and animosity. Though the characters cannot possibly know this information, the ekphrastic descriptions help to underscore the disillusionment that is to come. As Anthony stops to ponder Velázquez’s _Menipo_—a painting upon which Tedoro also reflects in _Las manos de Velázquez_—on his first visit to the Prado, the narrator first provides a textbook definition of this “portrait.” But, when he explains the legend associated with Menipo, he notes that the philosopher “ascendió al Olimpo y descendió al Hades y en los dos lugares encontró lo mismo: corrupción, engaño y vileza” (61). In this passage, the implication seems to be that the paragon of goodness, when examined closely, is just as corrupt, just as problematic, as the paragon of evil. While the Falangistas point their fingers at the communists and anarchists, who in turn point their fingers at the Falange, they refuse to reflect on their own actions. In the spirit of “depolarization” of the Civil War, this reference to an equality of corruption is illuminating. Anthony surmises that Velázquez painted this figure because of what he could teach him about his own life and career: “Tal vez pintó a Menipo como advertencia, para recordarse a sí mismo que al final del camino hacia la cumbre no nos espera la gloria, sino el desencanto” (61). This reference could just as

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169 According to Lund, transformed pictures can also be used to concretize abstractions or descriptions of optical situations, to direct the reader to visualize something, to make “the inner landscape” of the speaker visible to the reader, as a structuring element in organizing the text, as a leitmotif, or as “retarding factor in the narrative flow” (40).
well apply, indeed, to the battling political factions in the streets of Madrid as it does to Anthony’s own struggle to succeed professionally.

Garrigaw stands as the perfect example of the disillusionment that can come at the end of a long, successful career, and the narrator uses another ekphrastic passage to delve into this theme. In a scene set in the National Gallery in London, Garrigaw stops to contemplate one of his favorite paintings, the so-called Silver Phillip. This portrait of Felipe IV, painted by Velázquez when the king was still quite young, causes Garrigaw to reflect on his own mortality and his career: “Silver Philip es hoy tan joven como la primera vez que lo vio, y lo seguirá siendo cuando él ya no esté” (150). Garrigaw imagines Velázquez as a man who reached the end of his long career, having achieved the social ascendency he so desired, and yet was unsatisfied: “su imagen [en Las Meninas] es también la del hombre cansado que ha visto realizado su sueño tras una vida de afanes y renuncias y se pregunta si valió la pena. Hoy Edwin Garrigaw se hace las misma pregunta” (149). Just as Ortiz used Teodoro’s inner battles to give life to the painted scenes her narrator describes ekphrastically, here Mendoza utilizes Garrigaw’s projection of his own personal reflections on life and career as a way to present a more humanized Velázquez to his readers. The aging art historian becomes what Elkins calls “a co-creator or coconspirator in the story,” someone who brings “the narrative about, even fixing it, by linking its shapeless clues to our own aimless thoughts. And this leads away from art history, away from painting, and towards private reverie” (Why Are Our Pictures Puzzles? 94). Although Garrigaw is quick to caution Anthony against too much subjective interpretation in his scholarship, this passage helps us see that even Garrigaw is not immune to such elucidations, even if he does not put them down in writing.
While these descriptions allow for an explication or concretization of the characters’ mental processes or function as foreshadowing of events to come, they, along with Anthony’s conversations about painting with others, serve to place Velázquez in his historical context. Given that the *nueva histórica culturalistas* often attempts to portray great cultural figures in their most human element, the narrators or characters often attempt to divest those figures of the myths which would obscure their personalities. At the same time, as they attempt to find out more about Velázquez the man, personal, human parallels can be drawn, not only between the reader and the subject, but also between the art historian and the subject he or she studies. Early in his visit to Madrid, he describes Velázquez as a man just as aloof and dispassionate as he is:

> Velázquez no tiene nada de dramático. […] Es distante, tranquilo, pinta como a desgana, deja los cuadros a medio hacer, rara vez elige el tema. […] Su vida personal carece de relieve, la política no le interesó nunca. Prefería ser un funcionario a ser un artista, y cuando finalmente obtuvo un alto cargo burocrático, dejó de pintar o poco menos. (72-73)\(^{170}\)

The more enthusiastic and passionate Anthony becomes, the more interested he is in more dramatic moments of Velázquez’s life. Though he asserts early on that “Velázquez no tiene nada de dramático,” he finds himself absorbed by the painter’s possible love affairs and marital infidelities which could help to corroborate his theory. In his interview with *Mercurio*, Mendoza admits that he is no expert on Velázquez. Yet, he is fascinated by the fact that reality of his Velázquez’s desires do not match up to the charismatic myth of the artist, that legacy of the

