

*Transitioning Through Desire: Ana María Moix's Lesbian Textualit**Elizabeth Gunn**Morgan State University*

"It may be that if a lesbian opposes heterosexuality absolutely, she may find herself in its power than a straight or bisexual woman who knows or lives its constant instability"

- Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*

Ana María Moix is traditionally associated with the generation of vanguardism emerging in the 1970s around the time of Franco's death. During this time, Spain was wrestling between two pulls: heightened regime ideology in the form of "antic university curriculum" on the one hand, and on the other official backing of increasing "consumerist fun" (Labayni 298). The social and political incongruities at work at this time produce a generation of authors who served as "cultural mediators...putting Spain in touch with that part of the world culture, past and present, that had been deemed taboo or sanitized, whether by the regime or by an opposition ruled by duty rather than pleasure" (298). José María Castellet published the well-known *Nueve novísimos poetas españoles* (*Nine Novísimos Spanish Poets*) in 1970, marking off a generation of poets born during and after the Civil War. Though Moix was included for her poetry, she became equally renowned for her narrative writing. As a part of this generation, Moix brought the taboo topic of lesbianism onto the table in *Julia*, albeit enshrouded in what is roughly interpreted as silence. In his anthology, Castellet describes this generation as working purposefully with disruptive and deliberate breaks from the previous literary tradition of neo-realism and overt social critique (Jones 138). According to Jones, what distinguishes Moix from the other members of the anthology and of her generation is that "her work captures an atmosphere of disillusionment and anxiety, a fundamental lack of integrity with the world and with one's own self image" (140).¹

Moix's work is wrought with an awareness of a fundamental lack, a post-structuralist, postmodern critique of modernism's faith in originality and wholeness. This awareness and critique is central in *Julia* and *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* The two works consciously work in tandem to express themselves and to define lesbian desire: in both novels, lesbian desire controls the narrative thread. Yet, in accordance with the generation and coupled with a post-structuralist, postmodern critique of ideology, lesbianism is not found in any one place in either text. As the novels weave together, they reveal a process of signification, the very process by which incomplete subjectivity reveals itself as such. Moix's novels reflect the limits of non-normative desire in the midst of the monolith that presents itself as normative through rigid sexual and gender standards. Lesbianism as expressed intertextually and metatextually in two works speaks to the shift between the Francoist modern subject and the postmodern subject in 1960s and 1970s Spain.

The action in these novels occurs in the years just before the Transition² in Spain. Francoism promotes contradictory ideologies and practices:

Francoist authoritarianism had imposed itself even on its opposer normalizing sexual puritanism: in early 1970s Spain, pop – and advertising – offered a vision of sexual gratification that could be read as a sign both of late capitalist manipulation of consumer demand and of a denied individual self-expression. This duality is expressed in the writing by the mixture of deconstructive ironic posturing and increased open celebration of sexuality plurality...[including] Ana María Barrio (Spanish 297-8)

Similarly, *Julia*'s protagonist, Julia, is a young woman who remembers her life one night as she recuperates in a hospital after a suicide attempt. Her memory uncovers what become important details in her effort to understand her self-alienation. Several significant moments surface: her tenuous relationship with her mother; her isolation at school; her confused summers at the beach with her family; her cousin Ismael at the age of six; and her close bonds with several people including her paternal grandfather, a female schoolmate, and her female university professor.

¿Walter, por qué te fuiste? continues where *Julia* leaves off. Walter is revealed to be one of Julia's cousins. Also, many of the same family members and other characters reappear in the latter novel. As Jones notes of *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* the novels share many of the same themes as well: "the class system with its hypocritical, normative values, the resultant alienation and maladjustment, a sense of disillusionment and the emphasis on the past and on memory" ("Afterward" 141). The narrative structure is experimental in that the protagonist, Ismael, Julia's cousin, supposedly maintains an authoritative voice in the plot; however, Julia's, as well as several voices of other cousins, continually interject. It is not always clear who is speaking, from whose perspective the story is narrated, nor with what objective. The plot begins with Julia's death in a sanatorium, though this information is only revealed at the novel's conclusion. Upon her death, Julia has left a bundle of letters for Ismael to deliver to their older cousin. Ismael searches for Lea for seven years. This basic framework holds together the intertwining voices of several cousins as they interrupt Ismael. They recall their memories of the same youth Julia remembered throughout *Julia*, though from different perspectives. Jones summarizes: "cinema and popular music obsess the children, who see them as the forms of rebellion and escape. Increasingly complex stylistic devices enrich the multiple narrative strands, intertextuality, metafiction, and some unusual surrealist touches (a character who is half woman and half horse) ("Afterward" 141).

The combination of Julia's supposedly silenced lesbianism and Ismael's labored effort to control Julia's speaking root the relationship between these two novels. They work together intertextually in a self-conscious fashion with two crucial results. First, within the text Ismael fails to control Julia, and by relation, her lesbianism and her death. Second, the texts work together to reflect the way that lesbian subjectivity understands itself and its desire as processes of constant deferral. These processes, while they are

a lack of complete sexual subjectivity, position themselves self-knowingly as Moix's novels work intertextually to show that language is a process of deferral; lesbian subjectivity is the site on which this process is played out.

