

LOSS, DEATH, PROCREATION AND WRITING IN THE METAFICTIVE
NARRATIVE OF ROSA MONTERO

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ABSTRACT

ASHLEE SMITH BALENA: Loss, Death, Procreation and Writing in the Metafictive Narrative of Rosa Montero
(Under the direction of Dr. José Manuel Polo de Bernabé)

This work argues the purpose of writing for the female protagonists in Montero's *Crónica del desamor*, *La hija del caníbal*, *La función Delta*, *Historia del Rey Transparente* and *La loca de la casa*. This project attempts to uncover the connection between writing as a creative process and all its implications, such as its healing qualities for the protagonists. Finally, this study applies the feminist theories of Hélène Cixous, among others, to further connect women's personal and societal need to write.

The first chapter of this paper includes a brief look at the author's life and her many accomplishments, as well as her role in women's narrative of post-Franco Spain. This chapter gives special attention to several commonalities of the women writers of the time, such as the use of metafiction, the form of writing fiction within a fiction, which Montero employs in all five novels. The second chapter encompasses the use of writing in order to confront loss. All the protagonists suffer from various losses, such as the loss of youth, love and innocence. Chapter three discusses the structure of the protagonists' writing within the scope of the novel as a metafiction. In the fourth chapter, I expand on the theme of death and how each protagonist uses writing to face their worries about dying, and how some of the protagonists employ writing to actually transcend death. Cixous' theory encourages women's writing through the body; in correlation with this theory, this chapter concentrates on the connection of the ability to procreate through

writing. Finally, the conclusion illustrates how Montero actually portrays a positive outlook on life through the protagonists.

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INTRODUCTION

Rosa Montero is one of the most important contemporary writers of Spain. She participated in the boom of young female authors who became prominent at the end of the nineteen seventies after the death of General Francisco Franco. This group includes such authors as Ana María Moix, Esther Tusquets, Lourdes Ortiz and Montserrat Roig, among others (Brown 240). Many of these women's works share similar characteristics such as the tendencies of writing in the first person and employing the structure of the metanovel. We also see a change in the types of protagonists depicted in this narrative. They are usually single, middle to upper-middle class professional females who are in their thirties or forties. This boom boasts a revitalization of women's literature in Spain, and Montero is representative of this new narrative.

Montero wrote her first novel, *Crónica del desamor*, during the time of Spain's transition (1975-1982), when the country began to move away from a repressive dictatorship and to progress toward a more tolerant democratic system. The women writers of this group communicate the desire to be able to express themselves freely about topics related to the female experience (Zatlin 30). Particularly in her first novels, Montero offers a point of view of her generation through female characters, along with her own perspective and her personal experiences as a journalist. According to Carmen Sotomayor, "Sus vivencias personales se vierten dentro de la experiencia literaria para presentarnos una imagen particular de la generación a la que pertenece, o «generación del

cambio»” (101). Montero’s writings have transformed Spanish contemporary literature by incorporating topics that were once censored by Franco’s regime and by opening the door to more women novelists.

In this study I will focus on the writings of the protagonists of Rosa Montero’s novels *Crónica del desamor* (1979), *La función Delta* (1981), *La hija del caníbal* (1997), *La loca de la casa* (2003) and *Historia del rey transparente* (2005). I have chosen these particular novels because the protagonists are females who embark on various types of literary projects. I will analyze the process of writing and all its implications for women in different stages of their lives: Ana Antón of *Crónica del desamor* is in her early thirties; Leola of *Historia del rey transparente* whom we meet when she is fifteen, begins writing during the last years of her life at age forty. Lucía Romero of *La hija del caníbal*, is also in her forties, Rosa Montero¹ is in her fifties, and Lucía Ramos is approaching sixty years of age.² I plan to explore the reasons for which these women write in order to add some light to the question: “Why do women write?” All these women experience three types of loss during their lives: the loss of youth, the loss of love and the loss of innocence. I propose that they use writing as a means to confront their losses and reflect about them. Writing also contains recuperative qualities. While relating the feminist theory of Cixous to Montero’s work, I will reveal the connection between a woman’s need, personal as well as social, to write. At the same time, while examining Cixous’ theory, which states that women should write with their bodies, I will discuss the feminine ability to procreate through literature. My contribution to the studies of the

¹ In this study when referring to the character Rosa Montero in *La loca de la casa*, I will use the name Rosa, but to refer to the author, I will still employ Montero.

² *La función Delta* also includes a week in the life of the protagonist when she is thirty years old.

narrative of Rosa Montero is to find the connection between the female protagonists in the above mentioned five novels and how their commitment to write stems from three types of loss as well as their need to transcend.

It is also worth mentioning that before beginning their writing endeavors, the protagonists experience problems in their creative processes partly due to the condition of being a woman in a male-dominated society. Later in this study I will explain how the protagonists' circumstances in the work force and their difficult sentimental relationships contribute to the lack of inspiration to write or create. For the protagonists of these novels, the act of writing flourishes for a multitude of reasons. In *Crónica del desamor*, the protagonist writes in order to explore her own feelings about topics such as sexual harassment, single motherhood, and disastrous relationships. Women also write as an outlet for their creativity and a means to procreate because they are no longer able to have children. It is not a coincidence that four of the five protagonists work in different fields of communication (journalism, movie directing, children's literature, and novels). In their writings, which represent testimonies, memoirs and confessions, these women leave a part of themselves thanks to their literary creation.

Not much has been written about the connection of death and procreation with feminine writing or the role that various types of loss can have in initiating and inspiring writing in women in the works of Rosa Montero. In addition, no in-depth analysis has been made of Montero's latest two novels *La loca de la casa* (2003) and *Historia del rey transparente* (2005). I believe my research will be an original, interesting and positive contribution to the understanding and appreciation of Rosa Montero's works.

In order to better understand the circumstances and the time in the life of each protagonist, I will begin with a brief introduction of each of the five novels. Ana of *Crónica del desamor* is a writer for a newspaper in Madrid and decides to write, in an autobiographical way, a chronicle of all the Anas that will serve as a testimony of the universal experiences of women. She is a single mother who works for a company that does not appreciate her or her talent as a journalist, and she lacks job security. Of the five novels that will be examined in this study, Ana is the only protagonist that has a child, but this fact does not prevent her from suffering feelings of loneliness or anxiety about death. The reader discovers various reasons that demand her dedication to the act of writing: Ana writes about different types of personal losses as well as those suffered by other characters that surround her. Claudia Albarrán describes the writing process as a way out or an escape from feelings of emptiness: “Mientras que en la novela todo tiende al vacío, al fracaso y al tedio, la escritura se erige como única puerta de salida para los desencantados” (42). Through the topics included in the chronicle, the reader discovers the general worries and concerns of the contemporary Spanish woman living in a post-Franco Spain.

Lucía Romero of *La hija del caníbal* is also a writer, but of children’s stories instead of newspaper articles, two forms of writing with which Rosa Montero herself has worked. In *La hija del caníbal* the novel is the written product of Lucía Romero inspired by the crisis that she suffers upon her own passage from youth to maturity provoked by the kidnapping of her husband, Ramón. Because of her disillusionment at work because “sólo ha pergeñado horrosos cuentos para niños, insulsos parloteos con cabritas, gallinitas y gusanitos blancos, una auténtica orgía de diminutivos” (*Hija* 21), along with

the absence of her husband, Lucía feels motivated to write a novel for adults. Lucía also experiences mental block and an utter lack of motivation to continue writing children's fiction. She decides to write the novel as a part of her transition to a new life, one without her husband and the life as she knew it. Like Ana, Lucía writes about her confrontations with loss and what she learns through these hardships. She wishes to communicate her experience with the kidnapping in order to somehow rehabilitate herself. In fact, narrative allows her to see the world in a much more positive light: "Through narrative, Lucía is able finally to appropriate one of her neighbor Félix's many philosophical assertions: 'Siempre existe la belleza' (Montero 1997, 338)" (Amago 33).

Lucía Ramos of *La función Delta*, who ironically shares the same first name and a similar last name as the protagonist of *La hija del caníbal*, writes a personal diary about her experiences. The novel begins the twelfth of September and continues until the eleventh of December of the year 2010, which is the present time of the narration. Lucía's current age is sixty, but her diary includes memories of an important week in her life when she was thirty and awaiting the premiere of her first movie "Crónica del desamor," which is curiously the title of Rosa Montero's first novel. The part of the diary that is from 1980 only includes the feelings and the experiences from Monday until Sunday of Holy Week. For Lucía, writing is a consolation, providing comfort upon facing death. It is a way to reproduce, to create a part of herself that can continue living after her death. Writing is a way to procreate and also a possibility to transcend. Because of the lack of procreation in her life, Lucía expresses the need to write and to create her own literature; hence, the writer becomes a procreator. Lucía's writings are a self-reflection about her life because her death is imminent due to a cancerous tumor in

the brain. She reflects about the losses incurred during life just as the protagonists of the other novels do. Throughout the novel, the reader learns the thoughts that are associated with fear when one is faced with the reality of death and is able to witness how Lucía confronts the idea of no longer existing.

The narrator of *La loca de la casa* is Rosa Montero who compiles, in an essay-like fashion, historical and biographical information of writers from Herman Melville and Truman Capote to Verlaine and Rimbaud. In addition, Montero becomes a character in her own novel including autobiographical tidbits mixed with fiction. As she writes in the post scriptum: “Todo lo que cuento en este libro sobre otros libros u otras personas es cierto, es decir, verificable. Pero me temo que no puedo asegurar lo mismo sobre aquello que roza mi propia vida. Y es que toda autobiografía es ficcional y toda ficción autobiográfica” (*Loca* 273). Montero points out on numerous occasions the creative process and the steps she takes to write the novel we are actually reading: “Ayer me reservé el día entero para escribir. Y cuando digo escribir así, a secas, sin adjetivos, me estoy refiriendo a los textos míos, personales: cuentos, novelas, este libro” (47).

In Montero’s most recent novel, the historical fiction *Historia del Rey Transparente*, the protagonist and narrator Leola begins the novel in medias res “Soy mujer y escribo. Soy plebeya y sé leer [...] La pluma tiembla entre mis dedos cada vez que el ariete embiste contra la puerta” (*Historia* 11). This novel set in medieval France is circular. The beginning narrates the crusaders trying to break down the wall of the tower where she is taking refuge. Leola tells her story starting with the wars that forced her to leave her home at age fifteen and begin her adventure as a knight. She writes her autobiography spanning thirty-five years while hiding in a tower from the crusaders. The

novel itself is the product of her memories she wishes to put on paper before taking her own life with a fatal elixir. Likewise, Leola begins an encyclopedia before commencing the endeavor of the autobiography. She incorporates words that she has learned first-hand through her adventures including: “madurez,” “melancolía,” “memoria,” “compasión,” “la vida” and “felicidad.”

In conclusion, in this study I plan to explore why selected women in Rosa Montero’s novels choose to write. By doing that, my work may cast some light on the broader question of why women write. Bernstein notes that “confession is often reflective, the product of an uncomplicated ‘I’ whose unveiling of experience provides a shunt to an intrinsic truth of female selfhood, society, and sexism” (190). I believe the protagonists feel the need to write in order to confront various types of loss incurred throughout their lives and also as a means to procreate. Writing is recuperative for these women, but it also serves as a means to communicate and share their knowledge with others. Ricardo, Lucía’s friend and interlocutor of *La función Delta* states, “Así es que lo estás escribiendo muy en serio, estás escribiendo eso con pretensiones de novela, de obra literaria,” and her response is “¿Y por qué no?” The protagonists intend for the writings to be read by an audience. If one reads and assimilates their words, the protagonists in a sense will survive their physical death. All five novels I propose to analyze in this study employ the first person, and all the protagonists are women in different stages of their lives. In one form or another, the protagonists of *Crónica del desamor*, *La función Delta*, *La hija del caníbal*, *Historia del rey transparente* and *La loca de la casa* use writing within the text itself for various means, which I propose to explore.

The following chapter will begin with an introduction to Rosa Montero's life and works and will also include background information such as the style and subject matter of the post-Franco feminine narrative. Chapter two, entitled "Writing as a Means to Confront Loss" will begin with an introduction on the theme of loss and how it treated in all five novels. For example, the three types of loss included in each novel are: loss of youth, loss of love and loss of innocence. Chapter three discusses the structure of the protagonists' writing within the scope of the novel as a metafiction. Here I will explore the use of metafiction and the lack of reliability of the protagonists' writings. I will discuss the use of the autobiography, the construction of memory and the confessional use of the first-person in the works of Rosa Montero. I plan to examine Susan David Bernstein's essay "Confessional Feminism" to better explore these ideas in the novels. In chapter four, entitled "Death, Procreation and the Writing Process," I will discuss how writing allows the protagonists to reflect about death and also transcend it through their literary endeavors. It serves as a way to thwart losing memories and to not be forgotten by future generations. In the conclusion, I will tie together the many positive outcomes in the lives of the protagonists as they complete their goals summarizing under what circumstances the protagonists feel most motivated to write and when they do not. Through writing, women can become realized as human beings in a male-dominated world. Women may find their own voice as Hélène Cixous encourages them to do.

CHAPTER 1
ROSA MONTERO AND SPANISH WOMEN'S CONTEMPORARY
NARRATIVE

Born in Madrid on January 3, 1951, Montero did not live a typical childhood like the other girls of her generation. She suffered from tuberculosis and anemia, which obligated her to stay at home until she was nine years old. She did not have many friends with whom she could play, and this led her to spend hours on end reading and writing to pass the time (Amell xv). In an interview with Kathleen Glenn, Montero confesses: “Para mí escribir era un juego, yo es que me divertía mucho escribiendo, era uno de mis juegos preferidos” (“Conversación” 275). After high school, Montero began college to study psychology, but later decided to pursue her studies in journalism because of her love for writing. She graduated from the Escuela Oficial de Periodismo in Madrid and began a prosperous career as a journalist (Brown 240). Aside from dedicating her time and effort to writing novels, Montero is currently a journalist for the national Spanish newspaper *El País*, where she has worked since 1976. She is also known for her numerous interviews for which she has won two prestigious awards: “Premio Mundo de Entrevistas” in 1978 and “Premio Nacional de Periodismo” in 1980 (Brown 241). The most noteworthy compilations of Montero’s interviews are *España para ti para siempre* (1976) and *Cinco años de País* (1982), both dealing with socio-political themes and finally, *Entrevistas*, a later collection of interviews compiled in 1996. Other works of

journalism worth mentioning include *La vida desnuda* (1994), *Historias de mujeres* (1995) and *Pasiones: Amores y desamores que han cambiado la Historia* (1999). Montero boasts a variety of short stories to add to her repertoire. In 1998 she published a book of short stories about romantic relationships entitled *Amantes y enemigos* and in 1999 she wrote *Las madres no lloran en Disneylandia*. Montero does not limit her writing to serious topics for adult audiences; *El nido de los sueños* (1991), *Las barbaridades de Bárbara* (1996) y *El viaje fantástico de Bárbara* (1997) are titles of books written especially for children. Rosa Montero's novels present a variety of styles and current issues and have received a great deal of attention from critics and the public. The titles include *Crónica del desamor* (1979), *La función Delta* (1981), *Te trataré como a una reina* (1983), *Amado amo* (1988), *Temblor* (1990), *Bella y oscura* (1993), *La hija del caníbal* (1997), *El corazón del tártaro* (2001), *La loca de la casa* (2003) and *Historia del rey transparente* (2005).

Montero's narrative has achieved notable commercial success. Her first novel, for example, was published in May of 1979 and before the end of the year, it had already reached its fifth edition and by 1992, it had been through twenty-one editions (Amell "Rosa Montero" 232-33). *Te trataré como a una reina* reached its fifth edition within only a few months of its first publication, and Montero's *La hija del caníbal*, also well received by the public, won the first Premio Primavera de Novela in 1997 (Harges 4) and the following year it received the best novel of the year by the Círculo de Críticos de Chile. Montero's penultimate novel *La loca de la casa* won the Qué Leer prize for the best Spanish novel of 2003 and the following year, the Grizane Cavour prize for the best foreign novel published in Italy. Finally, Rosa Montero's most recent novel *Historia del*

rey transparente is not without its glory. It won the Qué Leer prize for the best Spanish novel of 2005.

Rosa Montero and her works have much in common with the contemporary feminine narrative and the women writers already mentioned. For example, many of the female writers that emerged after Franco's death are professionals that work in advertising or in journalism (Belver 27). This new generation is a cosmopolitan group that has lived abroad, studied at universities and has had a series of more diverse experiences throughout their lives than their mothers or grandmothers. The post-Franco feminine narrative reflects this new perspective through the emergence of urban settings along with foreign backdrops as well. In addition, in the post-Franco novel, several aspects of the protagonists change. They are no longer adolescents that have to learn how to be women, for example the protagonist Andrea in *Nada* (1945) by Carmen Laforet or Natalia in *Entre visillos* (1958) by Carmen Martín Gaité, novels published during the period of Spain's postwar. Ellen C. Mayock uses the term *chica rara* to describe the young, eccentric for their time, protagonists: "The *chica rara* confronts obstacles presented by her family and her society in general as she attempts to gain access to education, political institutions, social independence, and professional employment" (214). Instead, the post-Franco protagonists, that are generally between thirty and forty-five years of age, are single women, professionals (like their authors) who try to survive in a society where women can never be equal to their male counterparts (Bellver 28). In effect, Mayock contends that the "strange girl" of the postwar grows into the "strange woman" of the post-Franco era, an adult protagonist who "seeks and finds creative and unique ways of inscribing herself into culture through language" (215). On many

occasions, in the work force, these female protagonists suffer because of prejudices due to sexual discrimination or harassment. In *Crónica del desamor*, for example, the protagonist Ana Antón experiences discrimination first-hand when her boss fires her from her position at the bank because of her pregnancy. Later she is never able to obtain any type of job security at her current place of employment, a newspaper, even though she is a hard-working and talented journalist. Many of the protagonists of the contemporary narrative find themselves in unfair situations like this.

The feminist movement encourages women to write about their experiences from their own point of view. Mayock maintains that Spanish literary criticism “must still evaluate the emergence of the ‘I’ of its female authors, as distinct from that of its male authors, due to the extremely essentializing gender politics that have shaped much of the country’s mores and the particularly difficult access to publishing of women during the Franco regime” (219). The French feminist writers Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray y Monique Wittig utilize the term “*l’Écriture Féminine*” and “envision a separate language for women metaphorically based on women’s physical experience of sexuality” (Price Herndl 332). Cixous, author of the essay “The Laugh of the Medusa”, expresses the importance of writing to women:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must write herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement. (334)

On the other hand, Elaine Showalter poses the question in “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness,” “What is *the difference* of women’s writing?” (335). She considers the above mentioned French feminists and their concept of an inherent female language

based on biology as a “Utopian possibility rather than a literary practice” (335-6).

Showalter goes on to suggest that “[T]here can be no writing or criticism totally outside of the dominant structure” (348).

A substantial number of novels written in the post-Franco period contain topics that were not permitted during the dictatorship, for example, homosexuality, birth control, abortion, divorce and sexual relations. Also in contemporary literature we observe such subject matter as illegal drug usage in addition to the night life of the *movida* that were absent in Spanish literature before Franco’s death. According to Elena Gascón Vera, this atmosphere of Madrid during the transition represents “la libertad, la novedad, la posibilidad de estar en la calle toda la noche fumando drogas baratas y bebiendo tranquilamente sin que, como antes, la policía pidiera los carnets de identidad” (“Más allá” 163). With the end of censorship, the female authors dare to write about the prohibited or what was once taboo in order to give the reader a new vision of a much freer Spain with more liberated women. In addition, writing is the vehicle for providing changes for women as Cixous explains: “Writing is precisely the very *possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of the transformation of social and cultural structures” (“The Laugh” 337).

Although difficult moments of loneliness may transpire, Catherine Bellver explains that the contemporary Spanish writer realizes that there is life after a failed marriage, in the same way that there is life without marriage, and she ponders the idea of independence in her literature (28). For this reason many of the conversations between characters of this time period revolve around frustrations, crises and the loss of love. Many of the female protagonists feel the desire to be independent, but are afraid to be

alone. In the last decades of the twentieth century, Spanish narrative encompasses even more examples of women's experiences from their discoveries to their disillusionments. Maycock describes this interest in women-centered novels as "the proliferation of women authors treating women characters and a readers' market that contains more women" (216). This explosion of writing about women's experiences is not limited to female authors, however. Maycock continues that specifically the "strange woman" as a protagonist "becomes so common and so compelling in her ability to speak her way out of her gender and to suggest communal methods of promoting equality in the world [...] that from the 1980's through the present day, she is portrayed prolifically by both male and female authors" (215-6). Rosa Montero, the protagonist/narrator of *La loca de la casa* expresses her doubts on the whole idea of a special writing for women by women: "No, no existe una literatura de mujeres" (*Loca* 170). She goes on to say that the author's gender is simply an ingredient to the mix of what constitutes a novel: "Una novela es todo lo que el escritor es: sus sueños, sus lecturas, su edad, su lengua, su apariencia física, sus enfermedades, sus padres, su clase social, su trabajo [...] y también su género sexual, sin duda alguna. Pero eso, el sexo, no es más que un ingrediente entre muchos otros" (171).