\(^{170}\) Garrigaw’s reflections on Velázquez are similar. He describes painting for Velázquez as a beautiful curse, as a gift he would have preferred never to have received as long as he could have a greater social status instead. Comparing the painter to his frequent subject, Felipe IV, he declares: “Los dioses habían concedido a Felipe IV todo el poder imaginable pero a él sólo le interesaba el arte. Velázquez había recibido el don de ser uno de los más grandes pintores de todos los tiempos, pero él sólo anhelaba un poco de poder” (148).
nineteenth century: “Hoy nos sorprende que un artista tan importante anduviera mendigando prebendas de unos cortesanos que no le llegaba a la suela del zapato. Pero no sé si ésa no es la historia de todos nosotros” (23). The story of Velázquez’s quest for power and fame, then, becomes an affective link between the painter and Anthony, between the painter and those who strive for political control, and even between the painter and the reader. In his quest for power and recognition, and even in his desire for love—a theme in many recent novels about Velázquez—the painter’s world is brought a little closer to ours.

Anthony’s political neutrality and his supposed erudite equilibrium make him the ideal character to appraise with cold reserve the drama unfolding in the streets of Madrid. He is the character who can see both the reason and the faults in the arguments of the communists and the falangistas, and who can always take refuge from the fray in the Museo del Prado or in his own intellectual divagations on Velázquez’s life. However, Mendoza cleverly demonstrates the way that Anthony’s emotional appraisal of the Velázquez painting disrupts his balanced approach, perhaps even causing Anthony to see things that are not there, all in the hope of gaining the upper hand in a power struggle. In this way, Mendoza is able to focus on the escalating conflict that he considers the most interesting part of the Civil War years, specifically the unwillingness of any faction to share a modicum of power and authority with one another, or even to see things from another perspective. The result is a historical civil war novel which leaves us with no clear winners or losers and no one side which can claim the moral higher ground. The echoing of these themes on multiple narrative levels leaves the reader with depolarized view of the war. However, at the same time, it is a vision wistful over the recognition that the inability to reconcile differing points of view will end not in a loss of prestige, but in the loss of half a million lives and decades of bitterness and recrimination. Furthermore, as a novela histórica culturalista, Riña de gatos
also provides us with a more multi-faceted vision of Velázquez. As in Las manos de Velázquez, that personal, emotional, or subjective interpretation makes for bad academic scholarship and jeopardizes a historian’s career, but provides fertile ground for novelistic invention and ekphrastic elaboration.

The interest in the art historian protagonist appears to be a dual product of the literary curiosity about artists and of what Everly calls the twenty-first century “preoccupation with historical methodologies” (25). Though the art historians are not held to the same standards of “disinterestedness” as the artist characters analyzed in the previous chapters, they struggle to strike a balance between academic objectivity, emotional response, and writing motivated by personal gain. As Teodoro sarcastically snickers, the public perception of the art historian is of a person “siempre ajeno al trajinar del mundo y de sus pompas, interesado en la verdad del Arte. Ja, ja, ja,” an image the novel takes great pains to problematize (17). At the same time, these two novels reveal an acute impossibility to reach a definitive truth, in the realms of both art and history. Garrigaw tells Anthony that the task of the art historian is to “fijar la realidad y evitar el caos,” but the chaotic nature of both texts show us the unfeasibility of such a goal (266). In both cases, the plurality that historical writing dissuades enriches the novels we read. Through the multitude of contradictory voices that speak in Riña de gatos and the narrator’s refusal to take sides, and through the blend of discursive registers in Las manos de Velázquez, we see a subjective, humanized depiction of researcher and researched that performs a demystifying task similar to those seen in the previous chapters. By turning from the artist to the art historian as

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171 Everly refers in her book to this concern for the way history is written in four novels about the Spanish Civil War and memoria histórica: Carme Riera’s Dins el darer blau and La meitat de l’ànima, Dulce Chacón’s La voz dormida, and Javier Cercas’ Soldados de Salamina and La velocidad de la luz.
character, these authors also display a preoccupation with a network of cultural producers that, by its very existence, demythifies the cultural producers who occupy positions within it.
Conclusion

All of the novels addressed in the preceding chapters show us that the charismatic myth of the artist may be untenable in modern Spanish society, at least as the contemporary authors imagine it, but remains as a palimpsest in these pages. The myth is still the mark against which each of the artist characters in this intriguing selection of contemporary novels measures their success or failure. Yet, perhaps with the exception of Grandes and Herrero, all of the authors whose fiction is examined in these pages question and problematize this vision of the artistic personality and of art production that has permeated fiction about art for centuries. The ways they present their artist characters reveal that extreme disinterestedness, a romantic belief in the purity of art, and notions of the artist’s exceptionality no longer have a comfortable place in the contemporary Spanish imaginary or in the global cultural industry, where Spain’s presence has become more and more pronounced since the late 1970s. By and large, these texts upset the cliché image of the artist they inherited from the Romantics, and the same works fail to assert in its place a unified picture of a contemporary artistic identity. The artists’ voices are more individualized and less archetypal. The authors generally allow their characters to speak for themselves rather than speak for Art, which creates a polyphonic chorus of opinions on what it means to be an artist.