In *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?*, the thirty year old narrator, Ismael, undertakes a search for Lea. This search is for Julia's letters, and it serves as a parallel for both his and Julia's life long desire for Lea. The fluidity of the text's voices evidences his inability to separate his identity and desires from those of his other cousins, including that of his youngest cousin, Julia. Again, in *Julia*, Julia recalls her asphyxiating childhood through the voice of her younger self, Julita. Julita is overcome by desire for her mother, her cousin, and certain teachers as she endures a sexual assault by an older male cousin. Julia's university-age older self, struggles with Julita's memories. While some of these memories are fond ones of several years spent with her paternal grandfather, she eventually attempts suicide at that novel's conclusion. If silences, stops, and gaps characterize Julia's experience in *Julia*, the latter novel is an effort to create a space for a lesbian-identified voice.

Just as so many factors impede Julia's communication in the earlier work, *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?*, Ismael seems to at first serve as yet another obstacle to Julia's posthumous attempt to assert herself. That is, Ismael initially seems to serve as a barrier between Julia and Lea, and by parallel Julia's desire for Lea. Ismael wanders for a long time without locating Lea, all the while seeming to control Julia's voice and her desire for Lea, and for her desire to speak. The novel will end on an anti-cathartic note as Ismael has gained for himself some sort of voice while Julia's seems to indefinitely linger on the center of each work: though Ismael controls the letters thereby controlling Julia's language and desire, he does not have full possession because Julia's voice comes through in this latter novel time and time again. Additionally, it is Julia's desire for Lea to give the letters to Lea that actually propels the action.

Framing lesbian desire as that which best narrates an understanding of incomplete sexual subjectivity may be restricting at times (Julia after all does commit suicide), however, it is precisely because lesbian subjectivity knows about its polyvocality and functioning in a time of asphyxiating oppression that it proves subversive. Lutz Bergmann and Paul Julian Smith, in their edited volume *¿Entiendes? Queer Reading Hispanic Writings*, write of the Ley de vagos [Law of Idlers] (1953) that it "renowned gay men and lesbian subjects to 'security measures'" (10). And in 1970, the Ley de peligrosidad social [Law of Social Danger] "raised penalties to a maximum of five years for a single offense" (10). That Julia is overwhelmed by silence and is characterized by a lack of overt sexuality is not surprising.

Julia's silence seems to be the novel's driving theme. Indeed, her silence characterizes the incomplete sexual subjectivity of the final years of the Franco regime because in a way, she is overwhelmingly conscious of it. Furthermore, Moix frames the text in such a way as to present sites of lesbian narratives as self-reflexive. If Julia literally speaks about her lesbianism or lesbian desire, the texts ensure that those topics are all that is spoken. Indeed, as Margaret E.W. Jones suggests in "Ana María L

Literary Structures and The Enigmatic Nature of Reality,” *Julia* is structured from a point of view of retelling:

Setting the pattern for the later fiction, the entire book is a tortured remembrance of the past: of her brothers Ernesto, a homosexual, Rafael, who dies as an adolescent; of her beloved, self-centered mother; her loathed grandmother, a hypocritical *beatona*. Julia’s deeply impressionable nature never allows her to adjust to reality. Extremely insecure, she turns to older women for comfort: first, her mother, then Eva, her professor of literature at the University. She idolizes both, but both ultimately reject her. Even relationships with her peers end in disaster: a schoolfriend (Lidia) attempts sexual advances to prove her ascendancy over Julia. Her only true happy experience is an extended one with her anarchist grandfather, a stock character who teaches her the meaning of liberty, but the respite is too soon over. (107)

Perhaps the text is a tortured memory, but it is precisely that, a memory. A removal from that which “happened.” Understanding events through time, memories only make sense after the fact. And after all, they are only memories. Considering the parallel between memory construction and desire, both place value on that which never really was, or which only existed as something as an imagined thing. Even if the remembering is “tortured,” it is a creative act: she finds a way to create a narrative for herself vis-à-vis silence. The narrative is removed from what seems to be the superficial, daily happenings of her family life. Her relationship to the world, and to others, is quite different from that of her other cousins. Furthermore, *Julia* is not about successful relationships in a conventional sense. No relationship in the novel is successful (her parents are constantly separating; her aunt is involved with someone who seems to be unfaithful). Yet, they try to maintain a semblance of “normality.” The habitually absent father still appears at official family functions, for example.

Continuing with Jones’ reading, Julia’s only “happy” time, I would assert, is with her paternal grandfather with whom she spends several years after her young brother, Rafael, dies. While her grandfather, Julio, teaches her about “liberty” (his liberalism is anarchism, yet he is a landowner/business owner), he does not engage her in a full understanding of sexism. He thinks he can will her into dominating others. Julia’s “happiest” period of life is most likely the time she spends assisting her professor, I assume, with her work. Eva does not reject her as Jones proposes; rather, she simply has to get on the phone when Julia calls. Julia’s mother has forbidden her from seeing Eva (Eva was Julia’s father use to date), a ban that leads to Julia’s suicide attempt. Julia calls Eva before taking sleeping pills, and she cannot communicate her needs very well, thus hangs up because she has company:³ “Debía explicarle a Eva lo sucedido, pero no escuchó otra vez la voz fría, casi antipática: Te he dicho que tengo trabajo, ¿sucede algo grave? No seas pesada. Te llamaré mañana. Buenas noches.” (211).⁴ Julia had already called once and was unable to express herself well. In this phone call not only is she unable to express her desire, but Eva rejects her. Thus Julia attempts suicide. This suicide attempt is also a rhetorical, narrative device⁵ which underscores the systematic