The style of the contemporary narrative written by women, in many cases, tends to be in the form of the autobiography. By writing in an autobiographical way, in first person, the reader is allowed access to the mental processes of the protagonist. The self-reflecting voice of the first person, through confessions via the memoir in the case of the protagonist Lucía Ramos of *La función Delta*, allows a safe place for the writer to expose her identity. Bernstein further states that "confessional modes often reclaim a coherent,

unmediated self, a universalizing source of knowledge whose identity rests squarely on her gendered experiences” (176). The metafictional writings of the protagonists in this study utilize the first person to confess their various experiences. The reader, in turn, may better sympathize with these characters and relate to their points of view, whether male or female.

Metafiction is another element characteristic of the post-Franco narrative. Concha Alborg highlights the trend of metafiction in “Metaficción y feminismo en Rosa Montero,” an article written in the late nineteen eighties: “La tendencia a lo metafictional en la novela contemporánea ha sido un fenómeno evidente al que la crítica ha dedicado su atención por lo menos en los últimos veinte años” (67). According to Patricia Waugh metafiction can be described as “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (2). In other words, metafiction explores the possible truths and falsehoods of life reflected through literature; it is a questioning by the author of the world that surrounds her. For Samuel Amago, metafiction shows evidence of an ordering quality; it is “a celebration of language, for it is through words, stories, and narration in general that we are able to put order into the chaos of experience that surrounds us” (62). The protagonists of this study utilize narration to make sense of their losses acquired throughout their lives and in some form, make sense of the chaos.

Phyllis Zatlin admits that this technique, preferred during the first half of the nineteen eighties, forms as part of the literary process of reexamining old taboos and antiquated myths of patriarchal attitudes toward sexuality and the role of the women in

society (“Women Novelists” 30). This fiction within a fiction demonstrates the protagonists’ ability to self-reflect, and at the same time, expresses some of the topics that preoccupy them which I will analyze in this study, such as loss, loneliness, aging and death. For Waugh, metafiction assumes the function of showing that reality is a series of unstable structures (7), rejecting the fiction of realism that corresponds to:

the well-made plot, chronological sequence, the authoritative omniscient author, the rational connection between what characters ‘do’ and what they ‘are’, the causal connection between ‘surface’ details and the ‘deep’, ‘scientific’ laws of existence. (7)

With this description indicating what metafiction does not communicate, it is possible to make the connection between this style of writing and the feminist theory, which insists that women find their own voice, different from patriarchal expression. Cixous encourages the difference in writing: “I write woman: woman must write woman. And man, man” (“The Laugh” 335). Metafiction resists the lineal and the logical or writing generally associated with a male-dominated society. Alborg recognizes the use of metafiction in the novels of Montero as an instrument in order to “dar énfasis a las cuestiones feministas” (73). For Mary C. Harges, metafiction serves as an act of rebellion:

Montero’s frequent use of the metafictional mode as a subversive device is characteristic of her contemporaries’ conscious rebellion against male-dominated fiction. More than a mere reflection of reality, these novels intend to change reality by employing subversive strategies to deconstruct male paradigms, replacing them with a new woman-centered identity. (10)

The novels I plan to analyze by Rosa Montero can be characterized as a variation of the metafiction that Steven G. Kellman calls the “self-begetting novel”: “[an] account usually first person, of the development of a character to a point at which he is able to take up and compose the novel we have just finished reading” (Waugh 14). This is the

case with *Crónica del desamor*,³ *La hija del caníbal* and *La función Delta* that propose to be in and of themselves, the creation of the protagonists. *La loca de la casa* and *Historia del Rey Transparente* also include metafictional properties. Samuel Amago highlights the roles of the narrator and the reader in metafictional texts: “Metafiction draws our attention to the relationship between the narrator, his or her role in the construction of the narrative, and the role of the reader in the process of making meaning” (18). In these novels by Rosa Montero, we the readers must constantly discern whether the writings of the protagonists are reliable. Montero forces the reader to question the protagonists’ words and therefore devise his or her own interpretation of the events in question. According to Amago, “In seeking to understand narrative, we also seek to understand ourselves, our status as human beings, our identities, and our experience and interpretation of reality” (31).

³ *Crónica del desamor* incorporates the first, second and third person, which adds to its polyphony.

CHAPTER 2

WRITING AS A MEANS TO CONFRONT LOSS

In her book *The Search for Identity in the Narrative of Rosa Montero*, Vanessa Knights indicates that the use of discursive, metafictional writing as a means of searching for feminine identity is especially notable during Spain's transition period: "Montero uses the metafictional mode not only to depict a society in the throes of change but, perhaps more significantly, to explore the individual's search for identity through discursive practice" (85). Writing as a means to confront loss is one of the factors that compels Montero's protagonists to write and with the intent to publish and share their ideas. Ana Antón, Lucía Romero, Lucía Ramos, Rosa Montero (as the character) and Leola suffer from various types of loss in their lives. Writing becomes a way to accept their losses, reflect upon them to later be able to move on to the next stage of their lives. Biruté Cipliauskaitė attempts to explain what a woman gains when she writes with a feminine voice: "En las novelas actuales el lirismo obedece a otro propósito: mostrar que la mujer puede hallar fuerzas dentro de su condición femenina por el potencial de poesía/ creación que lleva en sí" (195). In other words, the act of writing gives women the capacity to face the challenges that they may encounter in society. In addition, writing serves as a means to formulate and solidify their identities. Bernstein notes, "'Autobiographics' is both a feminist writing and reading practice that illuminates modes of self-invention" (195).

The five protagonists that I will analyze have in common the loss of youth, which causes them emotional anguish, the loss of love, which results in feelings of loneliness, and the loss of innocence, which contributes to the construction of identity. Hélène Cixous describes the differences between men and women on the subject of loss and mourning:

Man cannot live without resigning himself to loss. He has to mourn. It's his way of withstanding castration. He goes through castration, that is, and by sublimation incorporates the lost object. Mourning, resigning oneself to loss, means not losing. When you've lost something and the loss is a dangerous one, you refuse to admit that something of your self might be lost in the lost object. So you "mourn," you make haste to recover the investment made in the lost object. But I believe women *do not mourn*, and this is where their pain lies! When you've mourned, it's all over after a year, there's no more suffering. Woman, though, does not mourn, does not resign herself to loss. She basically *takes up the challenge of loss* in order to go on living: she lives it, gives it life, is capable of unsparing loss. She does not hold onto loss, she loses without holding on to loss. This makes her writing a body that overflows, disgorges, vomiting as opposed to masculine incorporation...She loses, and doubtless it would be to the death were it not for the intervention of those basic movements of feminine unconscious (that is how I would define *feminine sublimation*) which provide the capacity of passing above it all by means of a form of oblivion which is not the oblivion of burial or interment but the oblivion of *acceptance*. This is taking loss, seizing it, living it. This goes with not withholding: she does not withhold. She does not withhold, hence the impression of constant return evoked by this lack of withholding. It's like a kind of open memory that ceaselessly makes way. And in the end, she will write this not-withholding, this not-writing: she writes of not-writing, not-happening ...She crosses limits: she is neither outside nor in, whereas the masculine would try to "bring the outside in, if possible." (*Signs* 54)

All the protagonists include the topic of loss in their testimonies, confessions and diaries because through loss they discover their own identity; in moments of anguish their true character emerges. Writing for these female characters is a process that reveals aspects of their unique personalities, their society and the problems that preoccupy many

women, and in this chapter, I will concentrate on how loss plays an important role in their lives.⁴

Crónica del desamor

Ana Antón of *Crónica del desamor* attests her personal experiences plus those of the women that form a pseudo-family of emotional support with her. Thanks to the Ana's reflections during the novel, her attitude changes. It is for this reason at the end, Ana is able to produce the novel she always wanted to write, but did not possess the confidence in herself or in her writing to do so before: "At the beginning of the novel, the heroine can only dream of writing her story, but by the end she has acquired sufficient resources to begin it" (Brown 245). At the beginning the thought of creating a text about women's experiences did not seem like a viable possibility for Ana: "Piensa Ana que estaría bien escribir un día algo. Sobre la vida de cada día, claro está [...] Sería el libro de las Anas, de todas y ella misma, tan distinta y tan una" (*Crónica* 8-9). Writing then includes not just the experiences of the protagonists, but those of women in general. Montero introduces the theme of loss as a universal aspect of the lives of women. In the third person as well as in the first, Ana expresses the loss of her own youth and that of the characters that surround her. She incorporates the loss of love and all its implications, such as loneliness and the examination of one's life after the failure of a romantic relationship. Ultimately, we see the loss of innocence, which gives Ana the inspiration to definitively write the novel of the Anas. In her study about the works of Montserrat

⁴ In the essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud describes those who show symptoms of melancholia as different from those in mourning because the former mourns an "unknown loss." The melancholic reveals a loss of self-esteem and a lack of self worth. He or she may also exhibit feelings of shame and self-reproach. None of Montero's protagonists studied here demonstrate such characteristics. Neither do they show signs of mourning even though they do experience various types of loss.

Roig, Elizabeth Ordóñez concludes that for Roig, “Woman’s welcome loss of innocence has brought the fascinating and terrifying obligation to create, and for her [Roig] that act of creation is theoretically limitless” (“Inscribing Difference” 48). From a feminine perspective, Ana relates the experiences of various types of loss in order to find personal meaning behind it. While confronting those losses directly, she realizes her own strength and with that, she is able to write with conviction. Indeed, when Ana feels she finally knows herself, she begins her autobiographical novel. In her essay “Authorizing the Autobiographical”, Shari Benstock claims how understanding oneself can prompt the need or appeal to write one’s self: “This coming-to-knowledge of the self constitutes both the desire that initiates the autobiographical act and the goal toward which autobiography directs itself. By means of writing, such desire presumably can be fulfilled” (1041).

Loss of Youth

The loss of youth is one of Ana’s preoccupations and for all of the Anas in the novel. Montero focuses on the idea of “perder el tren”, or missing the train, the train being the metaphor for women’s only chance to succeed in making a change.⁵ Montero illustrates the character Ana María, Ana’s neighbor, in the first pages of the novel as an example of a woman who “ha perdido el tren en alguna estación y ahora se consume calladamente en la agonía de saberse vieja e incapaz” (*Crónica* 8). In *Crónica del desamor* the loss of youth signifies the end of opportunities and options for bettering one’s life, such as studying for new career or changing professions. Other characters

⁵ Montero also employs the train metaphor in the novel *Te trataré como a una reina*. The middle-aged character Antonia decides to catch a train without knowing its destination after the tearful breakup with her adolescent boyfriend. The decision to flee was one that “se le agarrotaba el cuello, y se sentía desmayar de puro miedo” (*Reina* 243). However, instead of “subirse al primer tren, hacia un destino no conocido y diferente” for a new future with opportunities, she denies herself this possibility “perdiendo el tren” to arrive at the familiar steps of her mother’s home (243-5).

articulate this dismal idea of the end of youth means the loss of opportunities. Such is the case of Amanda who advises Ana not to get married when she becomes pregnant saying: “No te cases, yo me he hundido la vida, pero tú eres joven y son otros tiempos” (213). Amanda utters “otros tiempos” referring to a new stage in Spain’s history, the transition to a democratic government. However, women who are already married and are not educated cannot take advantage of this new mentality. To be young means having opportunities, while after a certain age, life only reveals a life sentence to a future with out promise. Sandra Clevenger attributes this hopelessness and resignation in women to their rigid and conservative upbringing during the war and postwar: “Women who have not developed independence have too often blindly accepted the stereotypical roles that society has set for them” (87). The following passage clearly illustrates many women’s acceptance of their stationary position in society: “Como todas esas mujeres entre treinta y cuarenta años que se saben perdedoras, que han comprendido que el tren ha salido dejándolas en tierra, [...] que han renunciado a vivir porque el cambio les ha llegado demasiado tarde, porque se sienten incapaces” (*Crónica* 213). With a pessimistic tone, Montero shows the injustice of the double standard experienced by Spanish women in the late seventies who by the age of forty believe themselves to be old and incapable of transforming their lives.

For Ana, turning thirty marks the end of her youth:⁶ “Recuerda Ana que fue el día en que ella cumplió los treinta años, amargo día aquél, despedida de la veintena, despedida de la juventud, despedida de la creencia en un futuro ilimitado” (*Crónica* 41). Ana reflects about her age as if she were eighty years old: “Es posible que tras los

⁶ The fear of aging and the loss of youth can easily be linked to a fear of death, another preoccupation of the protagonists that I will analyze in more detail in chapter four.

pequeños desencantos cotidianos me sienta necesitada de [...] creerme todavía joven, algodónar la monótona existencia olvidando que ya tengo treinta años, que la vida se escapa, rápida y banal, hacia la muerte que llevamos dentro” (74). The passing of time equates to the gradual loss of oneself, or in other words, the chipping away of life, an idea that causes great anxiety in the minds of Ana and her friends. Ana’s comments about her single friends Antonia, Blanquita and Lola show her pessimistic attitude about the passage of time and the failure of women who do not take advantage of the prime years of their youth.⁷

Facing the fugacity of youth, Montero signals the ridiculousness of characters that are not able to grow up or act appropriately for their age. Ana’s homosexual friend Cecilio who has recently turned forty years old and Pulga, or “Flea” who is thirty and deserving of this nickname due to her very small stature, cling to their youth. The two try to avoid feeling old by engaging in affairs with younger lovers, often times much younger. Cecilio, even though he is in his forties, admits his preference to much younger men: “Seguramente en mi vejez lloraré de ansias ante la indiferencia de un adolescente que todavía no ha nacido” (*Crónica* 80). His own insecurities about his age cause him act desperately one night when he goes bar hopping with Ana. After spending the whole night flirting with a young waiter, who shows him absolutely no interest in return, Cecilio decides to wait until the place closes to later follow the man home in his car. During the one-sided chase for the waiter, who is oblivious to this wild pursuit, Cecilio “Saltó semáforos, torció en prohibido, asaltó en una calle peatonal amparado por la noche” (83), actions that make it very clear his desperate need to still feel attractive and desired. One

⁷ “O si en cambio se habrán dado cuenta de su absurdo y masticarán el dolor del tiempo que se ha ido” (*Crónica* 213).

consequence of the character's perceived loss of youth is feeling unattractive, and as a result, the fear of becoming invisible only intensifies.⁸ Cecilio candidly expresses his reality and his sadness in the following passage: "Pero a veces siento una melancolía [...] Salgo a la calle, veo a un muchacho que me gusta, que pasa junto a mí, ajeno a todo, ignorando mi presencia" (82). The deterioration of the physical is another topic within the loss of youth theme that Montero highlights through Ana's testimony. Cecilio especially worries about one day losing his faculties and eventually his independence, explaining that "iremos perdiendo poco a poco la capacidad de salir y de movernos, [...] que poco a poco, al compás de las arrugas y los primeros dolores artríticos o reumáticos, nos iremos encerrando en nuestras cuatro paredes, cada día más irreversiblemente consumidos" (75).

In order to subside the feeling that she is losing her youth, or to at least not be so aware of the reality of growing older, Pulga only dates young men, usually in their early twenties or even teenagers. Pulga lost her virginity at a young age under less than desirable circumstances; she was a virgin when she got married at age nineteen, and on her wedding night her husband "la violó sin palabras, dolorosa e inhábilmente" (*Crónica* 95). This painful experience resulted in the loss of her innocence. Pulga insists on being in a position where she can maintain control over her sexual partners, a control she was not able to assert over her husband: "Pulga ha ido escogiendo muchachos cada vez más jóvenes, cada vez más inexpertos, chicos predestinados a la fascinación y a los que ella puede dominar fácilmente con dulce tiranía" (97). In a conversation with her friends Ana and Elena, Pulga comments on the relationship she has with a nineteen year old man who is a performer in the circus. Pulga is aware that she probably seems ridiculous to her

⁸ The fear of becoming invisible is a theme that is repeated *La hija del canibal*.

friends, and even realizes the humor, even pathetic quality of her condition: “yo sé que necesito un hombre de mi edad y otro rollo” (215), but at any rate she continues with the same pattern of behavior. In the passing from youth to maturity, Pulga, with her body of a little girl, ironically resists old age and tries to recuperate her youth by attracting inexperienced boys with whom to have relationships.

The changes in one’s attitude due to maturity show how little by little one leaves behind traces of his or her youth. The loss of youth is the realization of the fugacity of life, that life, like beauty, is not forever. Candela admits in a conversation with Ana that “yo no quiero seguir perdiendo vida” (*Crónica* 144). The moment arrives in which she realizes that life does not last forever, and she does not want life to simply pass her by. Elena is another character who is conscious of her own aging: “Recuerda que allí perdí el virgo, nueve años atrás, y se siente cada día un poco más vieja” (57). In the following passage, Candela expresses how she shared the same preoccupations of the future of those older than she, even when she was young:

Cuando era más joven intenté vivir el momento, ya sabes, seguir esa moda que preconizaba acumular experiencias, sacar el máximo provecho al presente [...] Bueno, me empeñaba en creer eso y en vivir así, pero era mentira, estaba llena de proyecciones al futuro, de ansiedades. (143)

Upon losing their youth and entering into their thirties and forties, Ana’s friends express the ironies of their attitudes and the routines of their youth as compared to their lives now:

Cuando tenía veinte años y estaba delgadita me vestía como una señora de cuarenta. Ahora que tengo cuarenta y estoy entrada en carnes me pongo plumas, volantes y satinados como una chica de veinte. Cuando tenía quince me quitaba los calcetines en el descansillo de la escalera para ponerme medias. Ahora me quito las medias para ponerme calcetines de perlé. (206)

Mercedes comments on how the passing of time changes a person. She is a woman who is a bit heavier than before, but with the desire of being young again in the way she fancies wearing flashy clothes. The characters in Ana's world desperately hold on to their youth in the ways that they dress or by maintaining relationships with much younger partners. By trying to trap their youth with these desperate methods, they believe that their resistance to old age will keep it at bay longer.

Loss of Love

The loss of love is one of the most relevant themes of the novel together with the loneliness that appears directly following a breakup. It is the focal loss for the majority of the characters because all experience some type of "desamor" or un-love. Some stay in their romantic relationships only to avoid loneliness, as if being alone were some kind of death sentence. Alma Amell comments on this phenomenon with Pulga who cannot be in her apartment without the company of a man: "El mejor ejemplo de los que practican este escapismo o autoengaño es la Pulga, que necesita vivir con amantes más jóvenes que ella para olvidarse de su edad, y que además no aguanta estar sola en casa ni un minuto" ("Una crónica" 77). Ana's circle of friends understands the pain and desperation regarding the loss of love, and they try to avoid the emptiness of being alone with all their might because there is nothing worse than finding oneself old and alone. Elena communicates this bitter future: "Cumplir los cuarenta, los cincuenta, los sesenta [...] a los sesenta seremos menos capaces de reunirnos a comer. A los sesenta estaré sola, arrugadita y consumida, intentado tragar un plato de sopa porque ya no me quedarán apenas dientes" (*Crónica* 201-2). Ana utilizes writing in order to explore her own feelings about loneliness and growing old.

In her narration, Ana writes about the loss of love that she suffers with the disappearance of Juan, the father of her son Curro. Ana feels downhearted when she finds herself alone and a single mother, however, as Elena Gascón Vera explains, “En *Crónica* resalta el hecho de que las mujeres, sin un hombre en su vida, se realizan profesional y afectivamente mejor que cuando están acompañadas” (“Hacia un abordaje” 77). Ana writes about the melancholy that she feels in the day-to-day tasks due to Juan’s absence: “Le irrita. Le irrita profundamente fregar, o planchar, o coser, le irritan esas pesadas labores domésticas que comen su tiempo y le hacen sentir más que nunca la rutina” (*Crónica* 139). Susan David Bernstein states the importance of the use of the first person in order to find a feminine and personal voice. She coins the term “confessional feminism” to explain the idea of recuperating the truth about oneself upon including “first person theorizing, anecdotal individualism, and the new personalism” (175). Ana finds her own personal truth through her self reflections and the anecdotes about herself and her friends. Jane Tompkins shows the value of the day-to-day in women’s writing, which reflects the style that Ana employs:

The criticism I would like to write would always take off from personal experience. Would always be in some way a chronicle of my hours and days. Would speak in a voice which can talk about everything, would reach out to a reader like me and touch me where I want to be touched. (Bernstein 182)

Raysa Amador y Mireya Pérez Erdlyi convey the opinion that through daily experiences, women construct their own identity: “Fragments of everyday life function as a performance of identity and simultaneously they create a version of transforming experience into a construction of the self” (47). Ana expresses her feelings through everyday occurrences. Upon including daily activities, such as sharing a coffee with her neighbor in the morning or conversing with friends about past love relationships, Ana

expresses her feminine side. She also uses the home in order to connect her feelings of loneliness with the description of her apartment: “La casa está fría y sobre todo sola, las paredes muy blancas y vacías de muebles” (*Crónica* 7). The emptiness of her apartment responds to the emptiness she feels on the inside. Ana’s phone conversation with a stranger who accidentally dialed her phone number further draws attention to her loneliness. She assures him that “tengo mucho que hacer, no estoy muy sola y no me aburro nunca, de modo que no sigas llamando” (15), but she admits later that she had lied when she told him she was not lonely. The loss of love is at the root of the feeling of loneliness. Carmen Sotomayor affirms that the presence of another in one’s life serves three purposes: “Sirve en parte para llenar el vacío social de la persona; en segundo lugar, es parte del proceso de búsqueda de la propia identidad a través de un referente del sexo opuesto y, finalmente, es una manera de escapar a la propia angustia” (103). As we will see, a man or woman’s dependence on his or her partner can lead to the loss of identity after the relationship has ended.

