

the chapters and subchapters are in strict chronological order, there is no real plot development, in the sense that though the reader is aware that two years have taken place, there is rather an atemporal sequence, based on the narrator's decision to alternate between the present and the past at will in any given passage. Thus the temporality of the narrating is not in line with the chronological sequence in which that narrating takes place. Rather, the chapters all constitute variations on the constant theme of Julia's illness and how she, her parents, and others deal with it.

How does one classify a work like this? It does not carry the weight of traditional works of canonical contemporary authors such as Muñoz Molina or Marías, nor does it reach the levels of hilarity created by Elvira Lindo in her Manolito Gafotas series. It does not attempt to represent a marginalized group within society, unless we were to consider Julia a champion of patient's rights (and a case may be made for this). There is no profound message to the work, but it succeeds in creating a curious and entertaining narrator. In a period when both writers and critics are making attempts to extend the limits of the canon, it represents at least an experiment in narrative voice, a depoliticized Spanish version of Gunter Grass's Oscar in *The Tin Drum*. Like the novel as a whole, Julia is light-hearted and at times capable of drawing a hearty laugh from the reader. The novel does, unfortunately, drag because of the lack of real plot development, and, in this writer's opinion, because of the protagonist's endearing nature, one would expect that it would function much better as a serial text, perhaps even in comic book format, in the daily press.

Brooklyn College and the Graduate
Center of the City University of New York

WILLIAM SHERZER

Adelaida García Morales. *Una historia perversa*. Barcelona, Planeta, 2001, 219 pp.

Intermingle rudiments of Poe, Pygmalion, and Pythagoras with the affairs of a burgeoning Madrid art gallery (*Galería Nilo*) and its thirty-seven year old owner, Andrea, and you have the makings of *Una historia perversa*, which melds gothic horror and mismatched men and women who are driven by fatal attractions to each other, all of which nonetheless heralds the characteristic refinement in diction and tone for which García Morales' works of fiction are known. There is, however, one notable exception. Its main female character, Andrea, contrary to other female counterparts in this novelist's other works, such as *El testamento de Regina* (2001) and *El secreto de Elisa* (1999), for example, relishes being swept off her feet by a man she considers physically attractive, yet whom she barely knows, agreeing to marry him in the hopes of finding happiness. She speaks freely, if not obsessively (but without detail), about her

sexually satisfying marriage to Octavio, a forty-year old renown sculptor whose works, for all their magnificence, evoke feelings of horror in her. More to the point, the synergistic psychic energy that emanates from their marriage is replicated textually by means of distributing the conventional univalent narration of its 22 chapters between two alternating narrative voices which are labeled «Octavio» and «Andrea» (beginning with the former and ending with the latter), each one providing obvious and complimentary, while often divergent, points of view on the rapid deterioration of the union which lasted scarcely more than one year:

En realidad, ninguno de los dos respetábamos la institución del matrimonio ni creíamos en ella. Sin embargo, yo me empeñé en que se celebrara porque, aunque teóricamente pensaba que ninguna persona era propiedad de otra, visceralmente sentía que, al casarnos, Andrea me pertenecía, era una posesión que se me otorgaba. Y a ella le resultaba indiferente casarse o no, su deseo era que viviéramos juntos, que compartiéramos todo en nuestra vida... (20).