silencing of women and lesbians. It seems to be the completion of self and annihilation of self. Julia's desire for telling her story does not end with her death. Rather, it really begins to make sense at that point. Similarly, the silence imposed on Julia, on Moix, on a nation, is most obviously decried via Julia's death. *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* picks up where *Julia* has ended. As previously stated, *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* is a consciously meta-fictional and intertextual work. Julia has committed suicide and the nurse at the sanitarium has given Ismael Julia's letters. The novel is an intermingling of various cousins' voices as Ismael looks for Lea, all the while recalling the summers all the cousins spent together in "T."

Ismael seems to protagonize the second novel. He struggles to define himself beyond the others, an impossible task echoed in the narrative structure. Like Julia, he constantly confronts his own self-censure, and he moves in and out of various prescribed identities: the childish Ismael longing for Lea's attention, the young Ismael, and "The Great Yeibo" – the circus cowboy in love with Albina who is a woman, half-horse. While Ismael's access to his own voice may be in question, it allows him overt play with selfhood and subjectivity. This very play will become a pretext for exile. Insofar as Walter will be a lie (Walter is a fictional character created by older cousin Lea to avert attention from her sexual relationship with another cousin, Augusto), as Julia and Ismael discover this lie, they suffer a loss of innocence; however, they were not totally innocent before realizing the "truth." They also desired. Furthermore, that Walter is not a dashing stranger who comes to wed Lea, but their cousin, reveals the idealized heterosexual love plot as false.

The cousins' competing voices parallel their desires. They compete for Lea's attention, and in their sexual relationships with each other, often one body begins with another ends. In her article "The Traffic In Women," Rubin draws on Lévi-Strauss's understanding of the ways in which societies base themselves on the exchange of women, not because of some psycho-genetic incest taboo as suggested by Freud,⁶ but rather to the want to exchange goods for reproduction, blood alliances, and community building. As Rubin shows, society traffics in these identity markers, and they are all fluid (159-63). Moreover, she argues that feminism must call for a new definitive kinship, beyond that bound to the heterosexual contract. She calls for acknowledgement of an original suppressed bisexuality. While "origin" should always fall under scrutiny, Rubin's deconstruction of the incest taboo relates intimately to Moix's work in that the cousins not only confuse their voices, but their bodies too. They are sexually active with each other, often with disregard to gender. For example, Ismael and Julia are infatuated with Lea. Lea is sexually involved with Augusto. Ernesto, the older gay brother inaugurates several of the male cousins into sex via self and mutual masturbation. When Ismael discovers that Walter is not the phantasmatic American millionaire courting Lea, but rather Augusto, he is devastated with jealousy:

Ya resbalan lágrimas por tus mejillas, y la respiración, que no deseaba soltar para no hacer ruido, sale poco a poco, entrecortado, de la garganta. Sí, pueden oír esos sollozos, por eso subes, corres, vuelves por la escalera del desván, allí no habrá nadie, piensas, y abres la puerta y la cierras.

espalda, y te diriges hacia la turca sin patas y los ves, a Ernesto y a Lea con los pantalones bajados, se ponen colorados. ...bueno, ya tienes media docena de años, casi once. Yo a esa edad ya me lo hacía, pero ese... ¿sabes o no? Qué coño, igual se lo van a enseñar en el cole. Casi a oscuras en el desván, quizá no vean cómo te ruborizas cuando Ernesto te besa el pantalón, te enseña las fotos, los dibujos, te habla, te toca.... (169-70)

Among the male cousins at least, their bodies confuse in sexual play. None of them overtly questions their behavior; rather among themselves it is a normalized part of their togetherness. However, adults seem to loom, waging surveillance on the youth, aware of at least Ernesto's homosexuality. Julia records her father's treatment of Ernesto: "Papá lo arrinconó contra la pared y empezó a darle bofetadas: Eres mujercuela" (*Julia* 150).

The censors did not edit out this scene or the aforementioned one: perhaps evidence of Moix's subtlety; perhaps evidence of a somewhat normalized or at least collectively, consciously maintained adolescent sexual indoctrination by older relatives and peers (Ernesto does say to Ismael that at school they will teach him anyway). Regardless, in *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* Julia's attempt to speak out still lends structure to the narrative (after all, Ismael is on a frenetic search to find Lea to give her Julia's letters). Ismael's rethinking and retelling of each cousin's relationship to sexuality serves to structure the narrative as well. Ismael's desire for Lea does not separate from his desire for Julia. Moreover, it is impossible for him to compose his narrative in any chronological sequence in first person because, just as any signifying system interrelates, childhood memories, desires, and experiences intermingle with Julia's, Lea's, and the other cousins'.