The result of allowing individual artist characters to speak in this way is a spectrum of responses to producing art and defining creative identity in the modern world. Studying this gamut of representations in different types of novels, as I have in this project, leads to three principal conclusions we can make about the artistic personality in the contemporary Spanish novel. The first of these is that authors utilize the image of the artist for literary and social ends in a variety of texts, not just in *Künstlerromane*. In the examples of the post-Civil War novel by
Laforet and Martín Gaite discussed in Chapter One, the bohemian’s depiction as a poser and a fraud can be interpreted as a way to emphasize the inability for young *chicas raras* to find fulfillment in a society hampered by gendered limitations. In the *novela histórica culturalista* studied in Chapter Four, the art historian protagonists’ personal frustrations, conjectures, and projections of self onto their subject of study—Velázquez, in both cases—is used to reveal to the reader the constructed nature of the “great” artistic personality. In the case of the contemporary artist novels explored in Chapters Two and Three, the demythification leads to the creation of a new paradigm for late twentieth and early twenty-first century *Künstlerroman*. The artist hero Beebe described, who was “capable of abstracting himself from the world around him” to the point where he appeared “possessed,” is no longer to be found; the artist characters in these texts are all too aware of their surroundings (5). While it remains relevant to say that these novels can often be described as a “quest for self,” that quest rarely produces the sensation that “he is different from other men,” but “very much like other artists” or even that he “embodies the archetype of the artist” (Beebe 6). Instead, as in the case of Carlos in Llamazares’ *El cielo de Madrid* or Marta in Usón’s *Corazón de napalm*, characters realize that they are very much like “other men” and that there is no longer an artist archetype in which to see their own identities reflected. The contemporary artist novels present artists plagued by doubt—not just in their own abilities, but in the effectiveness and value of art as a method of expression. For this reason, the artist who sacrifices himself or herself for art is no longer heroic. As Calvo Serraller observes, doubt has always characterized modern artists: “Frenhofer duda, Picasso duda, Rabo Karabekian duda […] La duda parece, por consiguiente, un componente esencial en al artista moderno” (61).172 However, the kind of doubt they experience has changed in the contemporary period. In

172 With Frenhofer and Rabo Karabekian, Calvo Serraller refers to Balzac’s “Le Chef-d’oeuvre
the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, their uncertainty springs from “una verdadera crisis de identidad, a un no saber qué se debe hacer o quién se debe ser para llegar a tiempo, para estar de moda” (Calvo Serraller 61). It is precisely these struggles to define artistic identity that trigger the doubt plaguing Marta, Carlos, and Julio in Corazón de napalm, El cielo de Madrid, and El mundo visto desde el cielo.

The second principal conclusion we can draw from the study of the novels about artists is that there appears to be a marked division in the depiction of the artist and his or her relationship to the charismatic myth along gender lines. The novels by women and about women artists appear much more likely strike brutally cynical or overly reverent tones, whereas the novels about male members of the cultural field—whether by men or women—are typically prone to a bitter nostalgia. 173 In the novels from the post-Civil-War period, none of the female protagonists, with the exception of Elvira of Entre visillos, are visual artists themselves, but their relationship with the male artists seems initially to promise them the kind of meaningful personal connections denied them in the other, more “respectable” social circles they frequent. Their hopefulness quickly turns to disenchantment, however, when they realize they are subject to the same gender inconnu” (1831) and Kurt Vonnegut’s Bluebeard (1987), both of which are about fictional artists. In Balzac’s short story, the painter protagonist, Frenhofer, embodies the charismatic artistic identity, and actually dies as a result of his sacred space of creation being invaded by those who do not know how to respect it. In fact, as Bätschmann explains it, Frenhofer dies because he and his work “are ruthlessly demystified with the public, represented by two fellow artists, gain access to the place of creation” (93). In the contemporary novels examined here, the demystification of artistic activity has less drastic consequences.