Julita, a friend of Ana who has just separated from her husband after being married for fifteen years, represents how easy it is to lose one’s identity in a relationship and thereby losing oneself in the process. Julita says that “me siento como perdida, como si todo se hundiera, llena de miedo” (*Crónica* 100). She cannot imagine life without her husband, Antonio, because when she got married, she wholeheartedly believed in a happily ever after ending like in the fairytales or the *novelas rosas*. Moreover, she walked down the aisle a virgin and had three children; she did everything society asked of her by dedicating her life to being a good wife and mother. The loss of love makes Julita question the whole meaning of her existence. She is thirty-seven years old,

unemployed and now she must start over entering into a new stage in her life that has no guarantees. Ana assures Julita that “las cosas tienen su vitalidad, las relaciones se mueren, y lo jodido es empeñarse en continuarlas cuando todo se ha acabado, seguir con la rutina, eso sí es catastrófico” (103). Julita feels forced to enter in a new generation of changes that she is not familiar with.⁹ Antonio’s smitten attitude toward his new lover seems ironic to Ana: “la ama precisamente porque es joven, porque es libre e independiente. Ama en ella todo lo que él ayudó a anular en Julita” (102).

Instead of spending months feeling lost like Julita, Ana invents in her mind a passionate scene with her boss Eduardo Soto Amón whom she creates the nickname Ramsés “por lo mucho que manda” (*Crónica* 38). One aspect of metafiction is the ability to play with what is imaginary and what is real. In her alone time, Ana builds up a fantasy about her boss, someone with whom she has never exchanged a single word admitting that “todo empezó siendo casi un juego, y, mes tras mes, ha ido convirtiéndose en algo obsesivo: le imagina, le inventa, le recrea” (73). Ana employs her imagination to construct a world where she can forget about her reality, her lack of the romantic company of a man. She prefers for example to fantasize a “tierno y conflictivo” Soto Amón when the truth is he is a married playboy who prefers the company of expensive prostitutes. Ironically, Ana is conscious of her own fiction she has attributed to Soto Amón: Ella sabe que este amor es sólo una invención, ¿y qué importa? ¿No son todos los amores—a excepción quizá de los primeros—una simple construcción imaginaria?” (74). Sotomayor describes this behavior as a reaction; it is the search for a “refugio en su amor ficticio,” and at the same time an “amparo contra la soledad, un refugio de miedos

⁹ Julita is another one of Montero’s female character that has “missed the train.” She is no longer in her teens or her twenties, and now she is overwhelmed with too many responsibilities to even think about studying at the university or beginning a new life for herself.

inconfesables” (103). Although Ana may use her imagination to avoid feeling lonely, she does express a serious fear of being alone in the future. Her son Curro makes it more bearable to be without a significant other in her life, but Ana is constantly reminded that he will eventually grow up and will no longer be in her life in the same way he is now: “Para lo que va a durar, Curro se irá, afortunadamente para él” (80). She knows that she will feel an unimaginable solitude in the moment that Curro says good-bye to her: “Ana está segura de que el Curro se marchará cuando tenga quince, dieciséis, diecisiete años, es lo lógico. Poco va a servir el Curro de compañía en ese futuro de soledad senil” (202). She admits to herself the desire to not let him grow up so that he will always be by her side. Regarding the topic of loneliness, Ana expresses a deep sadness; with sorrow she intuits that “ha consumido media vida inventando amores inexistentes: y este Soto Amón de la treintena no es más que un nuevo y sofisticado artificio” (216). Deep down, she knows that neither the fantasy of Soto Amón nor the companionship with her son can rescue her from her feelings of solitude.

The relationship between Elena and Javier is another that can be characterized as an un-love. Tired of putting forth such an effort and totally dissatisfied through the process, Elena suffers a relationship crisis with her partner. She feels a loss of passion, but she is unable to leave Javier because she cannot muster the courage to tell him good-bye. Elena confesses to Ana: “Sabes lo difícil que es terminar una relación, hostia, es difícilísimo” (*Crónica* 16). Elena craves being alone, which differentiates her from the other characters in the novel who combat their feelings of loneliness by constantly surrounding themselves with friends and undesirables. Seeing Javier in her apartment represents for Elena an invasion of privacy and of her personal space. Ana narrates: “Sus

costumbres de solitaria están tan arraigadas que vive cualquier alteración en ellas como un ataque personal, como una claudicación de independencia, y así, poco a poco, en tontas escaramuzas, creció la agresividad que ha envenenado los días, la relación, el cariño” (58). In her chronicle, Ana represents the characters that maintain relationships for reasons of fear of being alone, but also those like Elena who escape suffocating relationships and require alone time. Elena “se siente asfixiada desde hace algunos meses por esta relación agonizante, allí está, encerrada en la rutina, boqueante en busca de aire como pez fuera del agua” (113). Montero suggests that not just women need the emotional shelter of the opposite sex; she describes Javier as siempre rodeado de amor y mimo, nunca independiente del todo. Y así es inseguro” (114). All his life Javier has been accustomed to being served by women, an idea that Elena opposes, as she complains: “por una cuestión educacional en el noventa por ciento de las parejas la que ha de joderse es ella, la que lo pone todo, la que prescindir de su vida y la supedita al hombre, mientras que él se aprovecha de la situación y no entrega nada” (107).¹⁰

Elena is sensitive to the inequalities between sexes; however, she realizes that her militant attitude should not interfere with her decision to procreate. Before, having a child was another one of the many “deformaciones culturales,” but now she recognizes that “parir es un privilegio” and that respecting and keeping to the ideas of the women’s liberation movement should not mean “adoptar valores masculinos, copiar al hombre, repudiar la identidad de hembra” (*Crónica* 230). Roberto Manteiga maintains that Montero wishes to prove, as we see in Elena’s character, that women do not have to lose

¹⁰ In the following quote, Sandra Clevenger explains the concept of socialization; Javier’s attitude toward women that their role in life is to serve men models this learned behavior: “Socialization is the process by which an individual learns to perform various social roles adequately; it involves learning the norms, values and expectations of society. This process of socialization puts a strong pressure on individuals to conform to society by accepting the gender roles which they are expected to perform” (87).

their feminine identity when adopting a new way of thinking, which may be incompatible with their prior beliefs:

Those women who, in the past, had felt compelled to act within society's normative structure, lest they be accused of demonstrating deviant behavior, were now anxious to act in ways that challenged the norm. Yet, Montero believes that in their attempt to achieve equality, women have, in effect, lost their identity, and, in turn, their ability to communicate their true feelings. (115)

Amell concludes that Montero employs Hélène Cixous' theory of "*l'Écriture Féminine*" with Elena's character: "According to Cixous, once feminine differences have been duly recognized and female sexuality confirmed as a positive asset, it will be possible to establish a dialogue between men and women as equals in a new, truly bisexual era when neither gender is privileged" (*Odyssey* 22). Montero, like Ana, wishes to incorporate various types of relationships and their consequent losses in order to reflect about them and propose to the world her unique perspective. Zulema Ester Moret includes other reasons for which women write: "Escribimos para explicarnos; para explicar el mundo; para gozar; para evadirnos; para crear utopías; para exorcizar fantasmas que nos habitan; para elaborar situaciones traumáticas; para cubrirnos y para descubrirnos" (40). In accord with Moret's ideas about writing, Ana writes about un-love and loneliness in order to highlight the female experience in late seventies Spain and to discover a part of herself in all the women that she examines in her work. Furthermore, and more simply put, Ana explains to Curro that, "Estoy escribiendo [...] porque me gusta" (*Crónica* 163).

Loss of Innocence

The last form of loss that Ana presents in her chronicle is that of innocence. She learns the loss of the illusion of love after many failures in her attempts at having a love life and finally concluding with the disastrous affair with her boss Soto Amón. In the

face of the loss of youth and love, Ana realizes various aspects of life and truths about her condition as a woman. Being a young, attractive woman, Ana suffers several examples of sexual harassment in the work force. She is punished for her pregnancy and ignored in an interview because she does not consent to offering herself sexually. All these negative experiences make her understand the reality of living in a male-dominated society where many injustices against women still exist. Ana loses her innocence, and because of this, she is able to write her chronicle in order to denounce the sexism present in Spain, specifically against professional and educated women. Kathleen Thompson-Casado analyzes the discrimination that Montero illustrates in *Crónica del desamor*:

Although sexual discrimination in the areas of female sexuality and labor practices are but two examples of the multitude of examples of sexism in *Crónica*, it is clear even from a limited examination of them that Montero's concept of sexism in the first novel springs from a point of view that emphasizes primarily an impassioned denouncement of discriminatory practices as they apply to urban, educated, professional women. (354)

One of Ana's first experiences with sexual harassment occurs when she is still a student in high school. She is on the subway and an elderly man approaches her and rubs up against her in an inappropriate manner. Ana narrates "Era la primera vez y no sabía. Después sí," a quote showing how she loses her innocence upon finding herself in her first situation with an indecent man. Later, such unpleasant incidents become commonplace: "Después se hizo, se hicieron conocedoras de estos asaltos incruentos y cotidianos. De las manos que pellizcan culos, de los restregones de autobús, del asco al intuir algo duro—pobres de ellas, ignorantes de erecciones—contra tu muslo o tu mano" (*Crónica* 158). Ana, as well as her friends, suffers from harassment from dirty old men, tasteless displays from exhibitionists and obscene catcalls in the street such as "te-lo-voy-a-meter-por-no-sé-donde" y "te-voy-a-llenar-de-leche" (159). They lose their innocence

because they must become accustomed to feelings of guilt and shame. They must learn where to sit in the movie theater in order to avoid someone stroking their thighs. They no longer feel scandalized or stunned because these indiscretions become so routine.

Montero reproaches this treatment of women as sex objects and the consequent loss of innocence of these women due to such harassment.

At the age of seventeen, Ana goes to an interview where she encounters sexual harassment for the first time within the parameters of the workforce. The “sub-sub-secretario de Información y Turismo” conducts the interview while imparting very inappropriate comments such as “me eres simpática” y “este trabajo es muy codiciado y para conseguirlo hay que reunir una serie de condiciones” (155). He explains that he is a very busy man, but offers her private tutoring in French so she will be prepared when she presents her application to his superiors, a futile attempt at asking for a date in exchange for a better chance at getting the job. Thompson-Casado notes: “The majority of *Crónica*’s female characters experience some form of sexual discrimination at work, including but not limited to discriminatory hiring practices, lack of professional advancement, and devaluated perception by colleagues” (353). After the interview is over, Ana yearns to fiercely react to the interviewer’s loss of interest in her because of her lack of cooperation in his game. She wants to “levantarse, adusta y heladora, encontrar la justa frase que expresara su desprecio, aguantar las ganas de llorar, insultarle” (*Crónica* 156). Nevertheless, because of her upbringing, she remains silent. She also keeps quiet when years later she loses her job at the bank because she becomes pregnant. The personnel manager offers to pay her hospital expenses and medical bills on the condition that she looks for another job after giving birth. Her reaction is silence:

“Ana supo morderse los labios, mantenerse, no darle las gracias que el miserable esperaba” (263). Ana is able to finally break her silence when she writes her chronicle, revealing her humiliations to the public and to herself.

When Ana becomes a professional in her career, she still suffers from sexual harassment and discrimination. She loses her innocence upon realizing the lack of equality at her work because of her sex and the stigma of being a single mother. After several attempts at securing a raise or at least a steady position at the newspaper, Ana only finds obstacles when aspiring for job security. Thompson-Casado points out the excuses that the company makes the injustices that it commits and against Ana: “As months pass, the insecurities and hardships caused by her position are continuously enumerated. Yet in the final chapter, [...] Ana’s request is once again denied on the non-justified grounds that it is simply impossible” (353). Later Ana finds out that the newspaper hires three men for permanent positions, yet she reacts in a way that is “painfully representative of that of many women caught in the same dilemma, expressing both a profound sense of rage and impotency” (Thompson-Casado 353). Needless to say, Ana feels unappreciated and as if her superiors’ opinion of her were “de esclava y de tonta” after putting forth such hard work and dedication. With indignation, Ana understands that she cannot protest being passed up for promotion because “sabe que sus gritos sólo servirán para provocar palmaditas en el hombro [...] y todo seguirá igual sin que su enfado haya servido para nada” (*Crónica* 261). In the patriarchal world of the workplace, Ana’s voice is silenced; however, she exercises her right to be heard with writing.

Finally, Ana loses her innocence with the demythification of her Prince Charming, Soto Amón. She has invented an elaborate story about her boss, as if he were the ideal man with romantically perfect characteristics, but after the company Christmas party, she realizes that it was all just a fantasy. Phyllis Zatlin refers to Ana's relationship with Soto Amón as "a Cinderella fantasy" that is destroyed after a night of unsatisfying sex ("Women Novelists" 34). In an interview with Javier Escudero, Montero describes the "amor-pasión" that Ana experiences: "Pasa alguien cerca de ti y tú, que tienes esa capacidad y necesidad de amor, te inventas el amor hacia esa persona y te inventas a esa persona. Ese amor-pasión está condenado obligatoriamente a la frustración porque el conocimiento de esa persona destruye esa imagen amorosa que te has hecho" ("La creación literaria" 216). Ana comes to her own conclusions about the real Soto Amón after finally having a real conversation with him at dinner; she can even predict the course of the conversation. She tells herself: "Ana teme que ahora comience a hablar de la jaula dorada de su agotado matrimonio: una boda temprana, yo era tan joven, no me entiendo con mi mujer, los dos somos desgraciados, y el peso del poder, y estoy tan solo" (*Crónica* 268). After Ana imagines this justification monologue explaining why he is not with his wife, Soto Amón actually begins the story of his failed marriage due to having gotten married at such a young age. At the same time during the meal, Ana becomes disappointed with his gallantries, his use of worn-out lines such as "es como si te conociera desde hace mucho," because it is upsetting to her "al reconocer esas frases tan oídas" (269). Nevertheless, she knows that the night will end with sex, empty and void of love, even though an intimate spiritual connection is actually what she is looking for. She decides to spend the night in his arms by means of "la inercia de este año de deseos,

arrastrada por la minúscula esperanza de que aún sea distinto” (270). According to Amell, Soto Amón possesses “the remarkable ability to generate a spirit of dedication and servility [...] through his subduing presence and tyrannizing indifference” (*Odyssey* 50). Because he is her boss, Ana feels a mix of love and hate toward him. With a sarcastic tone Ana imagines how the night will probably end:

Y con entristecida certidumbre, Ana intuye en un segundo el desarrollo de la noche, él me desnudará con mano hábil y ajena, simularemos unas caricias vacías de intención, nos amaremos sin decir nada en un coito impersonal, Eduardo tendrá un orgasmo ajeno de mí, sin abrazarme, sin verme, sin recordar seguramente quién soy yo. Después habrá un discreto, mínimamente amable momento de descanso, y de inmediato la mirada al reloj, lo siento, pero me tengo que marchar, dirá él, es lo estipulado con mi mujer. (*Crónica* 270)

The night ended exactly as Ana thought it would, but she decides to play a different role than the one she foresaw. With confidence and assurance, she insists “No me acompañes: voy a coger un taxi,” which causes “una sombra de duda, un relámpago de suspicacia” in Soto Amón (271). The tables turn because Ana takes control and shows a sense of security in herself while Soto Amón is left confused and dumbfounded, even a bit insecure. Ana loses her innocence when she realizes that there is no such thing as a knight in shining armor. In the following quote, Amell describes the purpose of Ana’s fantasy: “Curiosamente, Ana ya sabe de antemano todo lo que él hará y dirá cuando por fin se llegan a juntar una noche. Sin embargo, quería tener esta experiencia, la necesitaba para librarse de veras y empezar a ser su propia persona” (“Una crónica” 78). With the realization of a dream that ends in a real disappointment, Ana is able to abandon her romantic myth and as Amell suggests, examine her own identity. Upon tackling this final example of loss, Ana dedicates herself to putting her ideas on paper: “Sólo le duele que fuera el propio Soto Amón quien se quitara la corbata en un automático, bien ensayado,

autosuficiente gesto. Un gesto cruel y poderoso que [...] puede ser un buen comienzo para ese libro que ahora está segura de escribir” (*Crónica* 273). After a bad night, something positive does emerge.

Due to her losses, Ana is able to write her chronicle. She and her friends experience the loss of youth, the loss of love and finally the loss of innocence. She decides that her book will be “un apunte, una crónica del desamor cotidiano, rubricada por la mediocridad de ese nudo de seda deshecho por la rutina y el tedio” (*Crónica* 273). Through her writing, Ana is able to enjoy a better appreciation and understanding of life in contemporary post-Franco Spain. As Davies explains: “The discursive and historical reconstruction undertaken by Ana is the chronicle she starts to write and by the implied author in the novel *Crónica del desamor* leads to recognition, insight, and understanding” (107). Ana confronts loss through the writing process and encounters personal meaning during a period of discovery in her life.

La hija del caníbal

For Lucía Romero, her existence has resulted in a series of one loss after another, and upon turning forty years of age she finds herself in an abyss of confusion. Because of her body’s physical changes, she no longer recognizes herself, nor does she recognize the man she married, and she now focuses on trying not to fall to pieces as she approaches her final demise, death. In her initiation novel *La hija del caníbal*, Rosa Montero describes the step from youth to maturity as a second puberty when “tienes que redactar tu visión y entendimiento del mundo; debes volver a definir tu identidad” (Elorrieta 1). The narrator, Lucía, who represents herself in the first person and at times

in the third person because “ella suele contemplarse como si fuese la protagonista de un libro” (Peña 160), is suffering from this second puberty. The novel represents the written product of Lucía due to the crisis that she suffers upon realizing her own passing from youth to middle age brought on by the kidnapping of her husband, Ramón.

Montero introduces the theme of loss as part of the changes that one experiences upon growing old. In an interview with Javier Escudero she comments that “pues esto es asumir la pérdida, asumir la muerte, asumir que vivir es perder. Perderlo todo, absolutamente todo” (Escudero “La presencia” 33). In the same fashion, Peña describes this same pessimistic view as applied to the narrator: “Desde su mirada, la existencia suma una pérdida tras otra: los sueños de ser diferente, las ambiciones literarias, el aventurarse al amor, la ilusión de mejorar y crecer, abandonos provisionales que van sitiándola” (152). The protagonist/narrator is forty-three years old and upon losing her husband she enters in a mid-life crisis in which she commences to examine every aspect of her life. Through the protagonist’s reflections within her own writing, Montero expresses three different types of losses that Lucía suffers: loss of youth, loss of love and loss of innocence, losses that Ana in *Crónica del desamor*, Lucía in *La función Delta*, Leola in *Historia del Rey Transparente* and Rosa in *La loca de la casa* also experience, but each at different times in their lives. In order to reflect about her new life without Ramón and confront these losses, Lucía writes her thoughts and her anxieties in the novel. She employs the writing process as a way to recuperate her identity, even creating a new identity of an independent woman and successful writer. According to Ciplijauskaitė, “Casi siempre, el acto de escribir lleva a la liberación: en los siglos anteriores, con refugiarse en la imaginación; en nuestros días, cerciorándose del propio

potencial y exigiendo que éste sea reconocido” (70). With her newfound confidence after rescuing her husband, Lucía writes to liberate herself and confront loss.

Loss of Youth

The loss of youth is an anxiety that enslaves Lucía’s mind. She realizes that she is not the same person physically as she once was and this frightens her: “Nada hay hoy en mí que sea igual a la Lucía de hace veinte años. Nada, salvo el empeño de creerme la misma” (*Hija* 51). Escudero classifies her feelings as “el desengaño ante las miserias del cuerpo” (“La presencia” 23). She worries about losing the ability to attract attention from men or simply becoming invisible, the same worry that we find in Cecilio’s character, Ana Antón’s homosexual friend in *Crónica del desamor*: “De los 45 en adelante, dicen las groseras tablas de estadísticas, como si a partir de ese mojón se extendiera el espacio exterior, la Tierra del Nunca Jamás, el despreciable universo de los Invisibles” (*Hija* 112). In order to avoid turning into one of the dreaded “invisibles” as quickly, Lucía engages in a type of nightly ritual including applying gel for her eyes, firming lotions for her chest and other special creams and moisturizers for combating wrinkles and cellulite. Lucía’s age makes her feel old and unattractive to the opposite sex. She expresses her insecurities about the prospect of flirting with a twenty-one year old: “no estaba preparada psicológicamente para coquetear con un muchacho como Adrián” (78). She lacks self-confidence, which in turn creates a pessimistic tone throughout the novel. Pilar Bellido Navarro explains that *La hija del caníbal* provides “una reflexión sobre la muerte, la soledad, la vejez y el paso del tiempo que, desde nuestro punto de vista, resulta deprimente de tan real” (256). Therefore, according to Lucía, part of the journey away

from youth and toward old age includes to some extent the loss of physical attractiveness, and to some degree, a loss of confidence in oneself as well.