Ismael is aware of his difficulty in producing a literary work: his confrontation with language disallows any conventionally ordered piece. In his youth he had written poetry which was received unfavorably by his family. Now, Ismael desires authorial success. In *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* he constantly refers to himself as a child, as The Great Yeibo, and as narrator. The novel begins with a prophetic proclamation: "Añoche soñé que había regresado a T" (9). From its start, his writing refers to a dreamlike state, and the intertwining voices and desires contribute to this dreamlike atmosphere. Ismael attempts to control language, to write without his obsession for Lea consuming his narrative; however his desire for her is inseparable from his desire to write:

Quiere obligarme a hablar, la realidad: esa extranjera beoda que me impresiona, misteriosa y subyugante, contando historias en las barras de los bares, siempre con una conmovedora excusa en los labios para que yo me libere de culpas e instigarnos a comprenderla. Pero la sé falsa y engañosa. (10)

If Ismael has learned to feel shame for his incestuous desire for Lea, he marks it with the language of dream, of impression, in order to avert attention from this desire.

Walter's identity functions as a reflection of deflected desire in the text mentioned, when Ismael discovers Walter's true identity is Augusto, he further re-

into a "fictitious" world. As with all the cousins, Ismael and Julia had imagined Walter as someone elusive and desirable: a spy, an actor, a smuggler. Ismael and Julia come to Walter's part in Lea's life. When Julia discovers Walter's identity, Julia reacts in accordance with her behavior in *Julia*: she literally buries her desire as symbolized by digging holes in the dirt and placing boxes in them. She silences it. However, the idea of Julia putting one box inside another also recalls the structure of the novel. Each chapter overlaps, each interrelate, no single master narrative emerges. While her desire is silenced again, the novels' intertextuality allows a different reading.

There is no pre-discursive moment from which to conceive of sex, gender and sexuality. That is, no subject exists before language. And language is always an imprecise endeavor. As subjects constituted by language, the process of becoming is an imprecise process of speaking, of being, of coming into subjectivity is continual. Each iteration of it as a word, gesture, look, silence, etc., is a working through in language. The reiteration is a slippage into a dissension from a model. The hetero-normative discursive posits the male/female as pre-discursive and natural.

The model is already a reiteration of the heterosexual and heterosexist ideal in which there is an end plot. The end plot is the present infused with futurity to ensure the continuation of the heterosexual/heterosexist ideal. This maneuver uncovers the power structures at work that set up and maintain such a matrix and its binaries (male/female, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual) from which it is constituted. Language may be oppositional, thus subjectivities may seem naturally oppositional; however, as the novels expose, language consistently turns against itself. Thus, supposedly "normal" embodiment of language (males' unfettered access to the Symbolic, without naturalized distance from it), is shown to be incoherent. Julia's distance from language seems normal because she is a female, because her desire is "abnormal."

Of course sex, gender, and sexuality do not manifest pre-discursively, as no originating moment exists. Butler's *Gender Trouble* understands gender as performance as a constitution of acts associated with socially appropriate gendered behavior, confirming or dissenting. In the case of the latter, the subject would then become a subvert. Further, sex is incomprehensible without gender and vice versa, thus the heterosexual matrix: if one is male, he must be masculine, he must be heterosexual. Such a matrix is just that, a matrix, one through which a subject is constituted before birth. It is impossible to imagine a genderless, non-sexed, non-gendered, non-sexualized entity. Further, Butler argues throughout *Bodies That Matter* that the subject does not perform a gender, but sexuality; the subject constitutes their performance. As Lee Edelman⁷ and Butler⁸ argue, the power does not necessarily reside in the play between terms (heterosexuality does rely on homosexuality for its constitution); rather, the power lies in revealing such structures are set up and for whom they are beneficial. Butler accounts for gender that sexism is at the root of heterosexism (*Bodies* 116). And heterosexism is not original. Julia digs holes in the ground, symbolically searching for an original, but stops when she learns Walter's/Augusto's true identity. Again, this revelation evidences the fall of the heterosexual love plot. It reveals it as already a fantasy, with a phantasmic ideal. Therefore, it was bound to fail.

When Ismael replays his recording of the day he and Julia witnessed Lea/Walter/Augusto having sex, Ismael describes of Julia:

Cava el último hoyo, de la última tarde, del último verano. ¿No en nada en el interior? ¿Por qué lo cubre de grava? Con el resto de las piedras va formando letras hasta componer una palabra Gualter. No se escucha con ge, le dices, sino con doble uve. Qué rabia te domina, sólo sirves para llorar. ¿Por qué lo entierra con los crometas y cajitas? Qué descomponer la inscripción, de una patada, pero no puedes mover las piernas, sólo dices ¿o lo piensas?, Walter soy, seré yo. (169)

Meanwhile, Julia does not bury anything in the most interior box because, as symbolizing system as it relates to sexuality, nothing exists in the center, at the core of identity. When Walter's identity is revealed, again, the heterosexual ideal is questioned. Julia has no reason to keep searching for it as it has been revealed as unfounded.

Julia and Ismael understand this differently. When Ismael learned Walter's identity, he was in that moment also transitioning into explicit sexuality as previously shown. Ismael associates the loss of the ideal in Walter with the sexual experience he had with his cousins. Ismael continues to struggle for what was lost and confused in that moment which is sustained convergence of subjectivity and desire over time in language. Julia knows that there is no such thing. The boxes are symbolic evidence: language knows that subjectivity knows that language is a process without end.