173 It is crucial to highlight this difference, as Caso’s El mundo visto desde el cielo and Ortiz’s Las manos de Velázquez are both penned by women, but are largely focused on a male artist and art historian, respectively. Caso’s protagonist, Julio, is one of the characters who most reluctantly admits that the age of the charismatic myth has passed, and Ortiz’s main character, Teodoro, also pines for the time when he could have written about Velázquez in a more romanticized way. However, these two texts also feature some strong female characters, both art historians—Áurea in El mundo and Mónica in Las manos—who are depicted as “interested” in every sense of the word and whose outlook clashes with the nostalgic viewpoints of their male lovers.
biases they find elsewhere. The rather irreverent and ironic way Andrea, Marta Camino, and Elvira expose the male artists around them as frauds contrasts sharply with the blind reverence with which Carmen of Herrero’s *Todo fue nada* and, to a lesser extent, Jose of Grandes’ *Castillos de cartón* see the male artists with whom they fall in love. Marks of postfeminism are evident in these texts, as the romance plot so strongly eschewed by the postwar women writers returns to the fore and a love story comes to overshadow making art in the text and in the women’s lives.

Marta of *Corazón de napalm* also demonstrates her links to postfeminism in her willingness to abandon art to get married, but, at the same time, her novel is the one which tears down the charismatic myth of the artist with the least compunction. Marta wants to make art for money and fame, and she is not afraid to admit it or to do whatever she must to make it happen—even break the cardinal rule of disinterested artistic creation and “sell out.” As we have seen, women have never treasured the tenets of the myth as a models for life and work. Julio of *El mundo visto desde el cielo* and Carlos of *El cielo de Madrid* admit that they once tailored their professional and personal identities around elements of the myth they once perceived as natural or divinely inspired. In traditional artist novels, Beebe notes, the “story concludes with the hero not yet an accomplished artist” (5). This is often because the plot has revolved around him “slough[ing] off domestic, social, and religious demands imposed on him by his environment” (6). While Julio and Carlos attempt to resist those same social demands, they too retain their belief in the myth. However, unlike their many of their predecessors, they are successful artists and are depicted as such in the text. Their economic and symbolic success makes it difficult for them to sustain the persona of an artist against the world. For Marta, on the other hand, that success remains elusive, but she courts it with the abandon of one for whom the charismatic vision artistic activity has never appeared a viable option.
The final conclusion we can draw about all of the novels studied here is that the demythification of the artist, carried out in different ways in each text, leads to more complete depictions of a network of cultural producers. Rather than artists who are only content in isolation, we see authors present more active and fruitful collaboration between position-holders in the cultural field. While certain traditional animosities between different members of the field linger—the antagonism between Julio and his dealer Jean-Luc in *El mundo visto desde el cielo* typifies this acrimony—in general, these novels represent a moderated stance in comparison to those of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, in *Corazón de napalm*, Marta’s friendly relationship with Turpin, her art dealer, and the fact that she actively pursues him in hopes he will represent her are indicative of her acceptance of their respective roles within the field. Carlos’s tempered position with respect to the field of restricted production in *El cielo de Madrid* is perhaps more tenuous and more painful than Marta’s, but it also signals a progressive and contemporary acceptance of the changed role of the artist in society. In Carlos’s case, this acceptance is epitomized by his final embrace of the typically bourgeois lifestyle, which in novels of the past would have been considered a punishment or a failure. Finally, the very detailed exploration of Teodoro’s profession as art historian which Ortiz describes in *Las manos de Velázquez* (and to a lesser extent, which Mendoza explores through Anthony in *Riña de gatos*)—the pressures to publish, the necessary tone the academic must strike in those publications, the tensions of institutional politics—are a unique window onto another aspect of the cultural field that demonstrates one facet of how the image of the artist is constructed and perpetuated. That the authors largely refuse to euphemize the mutual dependency of these relationships indicates a new mode of representing the artist in twentieth and twenty-first century Spain that turns the charismatic myth on its head.
The depiction of the artists’ participation in the network of cultural producers cannot help but remind us that the authors are, with the novels we read, vying to secure or gain their own positions in the cultural field. None of the authors in question here fit the mold of the “pure” author who writes exclusively for the field of restricted production. As Bourdieu has noted, compared to poetry and theater, the novel “is the most dispersed genre in terms of its forms of consecration” (51). This makes it more difficult for novelists to limit themselves to the field of restricted production that has been the domain of the charismatic artist for centuries. Just like the artists they depict in their texts, the authors are position-takers in the cultural field, and, like their characters, their position-taking are subject to a “double interpretation,” to use Bourdieu’s terms (137). Bourdieu explains that every cultural position-taking— the authors’ choice of genre, market, and subject matter—“can be related […] to the universe of cultural position-takings constituent of the specifically cultural field” (137). However, it can also be seen as a “consciously or unconsciously oriented strategy elaborated in relation to the field of allied or hostile positions” (137). With perhaps the exception of Laforet and Martín Gaite, the authors I have studied here are part of that generation of authors Henseler describes as “moving from ‘cultured’ to ‘contaminated’”(10). Given that this generation of authors has faced accusations of selling out or pandering to the market, it comes as no surprise that they would depict artists’ relationship to the market and to commercial success with less reproach than their