In *La hija del caníbal* Montero employs mutilation as a symbol of the loss of youth, which as a result changes identity. Félix Roble loses his youth when he builds and detonates a bomb that results in one casualty and the mutilation of his hand. The loss of his three fingers leads to the dawning of a new truth for Félix: “Fui aprendiendo de verdad lo que es la pérdida. Cómo no aprenderlo, si vivir es perder, precisamente. Desde entonces, desde mis doce años, lo he ido perdiendo todo. La vista, el oído, la agilidad, la memoria” (*Hija* 94). Félix’s identity changes with his loss: “mi mano reventada era una especie de condecoración de anarquista duro y veterano” (94). He stops being a boy from that moment on; the scar ends up being a reminder of his culpability and also a symbol of the anarchist’s cause.

At the train station Félix meets a discouraged young man, who like him, “su mano izquierda, la mano con la que sujetaba la cartera, estaba mutilada” and decides to give him some advice (*Hija* 323). It is a scene that mirrors a similar experience that Félix had in 1933 when an elderly man approached him with sound advice. Félix explains that “todos nos cruzamos en algún momento de nuestras vidas con nuestro yo futuro” (323).

Escudero maintains that:

Las abundantes imágenes excrementales [...] residuos corporales, desperdicios, malos olores—asociadas a la vejez y a la muerte, al deterioro y a la descomposición, refuerzan en un plano simbólico la visión pesimista que preside la obra de Montero, la percepción de una realidad corporal y de un cosmos en continua degradación. (*España Contemporánea* 24)

In other words, Félix's two encounters, both characterized by mutilation, sustain the pessimistic idea that the loss of youth is unavoidable and carries on through the generations.

Another example of mutilation that symbolizes loss of youth as well as identity is Lucía's automobile accident where she loses both her uterus and her teeth. Lucía relates the emptiness she sees in her mouth after taking out her false teeth with the emptiness she feels on the inside: "Mi boca es el sepulcro de mi hija" (*Hija* 315). Her youth corresponds to the ability to procreate, and the lack of this ability, represented by mutilation, changes Lucía's identity.¹⁰ Knights believes that "the issue of maternity is again central to *La hija del caníbal* as a focal part of Lucía's forty-something crisis is the realisation that she is a daughter who will never be a mother" (215). Escudero adds that her impossibility to procreate signifies "la imposibilidad de trascender la muerte" ("La presencia" 34), which produces sheer terror in the protagonist. Since Lucía cannot return to the past to recuperate her youth or her ability to have children, she finds another way to overcome death and to procreate, which is through writing.

Montero includes still other examples of mutilation that relate to physical losses and changes in identity in the novel. For example, Lucía calls her father "El Caníbal," which provokes grotesque mental images, because during the winter of the Spanish Civil War he is forced to eat "un filete de brazo al amigo muerto" after finding himself trapped and lost in the woods (*Hija* 113).

Lucía's father is always eager to create stories, to essentially lie in order to entertain his audiences.¹¹ Although the narrator admits that the cannibalism story could

¹¹ Later in this study, I will analyze the use of writing as a means to overcome infertility.

simply be a lie from this veteran actor, his being a cannibal assumes another meaning that expresses the identity of her father to her. Lucía stops acting so immaturely when she realizes that her father is a normal person who had a life before she was born, with his own fears, weaknesses and errors. With this new perception she decides that her father is not a cannibal, and then rationalizes that “si mi padre no era un caníbal, entonces yo tampoco era la “Hija del Caníbal” (334). Montero employs the idea of mutilation in order to emphasize changes in one’s identity due to the passage of time. Knights corroborates this opinion expressing that “identity itself is discontinuous despite our attempts to maintain a stable, coherent sense of self” (211). Lucía also notes this inconstant element of self and identity: “la identidad de cada cual es algo fugitivo y casual y cambiante” (*Hija* 12). The physical changes caused by old age and even mutilation contribute to the instability of identity for the characters in *La hija del caníbal*, while at the same time reflecting the brevity of life. Lucía uses writing in order to understand the world that surrounds her and to establish some sort of order to an ever-changing world.

The hostage, Ramón, sends his own pinky finger from his left hand to his wife in order to make the story of his kidnapping more believable. With the mutilation of his hand, the identity of Ramón begins to change for Lucía and the reader. The “rutinario, aburrido, poco expresivo e indolente” Ramón becomes part of the Spanish mafia. It is a fact that only becomes obvious after the amputation of his finger. Lucía laments: “Los escritores-profetas del sentimiento ñoño le llaman a eso madurar, aclararse las ideas y asumir la edad, pero a mí me parece que es como pudrirse” (*Hija* 123). In this sense, aging is the same as rotting, just like a severed body part. Upon using examples of

mutilation, the author formulates a pessimistic and grotesque tone about the passing of youth to old age and the inevitable change of identity. In her article “Vivir en una nube” Montero comments on *La hija del caníbal*: “El libro entero es una reflexión sobre la identidad, qué somos, si es que la conseguimos, cómo logramos reconocernos a nosotros mismos o cuál es el enigmático mecanismo que nos permite recordar nuestro propio nombre” (351). Espido Freire recapitulates the mutilations in the novel saying that “Habla de miembros perdidos, de dedos que flotan [...] Habla de dientes, de muchos dientes. De esos pedazos blancos que el cuerpo emplea para repetirnos, en la calavera del espejo Memento mori, recuerda que eres mortal” (3). These mutilations are examples and reminders of one’s mortality, a repeated theme throughout the novel.

Freud states in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” that two opposing drives exist in human behavior: the sexual drive and the death drive, commonly referred to as Eros and Thanatos. While Eros guides the creative or life force, Thanatos craves destruction and non-existence. Freud argues, “If we reasonably suppose, on the basis of all our experience without exception, that every living thing dies [...], then we can only say that *the goal of all life is death*” (166). Like the passing of youth, an ever approaching death is another preoccupation that Lucía endures: “A veces me pregunto si la Perra-Foca tendrá conciencia de su finitud. Si le dará miedo morirse, como a mí” (*Hija* 95). Lucía fears non-existence rather than yearns for it.¹² Death is the last step of life that provokes disillusionment “por la evidencia trágica e inexorable de que somos títeres en manos del

¹² Freud explains that the death instinct, or the unconscious wish to die, indicates a desire to not exist: “One of our strongest motives for believing in the existence of death drives is indeed the fact that we have perceived the dominant tendency of the psyche, and perhaps of nervous life in general, to be the constant endeavor – as manifested in the pleasure principle – to reduce inner stimulative tension, to maintain it at a steady level, to resolve it completely (the *Nirvana principle*, as Barbara Low has called it)” (184-5).

tiempo y la muerte” (Bellido Navarro 259). Lucía describes her trepidation as a “pozo que te vas cavando alrededor a medida que creces, ese miedo exudado gota a gota, tan tuyo como tu piel, el pánico de saberte viva y condenada a muerte” (*Hija* 67). Her middle-age crisis beginning at age forty worsens the torment that she feels in her mind. Lucía understands that she can characterize her existence by the loss of her youthful appearance, her inability to be a mother and the loss of time. With a pessimistic attitude, she only sees death as a sad end to a life she has not been able to live to the fullest, not a relief as the *Nirvana principle* would indicate. For Lucía, the passing of youth results in only one ending; this is death.

A consequence of the loss of youth upon reaching a mature age is the true comprehension of the loss of time. Part of the reason for the crisis that Lucía endures is her being forty-something without having truly lived. In an interview with Gorka Elorrieta, Montero blames Lucía’s passivity for her feelings of loss: “Por culpa de esa pasividad la protagonista femenina ha llegado a los cuarenta años con una existencia lastimosa; no tiene amigos, trabaja en algo que no le gusta nada, no se atreve a romper su relación amorosa [...] Siente que no ha vivido nada” (2). After having spent ten years in a loveless relationship which endures due to routine rather than passion, Lucía experiences the illusion of a new life with her love affair with Adrián. Her brief relationship with this young man causes her to grasp “todas mis vidas no vividas, de los hijos que no tuve, las cosas que no hice y los años que desperdicié” (*Hija* 316). Lucía admits that her own passive behavior has made her become frustrated with herself: “Callaba demasiado, consentía demasiado, asentía demasiado; era asquerosamente femenina en su silencio

público, mientras por dentro la frustración rugía” (42). Because of her inaction, Lucía loses years of her youth and of her life.

Loss of Love

Another type of loss in the novel *La hija del caníbal* is that of love. Lucía only has one relationship of pure passion and it is with a married man, Hans: “Le deseaba con todo su cuerpo, que es lo mismo que decir que le amaba con todo su espíritu” (*Hija* 117). It is a romance that ends when he decides to go back to his wife, which produces great heartache in Lucía: “Y, así como al herido todos los golpes le van a parar a la reciente brecha, al enfermo de desamor toda la realidad le aumenta la angustia de la pérdida” (117). This loss leaves Lucía feeling alone. Each memory, from the scent of his cologne to the song that they used to listen to together, causes her pain and feelings of melancholy. Montero explains the danger in a passionate love in her interview with Javier Escudero: “Esa tragedia del amor, que es un sueño que siempre está condenado a la destrucción, es una tragedia muy conmovedora, muy literaria, sobre la que me gusta escribir” (“La creación literaria” 216).

In her metafictional novel, Lucía writes that her doomed marriage to Ramón turns into “una rutina plana y miserable” (*Hija* 116). She misses the emotion and desire that she experienced with her ex-boyfriend Hans. Lucía stops loving Ramón, who for her, converts into a “débil, desvitalizado e insufrible” (313) being little by little. The un-love lasts for years. In fact, they marry after a courtship of nine years just to break up the monotony of the relationship. For the protagonist this loss of love is like experiencing a death: “Algo muere dentro de ti cuando se te acaba la ilusión, cuando ya no encuentras la voluntad necesaria para seguir queriendo a la misma persona” (313). Due to Lucía’s

dreadful dissatisfaction in her love life with Ramón before the kidnapping, her loss of love for Ramón is hardly surprising.

Another example of the loss of love occurs between Lucía's parents. The placement of several examples of un-love between various characters in the novel shows the universality of this type of loss. The Romeros spend thirty years together in spite of many difficult times wrought with sordid affairs, unforgiving criticism on both sides and deep emotional suffering. The narrator explains: "Mis padres se separaron hace más de una década. Atrás quedó el embeleso de su noviazgo, el aburrimiento de su madurez y la exasperación de los tiempos finales. Todo perdido" (*Hija* 106). Lucía expresses her continuous worry about loss because for her "la pérdida, cualquier pérdida, es un aperitivo de la muerte" (107).¹³ In this novel, Montero utilizes failed romantic relationships to highlight the theme of loss.

In the same way that the relationship between Lucía and Hans is one of foolish passion, so are the affairs that both Félix and Lucía's father establish with the entertainer "Manitas de Plata." Amalio Gayo, a dark-skinned theatrical performer with thick eyebrows, is donned the nickname "Little Hands of Silver" because she sings, dances and plays the guitar with great enthusiasm and talent. Félix comments that "la mujer te puede sacar a la luz toda la locura y la destrucción que tenías dentro de ti" (*Hija* 246). Félix's loss of this love due to his own jealousy and insecurities causes him great pain and misery, in the same way Lucía suffers when she loses Hans. Félix compares love with a drug: "Te ofrece el paraíso, pero te mata" (246). Lucía's father also has a love affair with

¹³ Bellido Navarro believes that the inclusion of the topics of failed marriages and divorce in the contemporary novel possesses important social value: "La caída del régimen franquista no trajo el mundo feliz tan esperado y las crisis laborales, de la familia, del matrimonio, de la pareja, de las relaciones sexuales comúnmente desgraciadas ocupan el centro de interés de nuestra última novelística" (251).

Amalia, one that he describes as a sickness that results in the eventual destruction of his marriage. He intensely falls in love with Amalia, but later, after his wife learns of his infidelity, she punishes him by making his life impossible. Lucía explains that when the passion in a relationship ends, it enters into a dull and boring routine and the connection between partners is lost. Montero does not offer healthy relationships in the novel with the exception of the now widowed Félix and his wife. The other marriages end in divorce and the love affairs in hatred. It is a pessimistic view of love and the losses that it entails.

The marriage between Félix and Margarita is the only example of a truly happy relationship in the novel. This is partly due to the fact that Félix represents optimism in the narration, but in the end he also loses the love of his life because she dies. Thus, Montero repeats the principal theme of the novel: to live is to lose. Like Lucía's parents, Félix and Margarita are together for thirty years, a time he describes as "esta es la felicidad" (*Hija* 255). However, Margarita never learns of Félix's former gangster lifestyle because during the time of full *franquismo*, Félix sees himself obligated to erase his past in order to protect her. Here Montero demonstrates again the impossibility of completely knowing someone, not even after thirty years of marriage. In another part Montero describes this reality with a disappointing tone:

Como todos los pasos iniciáticos, me parece traumático ver cómo la gente normal, cómo lo que tú creías que es la normalidad no es la normalidad, lo que tú creías que era la idea del mundo no es la idea del mundo. Gente que tú creías normal, entre comillas, resulta que mienten como bellacos, que hacen las cosas más aterradoras y que te siguen sonriendo como si fueran personas. (Escudero "Entre la literatura" 339-340)

Margarita, like Lucía, lives many years with her husband without knowing his true identity. Either way, the story of the Roble family gives an optimistic view of love, even

with the presence of secrets of a past life that, according to Montero, are inevitable. There are losses in un-love just as there are in love. Lucía writes about all these aspects of loss in order to comprehend them better. She is in search of her own identity, but she is confused because of all the occurrences surrounding the kidnapping and all the lies. Through writing, she is able to formulate a new identity for herself while at the same time understand the meaning of her past.

Loss of Innocence

The third type of loss in *La hija del caníbal* is that of innocence. In an interview with Javier Escudero, Montero comments that in maturity “hay una pérdida de inocencia igual que en la adolescencia” (“Entre la literatura” 333). Because of the kidnapping and the conversations with Félix during the last few months, Lucía learns that “si en la pubertad entierras la niñez, en la frontera de la edad madura entierras la juventud, es decir, vuelves a sentirte devastado por la revelación de lo real y pierdes los restos de candor que te quedaban” (*Hija* 326). Lucía discovers realities about her parents and about herself, about Ramón and the relationship that they share along with a new understanding about society in general. Upon maturing, Lucía loses her innocence and is no longer blind regarding many of the truths of the world. Like Lucía, Félix also loses his innocence, but he does it at a much younger age due to his many activities that contrast with the narrator’s passivity. The understanding reached about his personality, his family and society help Lucía to become a freer woman: “Ahora que les he dejado ser lo que ellos quieran, creo que estoy empezando a ser yo misma” (335). The Lucía at the end of novel, a very distinct woman from the one at the beginning, can say: “Hoy creo entender el mundo” (337).

La función Delta

Due to the structure of the novel in two temporal spaces (the past from thirty years ago and the present), we are able to explore the types and consequences of loss from two different stages in the life of Lucía Ramos in *La función Delta*. During the time of Lucía's thirties we encounter several losses similar to those of Ana in *Crónica del desamor*. She suffers from an "amor pasión" with a married man that causes her to feel the loss of love, which in turn is followed by extreme loneliness. She also suffers from panic and stress that correspond to her fear of growing old and losing her youth. At age sixty, Lucía, the eldest of the protagonist analyzed in this study, enters into the final stage of life, which is death. Her writing is the last step, her ultimate goal that she wishes to achieve in order to leave a part of herself to society before dying.

Loss of Youth

The apprehension about death and the loss of youth are evident from the beginning in *La función Delta*. In her diary, Lucía remembers the fear that she had at thirty years of age; she was afflicted about the future, knowing and worrying that one day she would become old: "Yo era por entonces tan alocadamente joven que me desagradaban los viejos, o, por mejor decir, me entristecían y angustiaban, me recordaban un futuro que prefería ignorar" (*Función* 9). Lucía's thoughts about the sad farewell of her youth can be compared to those of Ana Antón of *Crónica del desamor*. Lucía suffers from "instantes de vértigo" upon turning thirty, but, because of the premiere of her movie, she does not experience the same feelings of failure in the workplace as Ana. In fact, Ana at the age of thirty, continues working in a job without hopes for stability, but

Lucía at thirty enjoys a steady job where she creates advertisements with “un toque moderno, para que no resultaran anticuados ante las exigencias de las feministas” (27), in addition to being a director of a movie. Ballesteros comments on the importance of the premiere for Lucía: “La película fue para Lucía el primer gran intento de autoconcienciación de su papel de creadora en el mundo. Constituye el máximo esfuerzo para salir del mundo de la publicidad en el que ha estado encerrada hasta ese momento” (Ballesteros 99). Although Lucía fears the loss of youth, she does not experience the same frustrations at work as Ana.¹⁴

Each description regarding old people that Lucía presents in her writings is negative. An example is how she portrays her depressed and very lonely neighbor, doña Maruja, a sixty-six year old woman who tries to commit suicide over and over again, and even proposes to Lucía that she help her with “un empujoncito para entrar al río de la muerte” (*Función* 14). Lucía relates in her diary that “los viejos eran entonces para mí tan inescrutables e impredecibles como los niños pequeños” (12). Escudero mentions the baroque element of the descriptions of the characters in some of Montero’s novels when depicting the effects of aging: “Su deterioro físico está descrito usando un realismo feísta, de clara filiación quevediana, aspecto que actualiza en la narrativa de la escritora el tema barroco del desengaño ante las miserias del cuerpo” (“La presencia” 23). It is easy to understand why Lucía and the other protagonists fear losing their youth because the future is so bleak for the aged in Montero’s novels. According to Escudero: “la vejez

¹⁴ Pilar Bellido Navarro denotes the obvious parallelisms between *Crónica del desamor* and *La función Delta*: “Se repiten personajes en las narraciones, incluso las protagonistas son muy parecidas, Ana y Lucía son de la misma edad, por tanto, pertenecen a la misma generación (la vejez de Lucía es sólo la representación del futuro de ambas que es el mismo de la autora), viven en Madrid, son emprendedoras e independientes y la una lleva al cine la novela que la otra había anunciado anteriormente y que podemos suponer que llegó a escribir” (259).

aparece siempre presentada como una etapa trágica y solitaria, donde la vida carece de sentido y donde el ser humano, carcomido por la enfermedad o la decadencia física, aguarda temeroso el cumplimiento de su condena” (“La presencia” 23-4).

Lucía’s fears about her physical deterioration also manifest themselves in her dreams. In the following passage, Lucía comments on the terror that a recurring nightmare produces in her:

Me sueño despertando, levantándome y asomándome al espejo. Ese es el comienzo del horror: ahí, reflejada en el azogue, me descubro repentinamente convertida en una anciana, como si en el transcurso de la noche alguien me hubiera robado media vida. Me miro y me miro, horrorizada, intento reconocerme bajo las arrugas, bajo la piel decrepita. (*Función* 159)

The fear of the loss of physical attraction, after losing one’s youth, is a theme that we see repeated in all five novels analyzed here. Lucía has in her mind a type of outline of her life in which with each age come certain meanings. For example, for her, turning sixty means crossing the threshold of old age: “Cuando cumpla los sesenta comenzaré oficialmente mi vejez, y la perspectiva de un decaer físico me aterra” (*Función* 162).

Lucía’s recurring nightmare, along with her comments in her diary, clearly shows her preoccupation about losing her beauty and becoming a decrepit, undesirable old woman.

Another loss that signifies the loss of youth is the cessation of Lucía’s menstrual cycle. Lucía narrates, “La amargura de la menopausia reside en lo irreversible del proceso, en que tu cuerpo cierra una página de vida y tú no puedes detenerlo” (*Función* 165). Employing the metaphor of life as a compilation of volumes, menopause is another reminder for Lucía that her youth is coming to a close like the pages of a book. While reflecting on the blood that no longer flows each month, Lucía reasons that living unquestionably means losing: “Perdí mi juventud, pierdo las esperanzas, perderé mi vida,

he perdido a Miguel, (es posible que) perdiera o perdiese la oportunidad de ser una buena realizadora, estamos perdiendo el mundo que conocíamos y en el que crecí” (165). The referente to blood in Montero’s works reinforces Cixous’ theory that challenges women to write with their bodies: “Cixous hace hincapié en el pecho y en la vagina para concentrarse en los líquidos propiamente femeninos como el líquido vaginal, la sangre de la menstruación, la leche materna” (Gascón Vera “La escritura femenina” 61).

Throughout the novel Montero represents youth in a positive light that contrasts with the presentation of old age. María de Día who “se dibuja a veces de pequeñas flores por las mejillas, con diversos colores de *eye-liner* [...], estrellas en la barbilla, o una pequeña luna en azul plateado” (*Función* 71) stands out against María de Noche, just as Lucía of thirty years of age differs from the Lucía at sixty. María de Día is eighteen years old and innocent, while María de Noche according to Lucía’s description is “una mujer madura, casi de mi edad, y tiene ojos de haber visto demasiado” (*Función* 35). The day represents youth whereas the night signifies old age: “María de Noche es la penumbra” (35). Montero makes the connection between María de Día and Lucía when she was young: “Qué joven que es María de Día. A veces su juventud me divierte, me reafirma en mí misma” (70). Later in the novel, when Lucía realizes that she suffers from something much more serious than Menière’s disease, María de Día leaves the hospital. Her departure is symbolic because she says good-bye to the mature Lucía with cancer just as the young Lucía, free from illness does. For Susanna Regazzoni, by using contrasts: “La autora intenta captar, a través de momentos de fulgor vital, el sentido de la vida de la protagonista Lucía, cruzando dos niveles cronológicos: la juventud llena de ilusiones y la cansada vejez” (256).