Ismael refuses to accept the absence of the desired object. In his fantasy he becomes Walter, and later he becomes the circus cowboy loved by the white woman Albina. But Ismael still desires through fetishism, and his struggle with language is about his attempt to be fully present. He does not resign himself to the knowledge that language is a system of deferral.

Instead, he places his desire for Lea onto Albina, the fetish object. While in Melville's *Moby-Dick* Ishmael is an observer to Captain Ahab's obsessive pursuit, Moix's Ismael pursues Lea and is pursued by Albina. Ismael's own desire for Lea and to distance himself from her furthers the disassociative feel of the text. Similarly, the biblical story obligates her uncle to force Jacob to wed her rather than her sister Rachel whom he loved. Moix recovers this characteristic associated with Lea, a presence that Bush describes such:

Lea does not speak to discover hidden passions for her own sake but rather to oblige her partners to recognize in themselves what she condemns in others, whether the victim of her seduction be a young man preparing to preach sermons or the child Ismael, jealous of Lea's lovers. There is a second point to Lea's sexual activity: it proves to those who believe that possession is nine-tenths of the law that she is a law unto herself and cannot be subjugated through sexual relations. (148)

While it might be accurate that she cannot be subjugated through sexual relations, relations do define her. And while we hear Lea's voice mediated by Ismael, it is a voice that relies on sexuality for its own constitution. Though she shares an occasional pleasurable and sometimes compensatory kiss with Ismael, he disallows any potential same-sex desire to surface that Lea might have for Julia. Ismael is consumed by Julia's desire for Lea. It defines his journey, his writing, his experience, his subjectivity. It dares to "extroject" through Ismael's perhaps purposefully blurry account of their desire. Edelman's *Homographesis* understands the signifying system as a narrative focus on controlling the eruptions into/from the symbolic that may be conceived of as a screen, sometimes consistent and invisible and at other times showing tears – onto which significance is extrojected. It is a seemingly flawless surface until such an event alluding to normative desire reveals the surface as punctured. Homosexuality must be discovered and covered up. Ismael does not seek to cover his heterosexual incestuous desire. It is Julia's desire, her desire for narrative that is so apparently, dangerously moving beneath the surface.

The texts continually supplant lesbianism(s), and in another way, nothing like lesbianism(s) coming through over time and differently across time. Here, lesbianism is used as plural because not only is Julia's desire characterized as lesbian, but due to the number of characters' desire that Ismael might under represent or misrepresent.

Similar to the lesbian desire motivating and threatening the text, several modes of femininity circulate throughout the text. According to Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, the matriarchal figure, or in this case the most overtly dominant female character, Lea, is related to love/death dyad. Kristeva describes the first: "Ideal, artistically inclined, dedicated to beauty; she is, on the one hand, the focus of the artist's gaze who admires her. She has taken her as a model" (155). Lea is not the typical matriarchal figure (slightly somewhat anarchistic and seemingly rejects conventional social regulatory ideals) she is the dominant female and the dominant figure in some ways in the narrative. Dissimilarly, according to Kristeva, the abject woman "is tied to suffering, illness, sacrifice, and a downfall" (158). This description relates to Albina, the woman-horse, the most obviously abject figure in the work, together with Julia in certain ways. Julia, wandering each night for hours in search of Ismael, the woman-horse commits suicide. "Se cortó el yugular. Dejó una nota: ella quiere que la entierren al pie de esta montaña" (256). The abject is relegated away to constitute normative discourse. Both Julia and Albina are portrayed as abject, and according to Butler in *Bodies That Matter*, the love perceived wholeness placed onto the abject body/subject is descriptive of a process of impossible entry, already named and incarnated in language. Subjectivity is a trajectory of iterations and reiterations that becomes discernable, legible at death. There will always be something left out in the process of identification, and any prohibition (lesbian, mystical animal love) points to a site of desire (*Bodies* 187-206).

Ismael's relationship with Albina is at once a non-reproductive one, a fantastic one as they both are circus acts, and a capitalist one as they submit to commercial exploitation. Moix does not offer this relationship, or any really, as an ideal representation of couple or sexuality; the Ismael-Albina relationship in part works against the heterosexual model. As a figure of displaced desire and unrepresentable desire, Albina represents unruly

not at all dissimilar to the system of signification. Ismael describes their difficulty having sex: “lo mejor era tenderse, los dos. Así hacían el amor, sólo de vez en cuando, debido que ella terminaba llorando, sintiéndose desdichada y distinta al resto de las mujeres por causa de las dificultades presentadas por su caballuno cuerpo el momento de la realización del acto amoroso” (43-4). If Albina and Julia shadow each other, *Albina*’s materiality addresses Julia’s difficulty in overtly representing her desire. Bush offers another reading: “the invention of Albina allows, moreover, for an extraordinary burlesque passage on the difficulties encountered in the act of love between man and horse-woman, where the irony cuts more sharply against the social and sexual role of woman in Albina than against the fantastic sin of bestiality” (152). Certainly this is not speaking at lengths to the sin of bestiality; rather, it addresses the difficulty of representing lesbianism at this historical moment. If it is an ironic take on the social sexual role of woman in Albina, it serves as foil for Lea’s sexuality as well as for a reading of Julia’s desire. Julia’s lesbianism puts on display the seemingly unimaginable: sex with a horse, sex between women.