In keeping with (Pygmalion) his mythological predecessor's artistic calling, Octavio nurtures his creative genius by pursuing Andrea, whose beauty completely overwhelms him, convincing him ever more fervently of the sanctity of his mission as an artist, that being to continue perfecting the already established hallmark of his body of work: «esos torsos con los brazos en alto y vueltos hacia atrás, como si pretendieran quitarse de la espalda a algún torturador, cuya presencia se expresaba asimismo en los rostros desencajados, las miradas de horror, los ojos desorbitados... Y esas piernas con los tobillos encadenados y las manos amarradas...» (7). Mutually satisfying physical exuberance aside, however, both husband and wife are cognizant from the onset that something is amiss, for, as their daily routines coalesce, little time passes before they find themselves driven to invent ways of overcoming the various obstacles which have become major stumbling blocks for them: in Andrea's case, her curiosity about the locked confines of her husband's studio; for Octavio, and particularly after discovering that Andrea had in fact managed to get inside the forbidden space, an urgent need to devise a strategy to protect the secret technique of his art. Once she comprehends fully how he creates his sculptures (also to remain concealed in this review), Andrea is obliged in turn to devote her every waking hour to figuring out a plan which will allow her to become free of the fiendish entrapment which her marriage has become. Her life hinges on complying with Octavio's wishes and keeping his secrets, hence the making of the story's —and Andrea's own— Gordian knot. In keeping with the equally enigmatic nature of such things as, for example, Octavio's solitary walks while on their trips together to such places as Barcelona and A Coruña, as well as the (hidden) letters which are flawlessly forged in his wife's handwriting, which thereby make

her an accomplice to his dastardly deeds, the malaise mounts exponentially as García Morales once again succeeds in creating a fictive space that surpasses logic: «[sentirse] dentro de una pesadilla sin ningún posible final... [y] un estado de irrealidad que... no había conocido anteriormente» (64).

Transformation provides the continuum along which the bipartite narrative discourse evolves: Andrea changes from inspiration to menace, as Octavio, similarly, turns into her jailer, a monster, and a tormenter. Once reputed for her business savvy, Andrea rapidly assumes the role of an ill-kempt recluse who succumbs to the daily uses alcohol and drugs to cope with her own sword of Damocles. And it goes without saying that for Octavio, transformation forms the bedrock of his work as a sculptor.

It is, therefore, within these upper-middle class confines of art, classical music, late-night suppers, and a select handful of close friends, that the antagonistic points of view relative to the story are intertwined. Because no (meta)textual rationale whatsoever is given the reader concerning why the two narrative voices are worthy of being heard, *Una historia perversa* is as unnerving as the situations it brings to life. Despite the immediacy which both of their voices bring to the course of the events, Andrea and Octavio resemble scripted actors who are reading parts of a play which resonate with the audience, itself becoming attuned also to the other voices of characters who further enliven the discourse. Among these are, for example, Andrea's best friend, Laura, and Juan Saló, Octavio's cousin with whom Andrea falls in love. Each one of them promises yet fails to defy the all-encompassing imposed code of silence, as evidenced most poignantly in the tragic end which Octavio meets at Andrea's hand when, ironically, she finally understands the depth of his love for her.

All the while Andrea retells her final hours with Octavio, an eerie realization surfaces concerning the fact that the voices which have just been heard emanate from «un estado extraño, irreal y sereno» (215). This is particularly true of Octavio, who, it must be remembered, ceases to have a voice by virtue of his death. It is only at this juncture, that is, in «ese territorio onírico» (206), that the full impact of this novel is felt. By virtue of having Andrea find the incriminating forged letters behind a mirror in the most private of closed spaces, her bathroom, García Morales cleverly reformulated her common motif of having female characters put down in writing their experiences, and thus placing them solely in command of ([re]creating) themselves. In Andrea's case, her scripted textual double —the letters— emerges from behind the looking glass, only to force her to see the falsehood she has lived during her year with Octavio, to whom she misguidedly entrusted the molding of her life. Not only did her dream of happiness turn into an unspeakable nightmare, but more significantly, it caused her to lose herself completely in the process: «al

contemplarme en el espejo tuve la impresión de estar viendo a una bella actriz en una pantalla cinematográfica [...] Octavio... se había dedicado... a transformarme en su madre» (50 and 71, respectively). Or to quote Laura: «[p]arece que existe en esta historia un crimen horrendo» (193).

University of South Carolina

LUCILE C. CHARLEBOIS