Loss of Love

In both time frames, the loss of love is another subject that torments Lucía. She aspires to be successful in her new career as a movie director, but she also fears living her life without the company of a man. She is willing to sacrifice her profession in order to avoid loneliness. For example, she does not produce any other movies while she still maintains a relationship with Miguel, with whom she lived for twenty years. Although Montero presents men in a more positive light in *La función Delta* than in *Crónica del desamor*¹⁵ and *La hija del caníbal*, the female characters still suffer the loss of love, and in the case of the protagonist, a loss of creativity as a result of her romantic relationship. In the hospital thirty years later, it is also obvious the feelings of dependence that Lucía has for the presence of a man by her side: “Ayer no vino Ricardo, y hoy parece que tampoco vendrá ya. Temo que no vuelva más [...] Sin él la rutina hospitalaria se vuelve atroz” (*Función* 175). Lucía has enjoyed several romantic interests during the span of her life, but she only commits to three important relationships: the affairs with Hipólito and Miguel during her thirties and the friendship that develops into a romantic love with Ricardo at the end of her life.¹⁶

Montero includes several examples of un-love in *La función Delta*. Lucía reflects on her love life: “Yo sufría una inquietante tendencia a enamorarme de hombres problemáticos, hombres casados, hombres emparejados, hombres fugaces” (*Función* 98).

¹⁵ Bellido Navarro describes the characteristics of the male characters in *Crónica del desamor*: “Los personajes masculinos son los peor tratados, todos ellos ejemplos del antihéroe. Personajes de cartón piedra, monolíticos e inalterables, orgullosos, despóticos, autoritarios, fanfarrones, cobardes, que no resisten el más mínimo análisis de construcción psicológica” (254).

¹⁶ Lucía has maintained a friendship with Ricardo since her youth. They attempt to be together romantically, but it only results in an embarrassing and uncomfortable scene. The encounter ends in “un abrazo confortable y asexuado” (*Función* 155). The two decide to just be friends until they reunite thirty years later.

Lucía hypocritically writes in her diary about the pathetic relationships of her friend Rosa and her inability to be alone. She too perceives solitude as an unbearable state of being.

Lucía writes: “Rosa sufría la extraordinaria debilidad de no poder quedarse sola. Era este miedo lo que la forzaba a mantener relaciones absurdas con hombres absurdos” (52).

However, Rosa does find some relief from those distressing feelings of loneliness with her “manada” or herd of friends, and after divorcing her husband, her children satisfy a part of her need for companionship.

When Lucía writes a journal entry from the time period of her thirties, she highlights a conversation she has with a woman recently abandoned by her husband of seventeen years. This fallen apart marriage that Lucía learns of from a stranger at a party is another example of un-love in *La función Delta*. Alone at forty years of age, she confesses her dismal outlook to Lucía: “Mi ex marido me pasa un dinero para mí y los niños, pero... yo, claro, no me encuentro cómoda, porque... tengo que buscar trabajo, pero la cosa está tan mal... y... además, ¿qué puedo hacer, si no sé hacer nada? Dios mío, me siento tan perdida” (106). Her husband left her for a younger woman leaving her the responsibility of raising their two children. Through writing, Lucía comments on various failed relationships, but the one that seems the most painful to her is the shattered love affair with Hipólito.

Lucía is Hipólito’s mistress in an affair that she describes as a crazy love without commitments. He is a married man with children and never decides to leave his family for Lucía. Even still, Lucía is in love with him or at least with the idea of being in love. The “amor-pasión” that Lucía describes in her diary helps her to forget the finality of her existence: “Con el amor pasión se busca engañar a la muerte, se intenta alcanzar la

agudeza del vivir, esos instantes intensos en los que llegas a creerte eterna” (*Función* 110). She illustrates the physical reactions in her body when she sees Hipólito and the understanding that love has the ability to give meaning to life:¹⁷

Todos esos síntomas de amor loco y pasional, en suma, no eran más que obligaciones físicas que yo misma me imponía en mi afán por estar enamorada. Y esa falta de amor justo en vísperas de algo que tanto había esperado—la oportunidad de verle, de tocarle, de tenerle por unos días como mío—me produjo primero sorpresa, después el gozo de saberme dueña de mí misma, y por último cierto desmayo, una sensación de íntimo vacío: porque para alguien que, como yo, no creía en ninguna ideología ni respuesta total acogedora, el amor parecía ser la única excusa suficiente ante la vida. (11)

Lucía’s love for Hipólito is actually an obsession. She experiences feelings of desperation and heartache when she is not in his presence and sheer euphoria when he is near. She overly worries about her physical appearance and the words she uses when she speaks to him. Lucía admits: “Me encontraba mucho más guapa a mí misma de morena, y deseaba resultar lo más atractiva posible, deseaba que Hipólito me viera fascinante, que a la vuelta de su huida quedara deslumbrado por lo bruñido de mi piel” (*Función* 86). Totally insecure in the relationship and with the intention of upsetting her lover or at least triggering a reaction, Lucía’s obsession with Hipólito materializes with a letter she eagerly writes: “Sería una carta sangrienta, una carta cruel, una carta que le hiciera daño” (96). Glenn indicates: “It is her assumption that the letter will have the effect of bringing him back to her, humbled and properly contrite, and she is dumbfounded when he calmly accepts the rupture” (“Reader Expectations” 90). In addition, Glenn expresses the idea that the letter serves to show the reader the vindictive and immature nature of the

¹⁷ Because of the apparent loss of the “respuestas salvadoras,” faith in love gives us something in which to believe, as Rosa Montero explains in her interview with Javier Escudero: “Ya no creemos en las respuestas religiosas, no creemos en las respuestas científicas, no creemos en el progreso inexorable de la humanidad, no creemos en el marxismo. No hay respuestas globales que consuelen al ser humano” (Escudero *Arizona Journal* 215).

protagonist (92). Hipólito's indifferent reaction to the letter and his subsequent ending of all communication to Lucía only fuels her mania: "Comprendí que permanecer más tiempo sin verle era algo decididamente insoportable, y comencé a marcar su número de teléfono, cegada por el dolor de la ausencia, que era ya un dolor físico" (*Función* 136). She goes into a jealous rage when she finds out that Hipólito is already involved with another woman. Later Lucía's mind plays tricks on her as she finds his image in marble tables. She recognizes her ridiculous condition upon realizing that the relationship was nothing more than an "interminable sucesión de despedidas" (138) not worthy of the agony she was experiencing. Through writing in her diary, Lucía finds some perspective with regard to the relationship with Hipólito, even though Ricardo warns her that she is seeing the past in black and white. He assures her that Hipólito was neither as selfish nor as arrogant as she describes him.

In her thirties, Lucía begins a new career as a movie director and she possesses professional ambitions as well as personal ones, however she feels a type of weakness because of her situation of being a woman and needing a man in her life. She expresses with reluctance that she feels "como aplastada por siglos de educación femenil que hubieran robado mi integridad, mi paz, mi redondez. Era la maldición de la mujer-pareja, de la mujer-carente, de la mujer apoyo y apoyada" (*Función* 52). Lucía's friend Rosa criticizes her because when she is in the presence of a man, "cambias, te transformas, te conviertes en otra persona, coqueteas tontamente, estableces competencias con las demás mujeres" (53). Cixous explains that this competitive behavior is the result of the socialization of women in a patriarchal society: "Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their

own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves” (“The Laugh” 336). According to Gascón Vera, the idea that Montero tries to develop through the protagonist is “la aceptación creativa y estimulada de la autonomía femenina, el único camino para la verdadera realización personal de la mujer de hoy día” (“Hacia un abordaje” 84-5). In other words, until women can learn to be alone, they will never be free.

Just as the protagonists in the other novels in this study, Lucía, consciously or not, abandons her creativity because of her mate. Alborg suggests that “Lucía ha vivido engañándose en sus relaciones con los hombres, abandonando su carrera sin volver a su vena creativa hasta el punto cuando empieza la novela ya cerca de su muerte” (71). Even Lucía’s friend Ricardo sees her lack of ambition and loss of identity when she is with Miguel. Ricardo points out: “Cuando comenzaste a vivir con Miguel te acabaste como persona. No volviste a hacer una sola película” (*Función* 169). He continues that she entered into mediocrity and turned into the “compañera del matemático,” losing her spark because of “la vieja costumbre femenina, del ancestro” (169). Ricardo understands the problem of Lucía’s unstable identity and attributes this to her upbringing and public education. Ricardo tells Lucía that she is “entre la mujer independiente que querías y creías ser, y la mujer «esposa de» que llevas dentro de ti y para lo que fuiste educada” (168). The diary is the final fruit of her repressed creativity during the many years of living with Miguel.

Rosa’s character finally stops searching for negative relationships. She gives up dating for the sole purpose of avoiding feeling alone. Thirty years later, she shows the acceptance of being alone and the demythification of the happy ending of the novela rosa

(Zatlin “Experimental Fiction” 117). In a letter to Lucía she writes: “A veces, [...] me invade como una desazón, la melancolía de no tener a un hombre a mi lado, de no haber envejecido junto a un compañero idéntico a ti misma [...] Ya sabes, ese futuro ideal que siempre deseé. Pero eso, Lucía mía, es solamente un sueño” (*Función* 283). Lucía, on the other hand, maintains a relationship with Miguel for twenty years just to avoid loneliness. She takes comfort in the living arrangement. In her diary, Lucía wants to convince herself that Miguel was the perfect man, attending to her every need, both physical and emotional. Lucía remembers and writes Miguel’s attentive words: “Pero me tienes que enseñar, me tienes que ayudar a descubrirte, me tienes que decir cómo quieres que te bese, que te acaricie, que te ame” (246). Lucía wants to persuade herself and perhaps Ricardo as well, that the twenty years with Miguel were not wasted. Just as Ricardo refutes Lucía’s negative descriptions of Hipólito, he also denies the picture perfect account that she gives of Miguel: “Pero esta vez me estoy refiriendo a una falsedad absoluta [...] Según tus memorias, Hipólito es de una perversidad total y Miguel parece poseer la exclusiva de la bondad” (127). Ricardo, as the voice of reason, makes Lucía remember that she was bored in her relationship with Miguel and she hid many affairs while living with him. Davies comments on Lucía’s tendency to re-write the past: “She attempts to recapture and understand her past, but in effect rewrites it to suit her retrospective projected self-image” (109).

The relationship that Lucía possesses with Ricardo develops and grows in the hospital and represents a mutual understanding. At last, at the end of her life, Lucía expresses her true thoughts and she finally becomes honest with her feelings. Ricardo is a friend and companion who becomes her lover. He brings about emotions in Lucía that

she has not felt since her youth: “El aliento cálido de su carne me recordó sueños perdidos, me hizo sentir esa ruborizada emoción, ese anticipado gozo de aventura que a veces experimenté antes de hacer el amor cuando era joven” (*Función 221*). After so many losses of love, she finds in an old friend a love between the passionate love she felt with Hipólito and the day-to-day love that she felt for Miguel. Ricardo is the balance between these two types of love that Lucía classifies in her diary. As Davies explains: “He incarnates the destruction of the opposition passion/ companionship. His position represents, rather, a continuum, a process of communication between man and woman which leads to the mutual construction of identity” (116). The relationship with Ricardo is not lost for Lucía; the friendship that they maintain over the years finally turns into love before she dies.

Loss of Innocence

In addition to writing about the loss of youth and love, Lucía also explores the loss of innocence in her diary. Lucía represents this last loss by including various examples of when she loses her naïveté about her own mortality. She complains: “¿Por qué nadie me advirtió en mi juventud de que me iba a morir?” (*Función 267*). Upon losing her innocence, she realizes that youth is momentary and life must eventually come to an end. She admits that “Cuando yo era joven, la muerte no existía. Era sólo muerte en los demás, pero yo me creía eterna y fuerte” (160). In the same way, Lucía frequently makes mistakes between fantasy and fiction. However, the diary helps her write her own truth and later she contrasts this with Ricardo’s memories. Writing is a process that contributes to her self-reflection and understanding, but the diary also serves for the reader to witness various examples of Lucía’s loss of innocence.

Losing one's innocence in many cases is losing one's ignorance. Experience and learning are positive attributes that are gained through the loss of youth. Lucía maintains that during the adolescent years, young men and women do not know what it means to lose and only with loss in general does one lose his or her innocence. Innocence for Lucía has the negative connotation of being ignorant, but the positive connotation of being free of worries and fears. In her old age Lucía explains: "Pero hoy ya he perdido todos mis precarios paraísos" (*Función* 212). She loses her innocence, but with a pessimistic tone, she also loses hope. She admits that "me duele verme de nuevo treintañera, llena de ilusiones, tan inerme en mi pasión de vivir, tan ignorante de dolores futuros" (273). Her melancholy stems from the understanding that her death is rapidly approaching.

In the beginning, Lucía does not believe that her health is actually so delicate. She would tell herself: "Cuando lees estos volúmenes médicos repletos de dolores, siempre crees advertir todos los síntomas en ti misma. Es pura prevención, hipocondría, es simplemente miedo" (*Función* 204). Lucía finally loses her innocence when she no longer believes that she simply suffers from Menière's disease, but from something much graver. She intuitively feels her own death before receiving any test results proving a diagnosis of cancer: "Presiento, sé que estoy enferma, muy enferma, no es verdad lo que me dicen, todos me engañan y me animan con palabras inútiles, Dios mío, es el espanto, el vértigo, el vacío, me siento morir ya" (251). She understands that her headaches and nausea, even losing her sight are very serious symptoms that can be associated with brain tumors, not with just an insignificant virus. She also knows the seriousness of her condition due to her long stay at the hospital that keeps extending month after month. Even though she is

afraid, she must confront the idea of death and she does this through writing. The diary is a way to explore her current preoccupations and to reflect on her past expectations about death. She returns to her past analyzing her false ideas on what old age would be like for her: “A veces me siento estafada y la indignación me quema el ánimo. Estafada por las mentiras en las que crecí, por las mentiras con que me educaron. La serenidad de la vejez. La plácida aceptación del fin. Falso, todo falso” (160). Her attitude today contrasts with the innocence of María de Dña who leads her life with dreams about a limitless future: “Me enterneció su juventud, su credulidad aún intacta. El mundo sigue siendo igual, después de todo” (206).

Lucía finally loses another aspect of her innocence in the hospital because of Ricardo’s frequent visits. He does not agree that Lucía should re-write her past; he does not like how she changes the details of that week from thirty years ago. As a friend, Ricardo reads her memoirs and comments upon them in an honest way: “Te digo la verdad. Ya va siendo hora de que afrontes la realidad” (*Función* 171). He wants Lucía to stop living in a black and white world and to stop lying to herself about the past, especially about her romantic relationships:¹⁸ “¿No te das cuenta de que todo es mucho más sencillo? ¿De que la única realidad era que Hipólito no estaba enamorado de ti? Así de simple” (170). Ricardo serves as a mechanism to bring Lucía back to reality. Davies indicates that “She [Lucía] is the implied author, and although the verisimilitude on which her account depends is undermined by these metafictional strategies, the common sense, masculine, approach of Ricardo does have the effect of anchoring the novel in reality” (113). Although Ricardo is also known as a storyteller, he defends his fictional

¹⁸ With his near brutal honesty, Ricardo comments on the reality of Lucía’s sentimental relationships and her attitude as well as other aspects of her career.

fabrications because he never believes in them as the real truth in the way that Lucía believes her own lies. His stories are for passing the time in the hospital and for having fun. Davies concludes: “The difference between Lucía and himself, according to Ricardo, is that she writes (autobiography) in order to be believed while he consciously tells tall stories or lies (fiction). Presumably, authorial intention is what differentiates the genres” (112). Lucía learns from Ricardo that she cannot change the reality of her past nor invent a past that never happened. Ana María Dotras refers to the purpose of metafiction to focus on the interaction between life and art and the limits between reality and fiction: “Al cuestionar el mundo de la ficción, la novela cuestiona, simultáneamente, el mundo exterior” (195).

It is ironic that María de Noche explains to Lucía that she should return to the innocence of youth at the moment of death. She explains: “Calma, Lucía, calma. Sólo es cuestión de recuperar la inocencia, esa naturalidad de la juventud ante la vida. Los viejos vamos llenándonos de temores artificiales que hay que desechar” (*Función* 275). After a life of learning to fear death, she must return to a mindset free of trepidation and panic, a difficult task for the protagonist. Lucía comments on the phobias she acquired as she grew up: “Vivir es un ir aprendiendo miedos y pavores [...] Aprendí a tener miedo de nadar demasiado lejos de la playa, cuando de niña gozaba perdiéndome en el mar. Aprendí a temer los viajes, a ser claustrofóbica cuando nunca lo había sido” (161). Upon losing her childhood innocence and abandoning the certainty that life would last forever, Lucía fills her mind with terror. Her fear of death nearly paralyzes her: “va apoderándose de ti, que va mordiendo pedazos de tu vida” (161). Due to her loss of innocence, Lucía stops living long before her physical death, and she is conscious of this error: “Si pudiera

recuperar todo aquel tiempo que he vivido embrutecida y sin conciencia de vivir, si hubiera ahorrado todos los días que despilfarré y quemé en el tedio, ahora tendría muchos años de tregua por delante” (263). Lucía wastes many years of her life by not taking advantage of her creativity, in part because of fear. Cixous condemns the fear that women exhibit before the task of writing and expressing their ideas: “I didn’t open my mouth, I didn’t repaint my half of the world. I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and my fear. I said to myself: You are mad!” (335). Although Lucía suffers a desert period with her literary projects, she seizes her right to write with her memoirs at the end of her life.

Historia del Rey Transparente

Over the twenty-five years that Leola includes in her writings, she experiences loss of youth, loss of love and loss of innocence. Her losses provide the material she regards suitable to reflect her uniqueness and to include in her memoirs; these are the experiences she chooses to highlight because through loss, she is able to grow, mature and construct her identity. Writing captures her memories; if living implies losing, then writing is recuperating by reliving the experiences and documenting them on paper. Leola’s words also provide her with a sense of comfort: “quizá en mi deseo de hacer una enciclopedia no hay sino el anhelo de construir un nido de palabras en el que guarecerme y asentarme” (*Historia* 367). In addition, she wants to share her experiences and acquired knowledge with those who follow her.

Through the loss of her beloved Jacques, Leola abandons her home and undertakes the mission of searching for her first love and saving him. This loss incites

action, and Leola meets the challenge, albeit with some hesitation and doubt in the beginning. Similar to Lucía Romero of *La hija del caníbal*, who while looking for her husband, embarks on a series of adventures, Leola's spark into action also initiates with the loss of love, but she eventually loses sight of her original purpose for the search: "[A]hora me daba cuenta de que llevaba demasiado tiempo sin recordar a Jacques. Yo le había abandonado y le había traicionado con mi olvido porque prefería este bello mundo de los nobles" (*Historia* 211). Both Lucía and Leola gain much more than what was originally lost: new-found self-confidence and a more complete sense of self. In her essay "Conversations," Cixous expresses that "culturally, women have been taught how to lose, they've been sent to the school of losing. But there are men who have learnt how to lose, who have been to the school of losing who have come out victorious, transforming their loss into blessing. Some of them are our greatest poets. It's not a question of sex. It's a question of apprenticeship. Which school did you go to?" (Cixous "Conversations" 229). In line with Cixous' declaration, Leola transforms her loss into a great literary work, which is the autobiography of her life from age fifteen to forty, the text the reader holds in his or her hands.

Loss of Youth

As with the other protagonists in this study, Leola realizes her own loss of youth over the years and finds it a topic important to incorporate in her writings, both in the autobiography as well as in the encyclopedia. One definition she includes illustrates this point: "Melancolía: aguda conciencia del latir de la vida en su carrera veloz hacia la muerte, turbadora emoción entre la belleza que se nos acaba" (*Historia* 449). Leola's writings of her youth demonstrate her years of experience coming through her pen.

While describing her adolescence, she tries to depict her past with the eyes of a fifteen year old, but the voice of an experienced forty year old, sensitive of her now scarred body, actually emerges. She writes: “Corremos campo a través hasta nuestra poza en el Lot y nos metemos vestidos...Pero mi cuerpo es sano y joven, y está intacto” (17). Over time, Leola’s physical changes, due to aging or the result of engaging in battle, indicate a loss of youth.

Throughout the novel, Leola refers to her body as it changes with the passing of time. Cixous exclaims: “And why don’t you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it” (“The Laugh” 335). Leola writes the body and in turn puts herself into the text: “Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth” (338). Leola’s disfigured and marked body represents a map of past struggles, portraying the perilous life of a knight and warrior: “He perdido dos dedos de la mano izquierda, el meñique y el anular, rebanados por el hacha de un enigmático, y tengo el cuerpo roturado por las cicatrices de las heridas que Nyneve ha cosido con milagroso acierto” (*Historia* 228). In the following passage, Leola demonstrates her insecurities regarding these imperfections while attempting to understand her lover’s lack of interest in her: “[O] quizá sea mi culpa; quizá sea cosa de mi mano incompleta, de mis dedos cercenados por la espada; de mi cuerpo cosido a costurones, viriles cicatrices de guerrero que deforman mis hechuras de mujer” (301).