In *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* sexual tension is always threatening and often breaks through the surface. The reader learns Ernesto’s fate: he has married a woman, though he maintains a gay relationship with the man across the street. Don Ernesto’s sexualities and power has regulated him into convention, yet he circumscribes it. His narratives are represented by those societal structures (marriage, church, school, family) with which all the cousins struggle. Uncle Pedro and Grandmother Lucía embody these structures. Specifically, Lucía embodies Franco’s Catholicism; Pedro embodies Franco’s Law of the Father. The cousins are under surveillance, and the grandmother and Uncle Ernesto’s homosexuality with disgust and contempt from time to time. Pedro and Lucía represent the ideal Santa Teresa/Franco dyad promulgated by the regime. In *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* “La falta de moral divide a los pueblos, conduce a la guerra, a la miseria” (113). incestuous “immoral” relations between cousins continue into adulthood. Ismael and Lea have sex as adults, and Ricardo, another cousin, describes his desire for yet another cousin, María Antonia.

Even after having sex with Lea, Ismael still struggles to identify what he wants. He is certain that Ismael does not know to whom he is referring: to Lea or to Julia. He considers how to make sense of what she or they want, saying that there will be no history. Ismael continues to doubt his memory, to doubt his capacity to narrate. Though he is in part conscious of his constant desire for Lea and for writing, and he is aware of these things as motivators for the very text that is coming about, the order of the text has control over Ismael and not the other way around. It is Julia, or better Julia’s desire, that lends the overarching structure.

Julia, the main protagonist of this work whom Ismael attempts to diminish, tried to commit suicide in the final pages of *Julia*. She is successful in the final pages of *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* Just as Ismael’s desires have motivated his action, Julia’s desire motivates both her actions as well as those of Ismael. *Julia*’s atmosphere is asphyxiating: although her grandfather, appropriately named Don Julio, teaches Latin, it is a dead language. Julia masters Latin, yet this mastery does not allow her

beyond her silence. In *Julia*, she never names that which torments her: lesbian desire moreover, she never overtly names her want to express that desire or to foster that desire within herself. Yet, her lesbianism is almost all there is in both texts.

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick calls attention to the innumerable expressions of sexuality and of the epistemology of the secret of the open closet. According to Sedgwick, the closet is constituted by that which is already known but not yet said. This is certainly the case with Ernesto, though several adult characters make reference to his “woman-ish” qualities, and some of the cousins and their friends as well as right if he is gay. The closet hosts what is thought to be invisible in some ways, visits others:

“Closetedness” itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds it and differentially constitutes it. The speech act of coming out, in turn, and its compromises are as strangely specific (3)

One is always too early to come out – someone might not know and therefore label one putting homosexuality too much on display; one is always too late – someone might already know and have leverage over this constitutive speech act. Though Julia and Ernesto remained closeted, several people in both novels hint at Ernesto’s non-normativity, and a few refer to Julia’s. Carlos who has pursued Julia romantically and unsuccessfully throughout both novels makes a passing suggestion that something is “normal” between Julia and the professor, Eva, with whom she is infatuated:

¿Cómo está Julia? es rara tu prima, decía ruborizando, muy rara, nunca sabe si te toma en serio, si se te mea, si es una reaccionaria, una repulsa de mierda o todo lo contrario, no sé, a veces me da por pensar, llegué a una conclusión de que lleva una doble vida, sí, no te rías, se habla mucho de facultad, sí, de tu prima Julia y la Tal, la profe de lite.... (Walter 15)

There is talk of Julia’s non-normative sexuality. It is alluded to, but never named. It is an unfinished act. It remains in part the open secret in and beyond the last years of Francoism.

For Ismael, Julia’s, Lea’s and his own silence overwhelms. The silence arises from his inability to narrate. It is the silence that is in the letters he does not read. In this so-called silence, her desire to tell about her desire, is more pervasive than his own desire for Lea or for narrating. The novels present Julia’s life as incomplete because her desire is incomplete and only understood posthumously; Ismael holds onto the desire for the complete presence of sustainable attainable desire. He cannot find Lea to give her letters. And Julia’s desire to tell continues to direct and give structure to the narrative. Ismael has possession of Julia’s letters for seven years; for seven years he struggles to liberate himself from that which controls him.

He recalls of the visit to the sanatorium where Julia lived since her first suicide attempt at the close of *Julia*: “Puso el paquete en mis manos. Me confió esto, dijo que algún día volviera usted a visitarla y ya no lo encontraba...entrégueselo a mí por Walter, dijo” (245). Julia is the center of the action here. Bush speaks to the importance of this scene:

This request, ghostly inasmuch as the dead here communicate with the living, reveals at the close of the novel the key to the narrative action: what holds together the panoply of reminiscences and disjointed perspectives. As children she and Ismael had been Lea's couriers, bearing clandestine notes to her lovers. With her death she has at least descended from the role of messenger, and, breaking the silence of her self-directed speech, she has addressed another person – Lea. (150)

This recalls the Barthesian notion of writerly reading in which the reader creates the story through his reading. Here, Julia has not finally moved into the position of writing her own story; rather, she shows via her letters and her request that she has always been one writing her story.