174 The ambiguity in terms of the novel’s positioning in the cultural field has become even more ambiguous in Spain in recent decades with the rise the kind of text Henseler calls the “best-seller culto” (9).

175 For more on the opposition between best-sellers—“here today, gone tomorrow”— and classics—“best-sellers over the long run”—as well as the difference between “old” cultural products and “classic” ones, see Bourdieu 100-105.
predecessors. Some of them have addressed this topic, “the mass media and promotional demands of the industry” through author protagonists, such as Luisa Castro with her 2001 novel, *El secreto de la lejía* or Lucia Etexebarria in *De todo lo visible e invisible* (Henseler 10).

However, as Franssen and Hoenselaars note, “painters, sculptors, and composers […] provide a useful foil to the author as character” because, through such characters, authors can address indirectly their own concerns about “mechanism of appropriation, self-projection, and anxiety of influence” (26). While it would be naïve to see the novels as a faithful mirror of authors’ situation, we can, as Everly has noted, “come to understand the constructed nature of the cultural and by extension of the novel” and from there, “begin to see with a critical eye the ways in which literature and art convey certain representations of the world in which we live” (188).

The artist figures in these texts are sometimes frauds, sometimes opportunists, and sometimes they even verge on bourgeois, but one thing remains clear about their representation in all ten novels studied here: the charismatic myth that pits the artist against the world may be untenable, unrealistic, and even undesirable, but there remains a life-versus-art conflict of sorts in which the artist still engages. Carlos of *El cielo de Madrid* may accept his role as family man and as someone who profits economically from painting, but the novel’s plot is based largely around his coming to terms with this identity that radically differentiates him from the “artist hero” of a past generation. Marta embraces her “interestedness,” but at times she has to reconcile it with her “infulas de bohemia” (312). As Calvo Serraller astutely observes, the artist’s social role has passed through a variety of phases, but in all of them, he or she was subject to social prejudices, “por ser bohemia, […] por dejar de serlo y convertirse en algo parecido a un

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176 Henseler refers specifically to authors born in the 1960s and 1970s who began publishing in during the Transition and Post-Transition years. They live in an art world in which, as Alloway notes, “the market or exchange value of art [is] discussed […] not as a source of prestige but as the taint of corruption” (29).
The shifting position of the artist and the sustained social backlash lead Calvo Serraller to assert that making art “[es] una actividad nunca por completo homologable, ni cuando los artistas estaban totalmente desplazados y eran unos parias, ni cuando constituyen héroes míticos, capaces de poseer y generar cuantiosas fortunas” (59). As we consider this situation through the lens of Bourdieu’s theories, we are able to see that it is the ingrained logic of the field as an “economic world reversed” and its dependence on an “interest in disinterestedness” that continues to prevent artists’ full-scale assimilation and to perpetuate charismatic notions of artistic activity among artists, academics, and the public at large. In some contemporary texts, especially those about historical artists, the myth still holds sway, but the authors of the novels addressed here have created a competing mode of artist character. This contemporary character no longer cries out, as Pardo Bazán’s wretched artist, Silvio Lago, does in *La Quimera* (1905), “Soy malo. […] ¡Sólo tengo entrañas para mi loco deseo de pintar como los semidioses!” (240). They cannot see themselves as diabolical or superior beings communicating an authentic reality inaccessible to the masses. Rather, they are woefully profane, and as Julio—the artist for whom the realization is most painful—exclaims, they have become: “una panda de ateos sacralizando lo humano porque añoramos irremediablemente a lo divino” (Caso 216-17). Although the attitudes of individual artist characters differ in the degree to which they reject the charismatic myth, the novels I have examined here by Laforet, Martín Gaite, Llamazares, Caso, Usón, Grandes, Herrero, Ortiz, and Mendoza demonstrate that once the cultural field has been exposed, the myth and reality can no longer coexist harmoniously. The discord they produce leads, not only to a contemporary artist character that reflects twenty-first century concerns related to money and aesthetics, but to a innovative kind of artist novel from which it seems impossible to go back.
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TEACHING


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