Clearly, Leola is unhappy with her aging body, scarred from many years of fighting with a sword. It is no longer youthful in appearance, and this changes her concept of self: “Pero mi cuerpo, escrito por las cicatrices como el cuerpo de Filippo está

escrito por sus tatuajes griegos, no tiene nada de intacto y juvenil” (419). Judith Keagan Gardiner points out in her essay “On Female Identity and Writing by Women” the connection between the body and identity: “Women are encouraged to judge their inner selves through their external physical appearance and to equate the two. At the same time, they are taught to create socially approved images of themselves by manipulating their dress, speech and behavior” (360). Leola equates her sexual attractiveness with the condition of her body. While experiencing an intimate moment with León she looks at herself with disgust wondering why he would ever find her sexually attractive:

Me miro a mí misma: los senos pequeños, la complexión delgada y huesuda, las cicatrices de distintos tonos, dependiendo de los años transcurridos desde la herida: rosada en el hombro, tostada en la cadera, anaranjada en el tórax. Retorcidas cuerdas de carne que me afean. ¿Cómo puedo gustarle? Me estremezco y tiro de la piel de borrego para taparnos. No quiero que me vea. (432).

Leola’s body tells a story much like the autobiography we are reading. As her youth fades, her life story manifests on her body.

Leola writes the body because it represents her unique identity and it reflects the loss of her youth. She also feels the effects of growing older in her stamina and daily tasks: “Los eslabones tiran de mí hacia la tierra y mis músculos ya no son lo que eran. Debo de estar envejeciendo, y también me he ablandando con mi quieta vida de mujer, con la fácil vida ciudadana” (*Historia* 305). She is disappointed how over time she has lost her hard muscles and athleticism.

In addition to her own aging, Leola notes her companions growing older. First, she observes Nyneve’s appearance: “También Nyneve está envejeciendo. Ignoro su edad: ella dice que es varias veces centenaria, pero supongo que ése es uno de sus juegos de palabras” (314). Her uncomplimentary description of Nyneve’s fading beauty further

shows Leola's preoccupation with the loss of youth: "Últimamente, sin embargo, algo semejante a la edad o quizá al cansancio se está remansando en pequeños rincones de su rostro: en las tensas comisuras de su boca, en sus ojos apagados y hundidos, en su cabello rojo fuego cada vez más entreverado por la plata (314-5). Next, Leola describes Eloísa, another friend around sixty years old who lives in a convent: "[Es] uno de esos seres que parecen haber nacido siendo ya ancianos. Sus rasgos son regulares y, según dicen, en su juventud fue muy hermosa. Pero nada de aquel esplendor se trasluce ahora en su cara marchita y arrugada, en su gesto mortecino y melancólico" (*Historia* 369). Leola focuses on the negative aspects of the waning years of life concentrating on the physical deterioration of the body that occurs with aging.

Leola views the years of tournaments and living as a knight and as a warrior as the prime of her life. For her, the death of her horse Fuego represents the symbolic end of her youth and brings with it feelings of melancholy and sadness: "Mi vida de guerrero se ha acabado. Llevo casi medio año vistiendo de nuevo ropas de mujer; ya no soy caballero y, por consiguiente, el destino, con cruel coherencia, me ha privado también de mi caballo" (*Historia* 422). Leola realizes that her fighting days have ended and that she cannot recuperate the past. She continues sadly: "Siento un dolor seco, un desgarró de amputación. Algo ha terminado para siempre. Con Fuego se ha marchado mi juventud" (422). Once more, the mention of amputation indicates her feelings of loss both of her beloved horse and of her youth.

Montero illustrates the negative effects of old age along with societal prejudices against the aged in *Historia del Rey Transparente*. Leola's first mentor, who later refuses to teach her the art of combat, expresses his disillusionment with those who demonstrate

intolerance toward the elderly: “[L]os ancianos son considerados animales inútiles y enfermos de los que uno debe desembarazarse” (*Historia* 42-3). However, he goes on to mention his personal views of growing old that have a more positive outlook: “Yo sé que la vejez es la verdadera etapa épica del hombre, es la edad en la que los guerreros debemos librar nuestra batalla más gloriosa. No hay gesta mayor, no hay mejor proeza que saber envejecer y morir bien” (43). For him, growing old means making it to the age of glory and living it with dignity: “La vejez es la edad de la heroicidad, y yo he escogido ser un héroe” (43). However, Leola at age forty understands that growing old can also mean loneliness and an increased difficulty when coping with being alone: “Ahora entiendo a Nyneve cuando decidió sumar su destino al mío: a medida que envejeces se va haciendo más dura la soledad. Vas necesitando cada vez más ser necesitada de otras personas” (447). Through her writing, Leola provides the reader with her maturation process as she grows and learns from a once timid, insecure teen to an experienced, able woman. Gardiner views the female identity as a process: “‘Female identity is a process,’ and writing by women engages us in this process as the female self seeks to define itself in the experience of creating art” (361). Hence, writing allows Leola to define herself at different stages of her life.

With the loss of youth, Leola gains maturity, a positive consequence she recognizes and discusses in her encyclopedia. She writes: “Madurez: atisbo de entendimiento del mundo y de uno mismo, intuición del equilibrio de las cosas. Acercamiento entre la razón y el corazón. Conocimiento de los propios deseos y los propios miedos” (*Historia* 439). Leola understands that growing older can mean uncovering profound realizations about life, and perhaps even learning to be more honest

with herself: “Ya digo, estoy mayor, y tal vez ser mayor consista en empezar a saber aquellas cosas que preferirías ignorar” (306). Therefore, Leola weighs both the positives and negatives of losing her youth.

Loss of Love

In Lucía’s memoirs in *La función Delta*, she describes two types of love: “amor pasión” and “amor cómplice.” The crazy, passionate love or “amor pasión” she feels with Hipólito emphasizes her obsession with the idea of love. Her imagination creates most of the pitter-patting of her heart and the sensation that she cannot live without him. Lucía suffers the most as well as experiences the most rejection with this relationship. The relationship with Miguel, on the other hand, indicates the “amor cómplice,” a love that lacks that certain spark and even approaches boredom. At the end of the novel, Lucía experiences a more balanced love with Ricardo where mutual respect and understanding play a major role.

Leola also experiences these three same types of love, although she does not categorize them under labels as Lucía does. Nevertheless, all of Leola’s romantic prospects are eventually lost. She endures three major losses of love: her first love, Jacques, followed by the deceitful Gastón, and finally the devoted León. She learns from these sometimes painful experiences with men, and chooses to write about them in her literary projects. In addition to her own experiences with the loss of love, Leola writes about how those around her face this same type of loss. Writing about love and how it can be lost helps Leola protect those memories from oblivion. Cixous discusses the act of writing stories as a requirement to attain “the present of the unforgettable” in her essay “The Book as One of Its Own Characters”: “This unforgettable is very forgettable. At the

moment when it is produced, *I feel it*, the sensation is like the state that follows a dream: I have to note it live, or I do not note and it disappears” (430). Leola’s encyclopedia and her autobiography allow her to rescue the memories and feelings associated with her three lost loves.

Leola and her first love Jacques meet when they are children working on their master’s lands, and at age fifteen they decide to marry: “[N]os casaremos este verano, en cuanto terminemos de reunir los diez sueldos que tenemos que pagarle al amo por la boda” (*Historia* 16). When Leola’s first love, Jacques, disappears as a consequence of the war, she decides to leave her village to find him, but she can only survive by dressing as a man. Nonetheless, even as an adolescent before the emergence of political hostilities and the subsequent search for Jacques, Leola exhibits a yearning to see the world and explore beyond her village, a desire in which Jacques finds amusement: “¿No te gustaría verlo todo? Tolosa, y París, y... todo. Mi Jacques se ríe. –Qué cosas dices, Leola... ¿Es que quieres ser clérigo vagabundo? ¿O un guerrero? ¿No prefieres ser mi ternerita? (18). Jacques’ attitude indicates medieval society’s expectations of the role for women like Leola to play. Leola would always be tied to the land with Jacques, unable to pursue any goals of traveling or learning about other places. Her adventurous spirit could only be squelched in the role of wife and farmhand, as revealed in the following quote: “Pero siento en el pecho el peso de una pequeña pena, una pena extraña, como si echara de menos campos que nunca he visto y cosas que nunca he hecho, cielos que no conozco, ríos en los que no me he bañado” (19).

Leola feels insecure and lost without Jacques when she first ventures out onto uncharted territory: “Me siento un poco más indefensa. El mundo oscuro se aprieta

alrededor, cargado de embrujos y misterios. Si por lo menos estuviera aquí mi Jacques... Siempre ha estado en mi vida. No sé vivir sin él” (*Historia* 39). At first Leola feels emotionally dependent on Jacques, not quite prepared to rely only on herself. The loss of her love Jacques mirrors the loss of a part of Leola’s identity. Cixous expresses that one’s sense of self is malleable and in constant transformation: “All poets know that the self is in permanent mutation, that it is not one’s own, that it is always in movement, in a trance, astray, and that it goes out towards you. That is the free self” (“We Who Are Free” 203). In other words, losing Jacques coincides with the beginning of a new chapter for Leola which involves freeing herself from the ties with her feudal lord and to a certain degree, the oppression of being a woman.

These treasured memories that Leola holds of Jacques cause her to ignore her instincts. When a stranger approaches Leola claiming that Jacques has been looking for her, and now suffers from a possibly fatal arrow wound to the chest, Leola wishes to come to his rescue: “La culpa y la vergüenza. Mientras yo iba hilvanando egoístamente mi equivocada vida, él no me ha olvidado. Él me ha estado buscando. Y ahora se está muriendo” (*Historia* 383). Leola’s feelings of guilt reflect many women’s attitude that they do not deserve to focus on themselves and their own personal happiness. Later, Leola realizes that the pleas of the deceiving Mirábola were only to set her up in a trap where her attackers could assault her more easily. Even after the passing of twenty years, Leola still holds a special place in her heart for Jacques.

When Leola finally does reunite with Jacques years later, Leola gains perspective. She realizes that this is no longer the life where she belongs and therefore chooses not to reveal her identity to her past love: “Me despido con una leve inclinación de la cabeza

[...] Huyó de Jacques y de su gratitud [...] y casi corro hacia donde mis acompañantes me están esperando, los pies ligeros y asustados, feliz de volver a escaparme, feliz de irme otra vez” (*Historia* 493). She had romanticized her memories of Jacques, comparing him in a much better light to her other relationships.¹⁹ We see a clear example of this in the following quote: “Ignorante como soy en estas lides, sólo dispongo de la experiencia de mi Jacques, y con él éramos uno. Pero Gastón nunca ha sido mío. Tal vez el amor sea de este modo, como una estrella errante que ilumina fugazmente el firmamento para desaparecer después en la negrura” (300). Smith and Watson discuss how life-writers must reconstruct and categorize pieces of their lives to be able to interpret and evaluate their personal past: “[W]e inevitably organize or form fragments of memory into complex constructions that become the stories of our lives” (16). Through this disappointing visit with the Jacques of today, Leola finds closure to the loss of her first love. She now can decidedly bring an end to the fantasy her imagination created of the perfect love and life with the Jacques of yesteryear.

Other issues of identity emerge for Leola in her relationship with Gastón. While Leola maintains a romantic relationship with her second love, she abstains from the intensive training of combat. In a sense, she loses to some degree that part of her identity. In addition, Leola feels Gastón slowly pulling away from her, a marked loss in interest even before their eventual parting of ways: “Me esfuerzo en entender a Gastón, pero no lo consigo. Como impregnado por sus estudios herméticos, cada día está más encerrado en sí mismo, más oculto y ajeno” (*Historia* 300). Because of Gastón’s obvious

¹⁹ Similar to Lucía of *La función Delta*, who idealized her relationship with Miguel, many times Leola views her love for Jacques through rose-tinted glasses. Since Leola does not have an interlocutor like Ricardo to keep her memories in check, she must revisit her past to realize that the quality of her life would have been much worse had she not left the farm at age fifteen.

diminishing attraction or desire for Leola, she doubts herself and begins to question her identity: “[Q]uizá sea cosa de mi mano incompleta, de mis dedos cercenados por la espada; de mi cuerpo cosido a costurones, viriles cicatrices de guerrero que deforman mi hechuras de mujer. Puede que yo sea un engendro, ni caballero ni dama” (301). Leola’s relationship with Gastón, with whom she has her first sexual experience, begins with a strong physical attraction by both parties. Therefore, the lack of intimacy has a detrimental effect on her self-esteem.

Gastón depends on Leola financially to survive and actually betrays her trust by revealing incriminating evidence about her to the crusaders in exchange for gold. Hence, contempt plagues Leola’s memory of Gastón. In her autobiography, she complains of Gastón’s criticisms of her: “Incluso se atreve a decirme cómo debo desempeñar mi oficio de guerrero, él, que jamás ha tenido una espada en la mano. Y yo se lo permito, porque es verdad que no sé hacerme valer” (*Historia* 285). Also in her writings, she draws attention to Gastón’s vile temper: “Gastón está furioso. Aunque conozco bien su ira, creo que jamás le había visto tan indignado. Sus ojos son puñales de odio enfebrecido con los que querría acuchillarme” (319).²⁰ Leola’s relationship with Gastón indicates the least healthy and most problematic of her three loves. The loss of this love reveals a sense of relief rather than heartache.

In addition to her own loves, Leola describes Eloísa who endures an “amor pasión” with Abelardo. In a conversation with Leola, Eloísa confesses, “He intentado ser buena monja, buena cristiana; pero Abelardo es para mí más importante que Dios. Sé que con esto me condeno. Y lo más terrible es que me da lo mismo” (*Historia* 370).

²⁰ In a sense, Leola’s description of Gastón shares similarities with Lucía’s feelings regarding Hipólito in *La función Delta*. High passion ends with hurt feelings and betrayal.

Leola sees Eloísa's desperation as a horrible condition of the soul: "Tanta paz en este claustro, y tanta amargura y desesperación en el alma obsesionada de Eloísa" (370).

Leola questions the meaning of love and includes the loss of love in her autobiography in order to make sense of it. After Gastón, she resigns herself to never seek out the love of a man again: "No quiero volver a saber nada de los hombres. De los alquimistas traidores que te venden por una bolsa de oro, de los amantes tan absorbentes y tan intensos que pueden atraparte y deshacerte" (370).

After enduring Gastón's unpardonable betrayal, Leola renounces men, and even disposes of all her womanly clothing: "Quién me mandó a mí deshacerme de toda mi ropa de mujer cuando decidí volver a vestir de hombre? Obcecada por mi despecho tras la traición de Gastón, lo tiré todo" (*Historia* 419). Her only desire is to eventually seek revenge on Gastón by killing him: "[D]eseo tanto su muerte que no sé cómo matarle en mi recuerdo. Por eso sigo buscándole cada día en todos los hombres, con una perseverancia y un ahínco que nunca empleé en buscar a mi pobre Jacques" (380). The loss of love incites anger and an insatiable need for vengeance. In a sense, Leola finds retribution through writing by vilifying Gastón.²¹

"Soy mujer y él es mi hombre. Me inunda el deseo, el amor y el orgullo. Aunque León sea analfabeto" (*Historia* 441). At one point in time, a man's ability to read and write would not have been an issue for Leola. When she is with León she desires to look more feminine. She lets her hair grow long, adorns herself with jewelry and applies makeup to make herself more attractive: "Trenzo mi cabello, que he dejado crecer, y lo

²¹ Nyneve complains of Myrddin's defamation of her in his writings: "Se puso a sí mismo como personaje y se reservó la parte más brillante. Sí, nos conocimos bien. Demasiado bien. Y como al final las cosas entre nosotros se torcieron, Myrddin se vengó inventando par mí un papel infame" (*Historia* 99).

sujeto a la cabeza con unas hermosas agujas de perlas que me ha relagado León. Me pellizco las mejillas, para darles color, y pinto mis labios con carmín (440-1).

León and Leola begin their relationship when he saves her life from five men with swords, but she still has trouble trusting men: “León es el hombretón que me ayudó. Que me salvó la vida. Tengo mucho, demasiado que agradecerle, pero ya no me fío de los hombres. No entiendo por qué se arriesgó por mí; tanta generosidad me llena de suspicacia” (*Historia* 390). Before long, however, a new spark ignites in Leola. While watching him eat a fig, her erotic description of the event indicates her arousal:

León lame la blanda carne de su fruto; los labios le brillan con el almíbar del higo, esos labios firmes y bien dibujados, esa boca pequeña incrustada en sus mejillas abundantes. Y la lengua musculosa y acuciante, que arranca grumos de la carne melosa. Más arriba, los ojos, hundidos bajo el pesado pliegue de las cejas, ardiendo como inquietantes fuegos fatuos...El calor de la tarde entra abrasador por mi garganta, baja por mis pechos sudorosos, se extiende como un incendio en mis entrañas. (418).

They share a passionate love for one another, but the relationship does not flourish until Leola can trust again. León is gentle and kind, a caregiver who mothers those around him. His role is decidedly more typically feminine in the relationship: “León coge un paño, lo moja en el agua del barreño y comienza a limpiar la mugrienta cara de la chica. Lo hace con increíble delicadeza, pese a la dimensión de sus macizas manos” (401). Leola describes him as a massive brute, but with feminine characteristics such as “una boquita pequeña y apretada, bien dibujada, como de damisela” (391). This final love demonstrates harmony along with mutual understanding and respect.

While romantically involved with León, Leola writes the definition of the word love in her encyclopedia: “Amor: sueño que se sueña con los ojos abiertos. Dios en las entrañas (y que Dios me perdone). Vivir desterrado de ti, instalado en la cabeza, en la

respiración, en la piel de otro; y que ese lugar sea el Paraíso” (*Historia* 436). Leola finally experiences balance with León, a soul mate whom she can trust. Interestingly, their names begin with the same three letters as if to further prove their compatibility. The love she shares with León provides a protective bubble from the war-ravaged lands around her: “Sé que el mundo se derrumba y que en el aire vibra el acabose, pero estoy con León. Y eso me basta” (437). They enjoy an all-encompassing love, one that Leola cannot imagine living without: “Nunca he querido a nadie como le quiero a él y no comprendo cómo he podido vivir sin él hasta ahora” (436). However, Leola loses this seemingly perfect love as well due to their separation while trying to escape the crusaders.

The act of losing can be closely tied to the act of writing. Cixous states in the essay “We Who Are Free, Are We Free” that “[o]ur time is afraid of losing, and afraid of losing itself. But one can write *only* by losing oneself, by going astray, just as one can love only at the risk of losing oneself and of losing” (203). Through the loss of love of Jacques, Gastón and León, Leola’s identity transforms, and this allows her to explore her changing sense of self through writing.

Loss of Innocence

Leola decides to begin the recounting of her life at a moment when she lacks any sense of sophistication or worldliness: “Lamento ser joven e ignorante y poseer palabras suficientes; pero sobre todo lamento no saber que pensar” (*Historia* 88). At fifteen, Leola lacks knowledge of the people and places beyond her village; she cannot read or write. However, by the time she writes her autobiography at age forty, she has experienced the world as well as witnessed many tragedies and numerous deaths: “Le acaricio la mano.

Está fría y un poco rígida. He visto muchos muertos en mi vida, y en verdad Nyneve parece estar muerta” (*Historia 507*). Leola loses her innocence upon maturing, and learning to mistrust others and their real intentions. Life experience gained through her many adventures helps Leola decipher whether the people around her wish to cause her injury or aid her in her quests. As a laborer, life was simple, but as she enters a world of palaces and knightly duties, the line between good and evil blurs:

Las cosas son confusas en el ancho mundo. Antes la vida era tan dura, tan pobre y tan simple como el pequeño pedazo de árida tierra en el que mi familia y yo nos rompíamos las uñas escarbando. Todo estaba claro: la indiferencia de los poderosos, la crueldad del amo, nuestra indefensión pero también la unión que sentíamos entre nosotros, el trabajo embrutecedor, el esfuerzo y las penalidades, el alivio de haber vivido con bien un día más, la felicidad de poder comer y descansar. Pero ahora ya no sé quiénes son mis amigos, quiénes mis enemigos. No sé bien por qué Nyneve dice que Dhuoda es peligrosa, ni me acabo de creer todo eso que cuenta sobre Myrddin. De los belfos de mi caballo salen densas nubes de vapor. La vida es una niebla. (*Historia 166*).

Leola loses her innocence as she realizes that the world is not always as it seems. On the farm, she knew certain truths about life, but through her journey, she understands the complexity of the society in which she lives along with the many truths that can coexist.

In the beginning when Leola tries to live as a man for the first time, she encounters an older gentleman who gives her advice: “Ensúciate la cara con un poco de ceniza y tizne de la hoguera... Pasará más desapercibida tu inocencia” (*Historia 42*). This man has already lost his innocence, and views the world as a negative place in which to live: “Corren tiempos malos, Leola. Yo no he conocido otros, pero dicen que antes, hace mucho, existió un mundo diferente, un mundo de honor y palabra [...] Hoy los reyes son unos cobardes y los caballeros unos miserables” (42). Over the years, Leola also realizes the negative qualities that even those in positions of authority possess.