It is Ismael's attempt to author the text which comes into question. Julia's desire is again at its center, but it does not overtly position itself as the authority; much to the contrary, Julia and her desire are seemingly hidden (she is quiet, very few names, her desire, she buries almost everything literally and figuratively, including her body eventually). Julia's desire functions as that which keeps the more normative desire in and around the text: everything is set against her, even as she slips out and back into the text. There is no absence of her desire, and her desire to come into being, to tell her story, is reflective of the very structure at work: *¿Walter, por qué te fuiste?* Her desire is the force of the work without taking on an authorial voice.

One of Julia's difficulties in overtly narrating her desire is that there is no truly lesbian narrative. In the heterosexual encounter, one may anticipate the pleasure of the act as it incorporates the heterosexual, heterosexist culture: the act reflects the heterosexual matrix insofar as gender is on display in its most tactical sense. For the gay or lesbian, the narrative is not thus predetermined, there is no one inevitability; rather, it suggests a proliferation of acts, of narratives, of desires, and of texts. Homosexuality more accurately than lesbianism is about the lack of simultaneity, the lack of matching and on time in the way that heterosexuality and heterosexist sex and culture works. The heterosexual matrix is always working at a frenzied pace to assure that it will always reflect itself back as normal, as complete. There are tokens as proof: rings, wedding photo albums, children, etc. The heterosexual narrative makes itself look logical and timely. It does what it sets out to do, and heterosexuality follows a narrative that revolves with such tokens and mirrored images of completion. Gay male and lesbian sexualities have histories and accumulated markers, and gay males still have access to language in a way that women do not. For example, Ernesto draws and paints, and his parents provide him with his own studio, because as the grandmother repeatedly asserts, even though

bad for both sexes, it (whatever ill) is less so for boys. When Ernesto starts out to portrait of Walter, he ends up painting himself:

Ernesto dibujó la portada: el Gran Walter, alto, rubio, los ojos azules (cosa que le incriminaron, pues, en lugar de dibujar como grises y castaños, tal como Lea lo describió, Ernesto se retrató a sí mismo) trepando por las velas de un barco fenomenal que surcaba el océano azotado por el viento huracanado y las olas encrespadas por la tormenta. Ernesto pasaba el día dibujando a Walter, le ponía su propio rostro, pero el cuerpo desnudo, más robusto que el suyo.... (130)

Ernesto is able to identify with Lea's desire for Walter as well as Walter as a desire subject. His confrontation with the limits of subjectivity are seemingly much problematic, as he is entitled to a level of narcissism propped up by heterosexuality. Ismael's confrontation with language is different because Ismael had always been invested in the elusive object of desire (Walter), whereas Ernesto's working through has been more "tangible" as it seems. He has enjoyed a string of male lovers, as mentioned, lives across from his lover.

In the case of Moix's works, Julia's lesbianism confronts the limits of subjectivity in a problematic manner. Moix's portrayal of lesbianism as a self-conscious process of deferral is reflective of the postmodern move toward de-centering the subject. While important to recall that silence may indeed equal death, Moix is employing a rhetorical device: the two novels disallow Julia's silence. In fact, the two novels work together to speak Julia's desire for narration. In this way, as the two texts intermingle, as they fall over one another as signifying systems do, Julia's desire is both the motivation for the retelling and the retelling itself.

The two novels center most obviously on a (non) confrontation with language. In *Julia*, the protagonist is overwhelmed by her silence. She does not speak, literally. In her environment is so asphyxiating that coming to terms with what she is not saying, which is lesbianism, is actually the overwhelming trope. Her options are silence or suicide. In the latter novel, this theme is dealt with more overtly as revealed by Moix's style. The cousins' narratives spill into and over each other mirroring their apparent experiences as youths. The competing voices fight for authority. All the while the politically authoritative voice is at risk as well: the idealized notion of fascism promulgated by the Franco regime is shown to be unstable in 1960's Spain as the cousins quarrel and have affairs. The cousins are left to explore their lives in relation to politics contemporary to themselves: some will enter into religion, yet others become anarchists, and others delve into the limits of desire and subjectivity. The two novels and their relation to sexuality uncover lesbianism and lesbian desire.

In conclusion, as the novels topple over each other, they reveal a process of signification, the very process by which incomplete sexual subjectivity reveals itself. The problematic silence points to that which is not spoken: lesbianism. This silence is not accidental, nor is the silence a place of absence. *Julia* reflects the limits of normative desire in the midst of the monolith that presents itself as normative through

rigid moral and gender standards. In turn, Moix's works slip through the censors through the unity presented of the Franco regime as unfaltering. *¿Walter, por qué fuiste?* is her working through and learning that language is a process of deferral: subjectivities are formed via language, so is desire. In the absence of an original, novels tell the story of a desire for telling, not of a desire for an original. Specific Moix's lesbian characters and "lesbian" writing understand and engage with language as a system of deferral. Julia's lesbian subjectivity and desire control these works, yet is no obvious closure. The cousins' stories are all different, with differing perspectives and differing interpretations, with very little resolution. Moix places Julia's desire as a controlling device. Her desire becomes the white elephant in the room in the earlier novel. In the later one, Julia's desire frames the action. But her desire is a shifting signifier, and the works self-consciously recount this. Walter could never go anywhere because he was never there. The idealized incarnation of hetero-normative discourse is never there. What are found in its place are contested narrations, incest, homosexuality, and lesbianism. Moving through the text, lesbian desire is always near the surface, often all over it, always retelling a desire for what never was. Lesbianism is expressed intertextually and metatextually in these two works already speaks to a new understanding in the shift between the Francoist modern subject and the postmodern subject in 1960s and 1970s Spain.