Before losing her innocence through life experiences, Leola cannot gauge the cruel intentions of others. In her earlier years, she does not question authority or those in high positions, such as the clergy. Fortunately, her companion and life teacher Nynaeve serves to guide Leola through her adventures and attempts to warn her of wayward souls. Nynaeve advises her of basic knight errantry rules such as she should never mount a mare if she intends to pass as a real knight. She also constantly reminds young Leola that “la verdad tiene muchas caras” (*Historia* 85). Nynaeve cautions Leola to beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing, advising her that even the Church shows signs of corruption: “Ahora, por pocas monedas, puedes comprar el perdón de los pecados y la salvación de tu alma... [A]hora si eres rico puedes pecar y adquirir una bula para librarte de las consecuencias, y ni siquiera necesitas hacer penitencia” (60). Leola discovers the imperfections of high officials in the Church first-hand through an experience with sexual harassment by Fray Angélico.

While imprisoned by the crusaders, Leola learns that Fray Angélico always felt a deep attraction for her even when she was dressed as a man: “[Q]ue Dios me perdone, pero siempre me ha atraído tu escondida feminidad en sus ropajes viriles... Esa pequeña mujer envuelta en duros hierros... como ahora” (*Historia* 345). Admitting his “carne [...] débil y pecadora,” he wants to have sex with Leola, and in exchange, he will have the guards break her neck so that she does not feel the torturous flames when she is burned at the stake. The scene ends with Leola biting off the friar’s tongue and escaping from his powerful clutches. Leola realizes how innocent she was when she admired Fray Angélico, and trusted too much.

Decades after her initial departure, Leola returns to her village and reunites with her lost love Jacques. He is still a servant of the land, living in the same house. Jacques does not recognize Leola, and she does not volunteer to reveal her identity. Leola describes his physical appearance: “Las manos de Jacques están sucias y agrietadas, las uñas partidas, el cuello lleno de costras” (*Historia* 492). Leola realizes her lost innocence through the eyes of Jacques: “[H]uyo de su servidumbre y su inocencia, y casi corro hacia donde mis acompañantes me están esperando, los pies ligeros y asustados” (493).

Another aspect of the loss of innocence is the realization of change. During Leola’s homecoming to the señor de Abuny’s land, now as an adult, she writes the word “memoria” with her own personal meaning: “juego de la imaginación, cuento de juglar, ensueño de un pasado que vivió otra persona a quien crees conocer, pero que ya no existe” (*Historia* 488). Leola has shed her identity as Leola the uneducated, inexperienced peasant. She returns to her home as a new woman who no longer recognizes herself or the land: “Los montes parecen distintos, el río es menos caudaloso, hay un puente nuevo. Todo es más pequeño, más pobre, más feo que la imagen que guardo en mi cabeza” (488). Nynveve also discovers that the large forest where she used to frolic, now reside fields. The wilderness no longer exists: “Donde antes se extendía una densa floresta, ahora hay campos y más campos ondulantes, algunos de labor, la mayoría de pasto” (484). Leola loses her innocence about the world and includes this experience in her autobiography as well as in her encyclopedia.

To sum up, Leola is very aware of the losses she has incurred over the twenty-five years since she left her home. She remarks, “No termino de entender por qué le conmueve tanto la pérdida del bosque, después de tantas otras cosas como hemos

perdido” (484). The loss of youth, love and innocence provide her many life lessons and the material worth sharing with the world. Through loss, Leola’s identity changes and evolves, a transformation she confidently notes in herself: “[Y]o era otra, soy otra, alguien muy distinto a la indefensa Leola que llegó meses atrás a la escuela del Maestro” (92). Leola shares this evolution of herself with her readers.

La loca de la casa

Rosa explores the loss of youth, the loss of love and the loss of innocence in her autobiography and reflections on literature.²² She includes personal losses coupled with short biographies of authors who have also suffered varying degrees of loss. Rosa expresses how loss can contribute to one’s becoming a more effective writer: “[A]l cabo el padre falleció, con lo que Conrad, que para entonces contaba tan sólo once años, cerró el círculo de fuego de sufrimiento y de la pérdida. Quiero creer que aquel dolor enorme por lo menos contribuyó a crear a un escritor inmenso” (*Loca* 15). Here I wish to analyze the theme of loss in *La loca de la casa* and its implications for Rosa the writer/narrator and other writers mentioned in this metafictional text.

Loss of Youth

Rosa discusses how authors at a very young age realize the fleeting quality of life. She describes two categories of writers who have lost their childhoods: “memoriosos” and “amnésicos.” The former are nostalgic and hang on to their memories by filling their texts with abundant details; the latter who tend to flee from their past, possess a memory that is like “una pizarra mal borrada, llena de chafarrinones incomprensibles” (*Loca* 222-

²² Montero admits to the confusion of genre in *La loca de la casa*, which is a mix of autobiography and biography: “[H]oy la literatura está viviendo un tiempo especialmente mestizo en el que predomina la confusión de géneros: este mismo libro que estoy escribiendo es un ejemplo de ello” (*Loca* 180).

3). The loss of youth inspires many novelists to grasp their unstoppable, disappearing days by putting those memories on paper: “[U]n elevado número de novelistas han tenido una experiencia muy temprana de decadencia. Pongamos que a los seis, o diez, o doce años, han visto cómo el mundo de su infancia se desbarataba y desaparecía para siempre de una manera violenta” (*Loca* 13-14). Rosa explains that writing for her, and for many authors, recuperates a paradise lost by recapturing treasured memories of yore: “[T]odos esos novelistas que han creído perder en algún momento el paraíso escriben— escribimos—para intentar recuperarlo, para restituir aquello que se ha ido, para luchar contra la decadencia y el fin inexorable de las cosas” (15). Rosa utilizes writing as a means to salvage childhood memories from oblivion. Writing also proves as a way to remain youthful by symbolically avoiding the loss of youth: “Pues bien, el novelista tiene el privilegio de seguir siendo niño, de poder ser un loco, de mantener el contacto con lo informe” (18).

In an interview with Laura Hernández, Rosa Montero describes the fading of memories into nothingness as a type of death: “[E]l olvido es el fin de las cosas, la verdadera muerte, más que la muerte física. Mueres de verdad cuando nadie se acuerda de ti” (1). Writing serves as a double function: to recapture memories and to provide evidence of the existence of someone’s life. Rosa explains this in the following quote: “Todos los escritores ambicionamos atrapar el tiempo, remansarlo siguiera unos momentos en una pequeña presa de castor construida con palabras” (229-30). Rose warns, however, the possible detrimental effects of recording one’s personal history on memory: “Writing destroys memory; those who use it, Plato has Socrates argue, will become forgetful, relying on an external source for what they lack in internal resources”

(62). We see first hand how Rosa's memory is quite questionable when she retrieves from her memory bank a night of passion from her twenties.

Rosa admits to her failing memory, and this fact frightens her: "Yo también soy una amnésica perdida; de lo que se deduce, supongo, que yo también estoy huyendo de mi infancia. Sea por esta razón, o porque simplemente tengo deterioradas las neuronas, lo cierto es que mi memoria es catastrófica, hasta el punto de que llego a asustarme de mis olvidos" (*Loca* 223). Thus, the loss of youth also means the loss of memories from her childhood. When recounting the time her twin sister went missing when they were children, Rosa confesses, "la nitidez de mis recuerdos se emborrona" (106) and later "lo que vino después apenas si es en mi memoria una bruma confusa" (107). Rose describes how one's recollection of events from childhood as an adult vary greatly from the experience of the same events as a pre-adolescent: "Some time before puberty there is for most of us a transition in how we perceive and remember the world, a transition which means that our adult memories are strangely disarticulated from our childhood ones" (104). Another example of this is when Rosa returns to her childhood home perhaps to recapture a part of herself, of the child that no longer exists. She describes the experience: "Intenté volver a meterme en mis antiguos ojos de niña para ver el mundo desde allí, pero no pude. El pasado no existe, por mucho que diga Marcel Proust" (*Loca* 228). It amazes Rosa how remembering the design of the floor of her childhood home brings back a small piece of her past. In spite of everything, the visit still makes obvious the loss of youth.

Just as we see in the other novels analyzed here, the fear of growing old and losing one's youth is ever present in *La loca de la casa*. One example is the descriptions

of Rimbaud's deteriorating health and physical suffering at the end of his life: "Era un cáncer de los huesos. Le amputaron la pierna desde la ingle (mutilaron al poeta mutilado) pero no sirvió de nada. El tumor le dejó prácticamente paralizado y tardó en devorarlo nueve agónicos meses" (*Loca* 189).²³ In one description of Rosa's reencounter with M., she holds no restraint on her biting criticisms of him on how his loss of youth has left him bald, flabby and simply not the same gorgeous man he once was: "[C]on expresión ausente, paseó por mi cara unos ojos que parecían incapaces de fijar la mirada, unos ojos desenfocados, enrojecidos, lacrimosos, la tumba de aquellos extraordinarios ojos verdes perdidos para siempre en el pasado" (142). In another portrayal of the same scene, she suspects that M. underwent plastic surgery to evade the ever encroaching symptoms of old age. What does it mean to be old? Is there a magic number? Rosa constantly equates the loss of youth with words associated with death such as "tumba" or "cementerio": "Es una de las características de la edad: a medida que envejeces, tu casa se empieza a convertir en un cementerio de objetos inútiles" (253). Finally, Rosa examines the physical deterioration when the loss of youth occurs:

El envejecimiento es un proceso orgánico bastante lamentable que apenas si tiene un par de cosas buenas (una, que, si te esfuerzas, aprendes algunas cosas; y dos, que es la mejor prueba de que no te has muerto todavía) y otras muchas malísimas, como, por ejemplo, que tus neuronas se destruyen a mansalva, que tus células se deterioran y se oxidan, que la gravedad tira de tu cuerpo hacia la tierra-tumba debilitando los músculos y desplomando las carnes. (95-6)

For Rosa, the loss of youth also indicates the loss of imagination: "De niños, todos estamos *locos*; esto es, todos estamos poseídos por una imaginación sin domesticar y vivimos en una zona crepuscular de la realidad en la que todo resulta posible" (*Loca*

²³ Throughout Montero's narrative we find several examples of mutilation and metaphors with this term. Mutilation connects with the theme of loss and can be tied with the loss of youth as well as a loss or change in one's identity.

193). Rosa's profession is one where she constantly creates and uses her imagination, and in this way fights the inevitable loss of youth. By writing novels, Rosa saves herself from limiting her view of the world. She states that growing up often means "perder esa mirada múltiple, caleidoscópica, y libre sobre la vida monumental" (193). On the other hand, for Rosa, the loss of youth can also mean tearing down emotional walls and becoming more honest with herself and others: "Otra de las ventajas de la edad: no hay que fingir orgasmos, no hay que dar grititos innecesarios" (256). In this autobiography, Rosa wishes to share her thoughts on what the loss of youth means to her and its implications in her life and the lives of other authors.

Loss of Love

In the following quote, Benstock discusses the inevitable fractures that occur when one attempts to piece together his or her life story: "Language, which operates according to a principle of division and separation, is the medium by which and through which the 'self' is constructed. 'Writing the self' is therefore a process of simultaneous sealing and splitting that can only trace fissures of discontinuity" (1054). Montero's conveys the message that our memory can play tricks on us through Rosa's deliberate repetition in three different ways the love affair with M. and the subsequent reunion twenty years later. Rosa states, "Y pensé: si tú supieras la cantidad de vidas distintas que puede haber en una sola vida" (*Loca* 145). Montero hopes to express through the protagonist mirroring herself that reality is more subjective than it is objective.

The loss of love that Rosa represents in *La loca de la casa* best exemplifies a loss of the idea of love. As we observe in Soto Amón in *Crónica del desamor*, Hipólito in *La función Delta* or Gastón in *Historia del Rey Transparente*, all examples of Montero's

interpretation of “amor pasión,” this type of love is an invention, a mere process of the imagination that usually ends in disappointment. In an interview with Hernández, Montero formulates a hypothesis about why we deceive ourselves in this way: “[E]s una obviedad que la pasión amorosa es un invento. Que no amamos al otro al que nos disponemos a amar, sino que amamos el amor, [...] a lo que aspiras cuando estás enamorado apasionadamente es la sensación de enamoramiento” (Hernández 1).

Montero’s views repeat themselves through Rosa as we delve into the narrator’s emotions when she first meets M., an English-speaking European actor visiting Spain.

Rosa’s first account of M. begins with a very flattering physical description: “[T]enía unos treinta y dos años, unos ojos verdes demoledores, un cuerpo que adivinaba prodigioso” (*Loca* 32). However, since Rosa did not speak English and M.’s Spanish was quite poor, they communicated with the only bits of French and Italian that they could muster. It was a hot summer night of dinner, followed by all night drinking and dancing in the spirited night life of Madrid, a time when Franco was on his death bed and the restrictions were slowly lifting: “y yo tenía veintitrés años y eran unos tiempos felices y fáciles, unos tiempos sin sida, promiscuos y carnales” (33). Rosa accompanies M. to his apartment, and barely remembers the place or the sexual acts that ensued there. Later, she feels guilty for her promiscuity: “[E]mpecé a irritarme conmigo misma. Qué hago yo aquí, me dije, en este apartamento extraño, en esta Torre absurda” (34). Rosa leaves the apartment later that morning only to find her father and a swarm of policemen gathered around her Mehari. Her car was suspected of containing a bomb because of the

occurrences of recent ETA activity.²⁴ The relationship with M. can be summed up as a night of poor communication, ending in a meaningless sex act.

When M. tries to contact Rosa by phone and later with a letter in English, she does not return the call and throws the letter in the trash. The one-night-stand hardly counts as love or even infatuation. Rosa only thinks she feels love when nearly a month later, she realizes that M. is leaving the country. She describes her emotions at the time: “Fulminantemente enamorada de M. hasta la más recóndita de mis sinapsis neuronales, y hundida en la miseria por mi mala cabeza, que me había hecho perder La Oportunidad” (*Loca* 40). Within just a month of remembering the night with M., Rosa completely modifies her impressions of him: “Si antes me había inventado un M. despreciable, a partir de aquella noche me dediqué a imaginar un M. extraordinario” (41). Rosa obsessively searches for M.’s movies at the theater, she begins studying English and finally tries to contact M., but to no avail. Rosa eventually gives up on the dream after six months. Rosa wishes to reveal the impact our imaginations have on our psyches by sharing this first story about M. What seemed like a loss of loss, was merely a loss of a fantasy created in Rosa’s mind. In the second half of the story, Rosa reunites with M. twenty years later to conduct an interview with him for *El País*. He recognizes her after thirty minutes of dialogue and “se abrió su memoria; y vi que el pasado atravesaba por su cara como la sombra de una nube... mirando hacia dentro, hacia el pasado, y lo que veía no le gustaba nada” (44-5). The anticlimactic meeting ends when M. scurries away.

Rosa’s second version of her first meeting with M. differs greatly from her original account. Whereas in her first recollection of the events of that night Rosa

²⁴ By including descriptions of “los terribles grises del franquismo” (*Loca* 35) in this chapter, Montero intends to prevent a cultural collective amnesia of the horrors and fears produced by the Franco regime.

expresses that she does not remember the furniture or any particulars about M.'s apartment, this time she depicts minute details, even the pattern on the curtains: "El apartamento era una extravagancia que parecía salida de un telefilm norteamericano de los años cincuenta, con sillas de formica provistas de tres patitas de metal, una barra de bar en la sala, un muro revestido de teselas color verde y cortinas con dibujos de palmeras" (*Loca* 131). She also modifies the physical portrayal of M. with much more complimentary adjectives than before: "El tenía los ojos verdes más hermosos que jamás había visto" (130). Rosa also embellishes the chemistry connecting the two, highlighting the amazing sparks and palpable attraction between them.

Rosa speculates at the beginning of this chapter that passion is an invention: "¿Será que, en el fondo de nuestra conciencia, sabemos que la pasión amorosa es un invento, un producto de nuestra imaginación, una fantasía? ¿Y que, por tanto, ese dolor que nos abrasa es de algún modo irreal?" (*Loca* 127). She poses these questions to later prove them true through the abundantly more descriptive tale of her encounter with her European lover. Rosa shows the reader how her imagination fills in the gaps where her memory fails her. As a writer, she has that license. Just as she invents the images of palm trees on the curtains, she also fabricates certain feelings of love for M. In addition, Rosa replaces the uneventful, forgettable love making with a more exciting tale of M. collapsing to the floor in the kitchen causing blood to cover one side of his face. A common denominator in both tales is the fear she feels during the episode due to the dictatorship in Spain at the time. In the following quote, Rosa describes the uncooperative night watchman of the building: "Aquel hombre era por sí un bruto desconfiado y antipático, pero además el franquismo avivaba el recelo de tipos como él:

bajo la dictadura cualquier cosa podía ser en efecto sospechosa, y la gente medrosa y acomodaticia siempre evitaba ‘buscar líos’” (133). Because the two versions of the same night differ so substantially, the reader must come up with his or her own conclusions about what events truly occurred that night.

The relationship with M. does not develop in this story either because Rosa’s flight from the scene causes many misunderstandings and even a media frenzied nightmare for the famous actor. However, she still feels an intense love for M.: “[M]e había descubierto fatalmente enamorada de él” (*Loca* 139). Rosa experiences an extreme loss of love for a love that really never existed. She writes: “Un ser maravilloso al que yo había perdido para siempre por la mala suerte, por mi nerviosismo y por mi torpeza” (139). Her loss of “El Hombre De Mi Vida” causes her to become physically ill. Rosa also describes the emotional pain of the loss of love: “El dolor del desamor me golpeó como la ola gigante de un maremoto” (140). Rosa indicates the power of the mind and the “loca de la casa” has on her physical and mental states.

With the passage of time, the memory and hurt surrounding M. faded, and similar to the first story, she interviews him twenty years later, but this time with an interesting twist. M. loses all his sex appeal and along with it, his career in acting. This Hollywood has-been succumbs to alcoholism and drug addiction with bouts of depression. His loss of youth reveals an M. that is a far cry from the dashing movie star he once was: “[H]abía perdido esos mullidos músculos que antes le hacían parecer atlético y una pequeña barriga, redonda y vergonzante, asomaba por encima del cinturón” (*Loca* 142). Rosa does not reveal her identity to M. during the interview or at dinner the same

evening. She chalks up the reencounter as a pitiful ending for a man she once imagined could be the center of her universe.

As expected, Rosa's third rendition of the sultry summer night of 1974 Spain contrasts with the other two versions. This time M. has blue eyes and "no era demasiado alto, tal vez un metro setenta y cinco, pero era uno de los hombres más guapos que jamás había visto" (*Loca* 239). Again, the night ends at M.'s apartment in la Torre de Madrid. High passion leads to a sexual encounter, similar to events in the first story, but rather than forgettable, Rosa remembers it as comically awkward:

Recuerdo que, como a menudo sucede en los primeros encuentros, sobre todo cuando hay mucho deseo, cuando se es tímido, cuando se es joven y cuando no existe demasiada comunicación, el acto sexual estuvo lleno de torpezas, de codos que se clavaban y piernas que no se colocaban en el lugar adecuado. Su cuerpo era un banquete, pero me parece que la cosa no nos salió demasiado bien. (241)

Just as in the first story, Rosa feels a wave of guilt for her actions and describes herself "esa chica, cualquier chica, que les meten a estos figurones en la cama" (242). She quickly decides that M. is nothing more than a *machista* womanizer, and immediately escapes without waking the sleeping actor. Just as in the first story, Rosa finds several policemen standing around her car, and here too dread overwhelms her: "Alrededor del Mehari, un enjambre de *grises*, los temibles policies franquistas, husmeaban y libaban como abejorros [...] Siempre te temblaban las rodillas delante de los *grises*, en el franquismo" (243). This time Rosa spends a few nights in jail because of "una minúscula piedra de hash" the police found in her vehicle, but she considers herself lucky since she did not endure any physical violence from the officers.

Just as in the other versions of this story, Rosa later becomes obsessed with the idea of M., but this time only after she realizes that her sister Martina starts seeing him

romantically. After Martina returns from a date with him, a jealous Rosa observes: “Irradiaba esa mágica exuberancia que proporciona el buen sexo. En cuanto que la vi empecé a sufrir. Y qué sufrimiento tan violento” (*Loca* 249). She admits that her perception of M. actually changes once she realizes that Martina is now vying for his attention. As a result, M. suddenly seems more enchanting and sensitive. Her loss of “love” brings about unfavorable consequences: “Durante dos o tres meses, su ausencia me obsesionó. No podía escribir, no podía leer, sólo pensaba en él y en que lo había perdido. No fue un dolor amoroso: fue una enfermedad” (252). Although Rosa initially expects nothing more with M. than a one-night-stand, when a third party appears in the mix, Rosa imagination creates a new and improved M. that cannot be resisted.

The chapter on M. finally closes when as in the first two stories, Rosa reunites with him twenty years later, but now at an international film festival in Chile. In the first account M. has had plastic surgery and boasts a successful career in acting including winning an Oscar, while in the second version, a physically repugnant M. wears outdated clothes and desperately struggles to attract attention from the media. In the third description, Rosa writes a more balanced account of M. stating that he has gray hair and wrinkles, but he looks natural and good for his age. His modest career consists of performing in films and acting and writing for plays. In this final version, Rosa and M. become intimate after spending the entire time at the festival flirting and getting to know one another. However, this relationship also would lead to nowhere as it did twenty years ago: “Los minutos pasaban, teníamos que irnos y los dos sabíamos que no íbamos a hacer nada para volver a vernos” (259).