In the 1960's and into the Transition, the novel becomes a site for privatization for more personal, daily worries, and for self-reflexivity. This, of course, is in keeping with the change from modernism to postmodernism. Works by Moix and contemporaries, Juan Goytisolo, Antonio Muñoz Molina, and Esther Tusquets, among others, inaugurate a shift from a sort of neo-realism to self-referentiality. The novel no longer has to represent Civil War struggles and the ensuing aftermath; rather, Franco's death and the lifting of censorship allowed for a change in perspective. Art no longer looks to the original and forward looking. To the contrary, novels of the 1970s are full of literary allusions, self-reflections, and meta-fictions. As postmodernism negates the privilege of any one perspective, the authors of Transition and of Democracy reflect this in their

Notes

¹ In her "Afterword" to her translation of *Dangerous Virtues*, Jones quotes an important moment interview with Moix: "We [my brother Terenci and Miguel and I] didn't know anything about life; we learned everything from books, comics, movies, and songs. Miguel died without having had time to find out if there was any difference, so I dedicate these poems to him; they prove that there isn't any difference" (140). Jones follows with this: "These words anticipate the constant interplay among language, text, and life in Moix's works and her growing preoccupation with the primacy of language. They also forestall the vision of an increasingly impenetrable world that adds a note of postmodern to her work" (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1997).

² The Transition in Spain is the era when the country transitioned from a dictatorship under Francisco Franco to a liberal democratic state. The beginning of the Transition is usually dated with Franco's death on 20 November 1975, while its completion has been variously said to be marked by the signing of the Constitution of 1978, the failure of an attempted coup on 23 February 1981, or the electoral victory of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party on 28 October 1982. The Transition marks a moment which can be understood as an acute shift between modernity and its relative, modernism, to postmodernity and postmodernism. Changes include the end of regime control and the end of censorship of all media; the end of socialist government; renewed civil rights including rights for women; the renewed celebration of regional autonomy.

³ Eva has taken an interest in Julia because she, Eva, was Don Julio's apprentice. Further, Eva was involved romantically with Julia's father. As many feminist scholars have pointed out, female instructors have been competent and nurturing, a double bind indeed: "The qualities rated higher for female professors are those qualities generally considered to be common among them. And indeed, women as a group exhibit a larger number of these traits. However, women may need to score *higher* on the so-called 'female' traits in order to receive overall ratings comparable to those of men" (60). Taken from "Gender and Faculty Evaluation Process: Reward or Punishment?" *The Chilly Classroom Climate: A Guide to Improving the Education of Women*. Ed. Janice R. Sandler, et. al. National Association for Women in Education, 1996.

⁴ My translation here and elsewhere.

⁵ Of course the myth or question exists around gay and lesbian youth that they have a much higher suicide rate, or that a large number of youth suicide are committed because the youth is gay or lesbian.

⁶ Sigmund Freud *Totem And Taboo*. New York: Norton & Co., 1950. Here, Freud traces the taboo against incest among family lines (totem). He argues the incest taboo arises from the Oedipus Complex and this Complex is reflective of an ambivalence toward the totem, family line, or figure head. Fear and desire are both present. Restrictions on incest among tribe members may have come about as a result of the dominant male exercising power of the tribe to retain exclusive access to female members. Freud's explanation, while divergent from Freud's, is certainly consistent with his Oedipus theory in which the father denies access to family members.

⁷ Edelman's project in *Homographesis* correlates with Butler's in that he understands the sign system's inherent instability and that repressed desire lies at the root of this instability. However, while Butler seeks to uncover the power relations at work in creating this system, Edelman understands the sign system as a narrative keenly focused on controlling the eruptions into/from the symbolic that may be conceived of as a screen – at times consistent and invisible and at other times showing tears – in a Lacanian notion onto which signification is extrojected. It is a seemingly flawless surface until such an event as non normative desire reveals the surface as punctured. Homosexuality must be diverted, covered, and schlepped away. It is that which is always threatening to come through.

⁸ In *Bodies That Matter* Butler relates to Edelman in that they both analyze and confront that which is systematically denied by the symbolic (For Edelman, though, it is homosexual desire). For both the desire is that thing that underlies and drives this system of representation, but each offers a different evaluation of the ways in which language's incongruencies reveal desire. Butler understands that there are no clear epistemological breaks in history, nor in the chain of representation. The subject constantly comes into being through iteration and reiteration. Therefore, no original event or selfhood exists; rather, it performs selfhood, time and time again, differently. The lack of trauma in an event, for example, leads

subject to self constitute via replay. In Barthesian time, a trauma only comes into being with representation of that which did not occur. Language is a figure for agency and the relationship between body and speech parallel the relationship between material and discourse. This distance, she holds exactly what allows for discrepancy and for agency (a subject enters discourse already through heterosexual matrix, yet now has some choice). Rather, she proposes, this precise agency allows democratic contestation. Agency allows for that which cannot be forecasted, the very insubordination may reveal the symbolic discontinuous. In this way, agency threatens sovereignty.

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