Rosa discusses the loss of love, or at least the idea of it, in her autobiography because passionate, crazy love makes you feel alive, and losing it can make everything seem dismal and depressing. She states: “[N]os ponemos en contacto con la locura primordial cada vez que nos enamoramos apasionadamente” (*Loca* 237). Rosa makes a connection between the creative process and “amor pasión” because both require imagination and fantasy. She affirms that “la pasión tal vez sea el ejercicio creativo más común de la Tierra” (238).

Loss of Innocence

The loss of innocence for Rosa involves making several realizations about life. At age five, for example, she learns the meaning of death: “Y morirse, comprendí de golpe, era no estar en ningún lado” (*Loca* 161). She learns at age eighteen that the world hosts uncountable instances of darkness and pain. While enduring stress-related panic attacks, she grasps that she must learn to coexist with negativity: “Terminé perdiendo el miedo al miedo y aceptando que la vida posee un porcentaje de negrura con el que hay que aprender a convivir” (*Loca* 185). She confesses that at twenty-two and at thirty, she experiences these same panic attacks again, which involves a sense of feeling strangely separated from the world. Through these crises entailing feelings of anguish and fear, Rosa gains perspective. She compares herself to John Nash and Don Quixote, arguing that a little craziness is a crucial ingredient for the imagination to be able to create fiction. While losing her innocence that the world is not a perfect place, she gains important insights that consequently help her to become a stellar writer.

In an interview, Montero states that as human beings, we make up stories and believe them about our own lives: “[E]l relato que nos hacemos de la propia vida es un

cuento, entretejido de mentiras” (Hernández 1). She provides evidence for this statement by purposefully including false declarations about herself in the pseudo-autobiography that is *La loca de la casa*. As mentioned earlier, Montero does not have a twin sister, yet she includes one, Martina, in the autobiography.

The narrator describes Martina as possessing everything that she lacks, capable of activities in which she feels inept. For this reason, Martina embodies Rosa’s Other. Rosa already addresses the idea of an Other when expressing how the writing process sometimes seems to emerge via the assistance of a reflection of herself. She becomes aware of “la inquietante percepción, casi la certidumbre, de que la novela te la está inventando otro, te la está dictando otra, porque tú no sabías que sabías lo que estás escribiendo” (*Loca* 118). She also entertains the idea of the existence of a parallel universe where the Rosa in her dreams resides at night.

Josephine Donovan condemns the stereotyped images of women that Western literature has instilled in society. Female characters usually exemplify either good or evil making it difficult for real women to relate to them. The female readers begin to feel like the Other:

Under the category of the good-woman stereotypes, that is, those who serve the interests of the hero, are the patient wife, the mother/martyr, and the lady. In the bad or evil category are deviants who reject or do not properly serve man or his interests: the old maid/career woman, the witch/lesbian, the shrew or domineering mother/wife. (214)

Martina represents the “good-woman” stereotype, very different from her sister. Rosa describes her as “siempre tan ordenada, tan racional, tan hacedora y tan pulcra, nunca había fumado porros” (*Loca* 259). Thus, Martina symbolizes everything Rosa is not:

Ella tiene tres hijos (dos de ellos mellizos), yo no tengo ninguno; ella lleva veinte años con el mismo hombre felizmente, o por lo menos, siempre se les ve juntos y ella nunca se queja (bien es verdad que habla muy poco), mientras que yo he

tenido no sé cuántas parejas y suelo refunfuñar de todas ellas. Ella es de una eficiencia colosal, trabaja competentemente como gerente de una empresa informática, atiende a sus hijos, lleva su casa como un general de intendencia llevaría una ofensiva, cocina como un chef galardonado por la guía Michelin, resuelve todos los problemas burocráticos y legales con facilidad inhumana y siempre está tranquila y relajada, como si le sobraran horas a su día; yo, en cambio, no sé cocinar, tengo mi despacho convertido en una leonera, ordenar un armario me parece un reto insuperable. (100-1)

Rosa gives a voice to women who decide not to take on the traditional roles of wife and mother. Her greatest accomplishment is her words, and in the end “es la palabra lo que nos hace humanos” (101).

In one of Rosa’s recollections of the brief love affair with M., Martina develops into a fierce competitor for the same man. Twenty years later, Rosa fears that M. thinks that she is her sister: “¿A quién se refería M., en realidad? ¿En quién estaba pensando, a quién estaba viendo cuando me miraba?” (259). Rosa’s insecurities and the questioning of her identity reveal a silent competition between the two sisters. Rosa complains that Martina, “[D]ice que yo no soy una mujer, que soy una mutante” (162). Since Rosa never procreates, she feels like an outcast, or mutant, in her own family. Rosa believes she can never measure up to Martina, just as women readers may feel that they can never attain the standards of the stereotyped good-woman of Western literature.

With the passing of time, the loss of innocence eventually must take place, but the gaining of experience and insights indicate the rewards we reap in the process. Losing one’s innocence involves undergoing sometimes painful life lessons, but with the pain, a new self-awareness and understanding may flourish. Rosa states, “Mis angustias, en fin, me hicieron más sabia” (*Loca* 185). After Rosa’s final story about her reunion with M., she states that with age and maturity, she has learned to adjust to difficult situations and

to take the time to be grateful. She may write about her lessons and share them with her readers.

After witnessing so many losses in the lives of the protagonists in Rosa Montero's novels *Crónica del desamor*, *La hija del caníbal*, *La función Delta*, *Historia del Rey Transparente* and *La loca de la casa*, the reader might ask himself or herself, what is there to look forward to? The answer is that the protagonists find and identify the hope that exists after a multitude of losses in their lives through writing. They write to overcome the losses and learn from them. With all the negativity that the protagonists encounter in life, each one better defines her own identity, and each comes to the realization that something positive does exist in this world and that life is worth living. As Lucía Ramos explains before taking her last breath: "Lloré de calma y de prodigio y comprendí que sí, que todo había merecido la pena de vivirse y morirse" (*Función* 289).

Ana Antón begins her chronicle with sentiments of disillusion. She is conscious of the fact that her job lacks the prestige or security that she deserves as a young and talented writer. She knows that she works more hours and has more responsibilities than other employees, yet she is never compensated or rewarded for her hard work in the same way as her male colleagues. Throughout the novel, Ana includes negative comments about the love lives of her friends as well as pessimistic statements about her own. Bellido Navarro highlights the pessimism in Montero's first novel: "Ana y sus amigas [...] pasan por la narración contando sus historias de frustraciones, soledad, fracasos con un tono anímico de desencanto vital que se mantendrá a lo largo de todo el relato" (254). Nevertheless, the novel offers an optimistic turn at the end when Ana takes control of the situation with her boss Soto Amón. She shows inner strength when she decides to write

about her un-loves instead of being depressed about them. Through her various experiences with loss, Ana reinforces her identity and is ready to face the world a little wiser and definitely not as innocent as before the figurative death of her Prince Charming. She has the resources to write the novel that she always wanted to write; in addition, she shows emotional readiness for the project “when she finally reduces her boss, Soto Amón, to silence” (Knights 88). At the end of the novel, Ana finds herself alone, without male companionship, but this condition actually benefits her for a better future. According to Gascón Vera, “En su situación de mujeres solas, poco a poco se vuelven autónomas y descubren una independencia que les enriquece y les potencia” (*Un mito nuevo* 77). The reader finishes the novel with a sense of hope for Ana who succeeds in completing her goal of writing the novel.

Before beginning her novel, Lucía Romero believes that life is a succession of losses: “Todo se pierde, antes o después, hasta llegar a la pérdida final. Incluso la Perra-Foca perdió vista y oído y ya no corre nada [...] Ramón perdió su dedo. Y yo perdí a Ramón” (*Hija* 108). Her pessimistic outlook indicates that to live is to lose, but Félix’s character balances the narrator’s pessimism with his positive experiences and useful lessons acquired via his eighty years of life, and in this way, the conclusion of the novel also offers a hopeful tone for Lucía’s life. She finds herself alone, but with a new sensation of freedom that she enjoys. Upon accepting the losses while also realizing the gifts that life offers, Lucía feels alleviated and free: “Es verdad que el conocimiento puede liberarte” (329). She accepts that her parents are individuals separate from her. She also accepts her new life without a husband, and she finally accepts the challenge of writing a novel for adults. Her feelings of abandonment and of being “devorada por su

progenitor” change from the beginning of the novel until the end (Peña 152). Through her mid-life crisis, a woman is born with a new perspective with more independence and self-esteem. Peña concludes that the Lucía that “erige al final de la escritura es una mujer que asume, con plena conciencia, la historia de su país, el desencanto de su generación y el devenir de su propia existencia” (159).

Lucía Ramos of *La función Delta* discovers a more profound friendship with Ricardo during the final months of her life. Through the crisis of her failing health, she finds a love very different from those she experienced in her past, a love that can be described as neither “amor pasión” nor “amor cotidiano”. In a scene of passion, the reader learns of the true happiness that Lucía finally discovers with her old friend: “Su cuerpo era un montón de huesos esquinados cubiertos de una piel blanca y blanda, y, sin embargo, me pareció muy hermoso. Me sentí feliz” (*Función* 221). Amell maintains that through the narrative, Lucía learns that her life has been neither useless nor empty: “La protagonista de *La función Delta* llega a un mejor conocimiento de sí misma y por consiguiente al pleno reconocimiento de sus propios valores y de los demás” (“Una crónica” 80). Through using the medium of the autobiography, Lucía discovers her true self and ultimately finds happiness. Ballesteros describes this type of writing as therapeutic and effective for self-discovery: “La autobiografía representa un nuevo medio de autoconocimiento y una nueva formulación de responsabilidad hacia este ‘yo’. Se convierte en un instrumento para entender la vida, un viaje de descubrimiento y un medio de reconciliación” (*Escritura femenina* 25).

Leola also finds contentment even in the face of death in *Historia del Rey Transparente*. Amell states, “Through all her tribulations Leola continually sees on the

horizon the island of Avalon, which is ruled by a wise and beautiful queen; only women live there, death does not exist, and it is always spring. The image gives Leola courage and symbolizes hope for a better future” (“Rosa Montero” 236). Although the novel ends with Leola’s death, the outlook remains positive. Leola feels realized once she achieves the goal of reading and writing and creates a sense of family among her friends and life partner: “Y qué bella es la vida cuando está amenazada. Leo, escribo, hago el amor con León, converso con Nyneve, me río con las bromas de Filippo y Alina, que juegan con Guy como si fueran niños. Somos un clan, somos una horda. Somos una familia” (*Historia* 447). Later in life, Leola assumes the role of caretaker for those shunned by society, for example, the castrated angel, the falsely blind, the epileptic and the giant. Leola finally reaches a state of well-being, though it does not last because of the encroaching crusaders. They attempt to steal her freedom and happiness, but she takes matters into her own hands; she controls her destiny by taking the elixir which promises to transport her to the Utopia-like Avalon.

Shari Benstock states that in an autobiography:

The Subject is made an Object of investigation [...] and is further divided between the present moment of the narration and the past on which the narration is focused. These gaps in the temporal and spatial dimensions of the text itself are often successfully hidden from reader and writer, so that the fabric of the narrative appears seamless, spun of whole cloth. The effect is magical—the self appears organic, the present sum total of the past, the past an accurate predictor of the future. (1047)

Through Leola’s autobiography, she becomes the object of an investigation of her inner self. She sums up the last twenty-five years of her life as if to say, “Look what I accomplished.” Her losses do not defeat her, but make her stronger.

Through writing, the narrator/protagonist Rosa explores the inner workings of her authorial side. *La loca de la casa* directly delves into the questions surrounding why she

as an author writes and attempts to explain why others write, both male and female authors. Rosa explains that writing helps her calm the anguish spurred on during sleepless nights: “También podría decir que escribo para soportar la angustia de las noches. En el desasosiego febril de los insomnios, mientras das vueltas y vueltas en la cama, necesitas algo en lo que pensar para que las tinieblas no se llenen de amenazas” (*Loca* 261). Writing also serves the purpose of self-analysis: “no escribes para que los demás entiendan tu posición en el mundo, sino para entenderte... Para mí la escritura es un camino espiritual” (269). By the end of the novel, the reader learns that Rosa is able to finish her literary endeavor, even with the constant interruptions. She succeeds in demonstrating to the reader the importance of one’s imagination. Montero acknowledges its value: “La imaginación nos rescata, nos completa la existencia, da cierto sentido al desorden, nos hace sobrevivir, nos hace ser quienes somos” (Hernández 1). Finally, Rosa equates the creative process to a taste of paradise.

Upon taking on the loss of youth, the loss of love and finally the loss of innocence, the protagonists learn and grow as human beings. These five women go through difficult times that make them more powerful and more secure in their identities. Writing facilitates these positive goals. They ultimately embrace the advice of the French feminist Hélène Cixous to write and experience the fruits of that labor:

To write. An act which will not only “realize” the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal. (*Feminisms* 338)

CHAPTER 3

WRITING AND ITS DOUBLE

Although in the last chapter we observed how the protagonists of *La función Delta*, *Historia del Rey Transparente* and *La loca de la casa* write about the same types of losses as Ana in *Crónica del desamor* and Lucía in *La hija del caníbal*, they do not utilize the third person when writing about themselves. Ana and Lucía Romero are the only two who write both in the first person and in the third in order to relay their life stories. Smith and Watson propose that the use of the first person along with second or third person indicates that “the narrating ‘I’ is neither unified nor stable” (60). The use of multiple voices provides evidence for this interior fragmentation (60). Ana Antón and Lucía Romero utilize the third person narration in order to gain perspective outside themselves. Hence, the third person demonstrates the novelistic mode, whereas the purely first person accounts of Lucía Ramos, Leola and Rosa illustrate a more confessional mode true of the autobiography versus the novel with autobiographical information. This chapter focuses on metafiction and the act of self-conscious writing for all five protagonists.

Crónica del desamor

In *Crónica del desamor*, Montero presents a testimony of the abominable circumstances that Spanish women endured during the nineteen seventies. In keeping with the ideas of Cixous, Ana writes in order to make a difference: “She must write her

self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history” (“The Laugh” 337). When Ana writes in first person, in following with Cixous, she *writes her self*, and in this way the reader gains access to the mind of the protagonist. Thus, the reader can better understand her perspective as a woman, including her thoughts, her attitudes and her crises. As Susanna Regazzoni explains, “Es una escritura en primera persona que favorece una comunicación preferencial con el público femenino, el cual encuentra, de esta manera, un espejo donde poder reflejarse, reconocerse e identificarse” (254). According to Susan David Bernstein in her essay “Confessional Feminisms: Rhetorical Dimensions of First-Person Thinking,” the use of “I” in writing “carries the capacity to accentuate and overturn conventions of authority, particularly the pretense of objectivity as an ideological cover for masculine privilege (175).

Throughout the novel, Ana is conscious of her own writing, the act of writing the novel we have in our hands. It is obvious in her comment: “Pero escribir un libro así, se dice Ana con desconsuelo, sería banal, estúpido e interminable, un diario de aburridas frustraciones” (*Crónica* 12). Ana Dotras expresses that these types of statements by the protagonists further highlight the novel’s metafictional features: “Lo que todas las novelas de metaficción tienen en común es la exposición deliberada de la ficcionalidad de la creación literaria ya sea refiriéndose a sí mismas, a otras obras o, de forma amplia, al género novelístico mismo” (10-11).

In spite of Ana’s fear to write something boring, through metafiction she is able to explore and comment on the amorous relationships of her friends and in her own

relationship with the father of her son. Knights maintains that metafiction has the potential to “counter the silencing of women in patriarchal society and to deconstruct the notion of a fixed feminine identity through the use of a first-person narrator who articulates a multiple, self-contradictory self” (220). Ana includes conversations among her friends in order to provide a discursive element as well as to offer a variety of voices. Through writing, she attempts to comprehend what is love from the many perspectives presented in her chronicle. Javier Escudero describes the Rosa Montero’s use of writing as “su aventura narrativa en búsqueda constante, en un medio a través del cual trata de encontrar respuestas a sus obsesiones personales” (“La narrativa” 218). Ana, like her author, uses writing in order to discover some kind of meaning to life.

La hija del caníbal

After her experiences and the opportunity to write and reflect about them, Lucía Romero of *La hija del caníbal* has a better idea of who she is. However, she exhibits metafictional tendencies to confuse reality with imagination. After finishing the novel, the reader must decide what really happened during the kidnapping and what did not. It is evident from the beginning that Lucía is a storyteller, or better yet, a liar. She is proud of her ability to invent stories about the strangers she encounters in public: “A Ramón siempre le irritaron mis improvisaciones sobre la vida, mi sentido de la innovación” (20). In addition, Lucía admits to having lied about her appearance to the reader: “También he mentado en otros dos detalles. En primer lugar, no soy lo que se dice alta, sino más bien bajita [...] Y tampoco tengo los ojos grises, sino negros” (20). Lucía believes herself to be the protagonist of a novel or of a movie from the very beginning, which could also

explain her desire to tell untruths. For her, life is like a book in which she is capable of developing many identities. Through her writing, Lucía may put order to the many facets of self: “The narrator’s personality is comprised of multiple selves and memories that only achieve coherence through narrative” (Amago 34). In an interview with Vanessa Knights, Montero declares that pretending to be a protagonist is a game of identity and fiction: “Los novelistas, lo mismo que los actores u otros profesionales así tenemos más clara la percepción de la disociación. En este sentido, quizás somos más tendentes a estos juegos, pero la experiencia de verse desde fuera es una experiencia básica del ser humano” (273). Although Lucía portrays herself falsely on several occasions in the novel, it is accurate that she does evolve from the beginning and the end. The reader witnesses this via her own writing. Amago expresses how the act of writing for Lucía is a “dynamic process of narrative creation” that “reflects the construction of the self through language” (36-7). Lucía becomes more independent, and though she admits that identity is an ever changing, malleable concept of self, she begins to have a better idea of who Lucía Romero is today.

The obvious metafictional elements in *La hija del caníbal* reveal themselves when the narrator Lucía produces and self-referentially comments on the novel itself, the one we are reading, after she suffers through all the events surrounding the kidnapping and her own subsequent midlife crisis. The novels analyzed in this study, as well as other contemporary Spanish novels, for example, *Urraca* by Lourdes Ortiz, the narrator employs writing in order to reflect and better understand various facets of life. Peña agrees with this idea stating: “*La hija del caníbal* señala, en el proyecto escritural de Rosa Montero, el afianzamiento de una reflexión que retoma los tópicos del poder y las

relaciones entre hombres y mujeres, para avanzar hacia la indagación de la identidad humana” (161). Through writing a novel for adults, Lucía grows as a person and learns more about who is Lucía Romero. Knights affirms that: “Lucía is highly self-aware and relates her thoughts about the narrative process to the search for her own identity which takes place in parallel to her search for her missing husband” (211). In her narrative that fosters both strength and freedom, Lucía resolves doubts about her own identity. Peña comments: “El final feliz, previsto para esta historia, señala a una mujer sola, que se decide a afrontar el enigma del existir,” (159), which leaves the reader with a sense of optimism for the new Lucía Romero.

La función Delta

Lucía Ramos experiments with writing as a way to replace reality and memories of the past with other invented ideas created by her imagination. The reader realizes Lucía’s tendency to replace facts with fiction through the critiques that her friend Ricardo makes while he reads her memoirs during his frequent hospital visits to Lucía. She utilizes Ricardo’s recommendations in order to make the proper changes to her diary, which is supposedly a collection of personal memories: “Cambia con igual facilidad los elementos de su propia historia que los desenlaces ficticios; esta novela auto-referencial sirve para poner en tela de juicio el proceso narrativo y el proceso vital al mismo tiempo” (Alborg 73). Lucía uses the diary as a way to reconstruct and better understand her identity and to reflect on her life. However, Glenn warns that the reader should not trust Lucía’s autobiography found in the lines of her memoir. The identity that Lucía presents of herself and the one that she thinks she has is not necessarily the one that she actually

possesses (“Reader Expectations” 91). Lucía reveals herself as a not so trustworthy narrator. Glenn maintains that “Lucía insists that she is an even-tempered, fair-minded, self-sufficient, mature person. We should not be so naive as to take her at her word” (91). Although Lucía does include some details that are less than truthful about her life, the process of writing in itself gives her a voice in order to express her worries and fears as well as to illustrate the past in the way that she wishes to remember it. Not including the whole truth is a nothing out of the ordinary in diaries, however it is an exercise in order to discover one’s identity:

En efecto, autobiografías, memorias, testimonios, cartas, diarios íntimos [...] son textos por lo general ya dotados de un elevado poder interpretativo que se ve incrementado si lo que pretendemos es desenterrar la voz de la mujer [...] con el propósito de reconstruir su identidad a lo largo del tiempo. (Caballé 111-2)

Lucía Ramos describes the narrative of the week of her thirties as her “memorias” or memoirs, and the week in the hospital as her “diario” or diary. In the diary in which she writes in the present in the year 2010, she includes the discussions with Ricardo about the events in her memoirs. According to Smith and Watson, the term diary indicates a form of writing that “records dailiness in accounts and observations of emotional responses” (193). In this space, Lucía divulges her daily struggles in the hospital and Ricardo offers his editorial advice. The definition of the term memoir stands as “A mode of life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant; the memoir directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator” (198). This explains the reasoning for Ricardo’s criticism that Lucía’s “memorias” lack any of Spain’s social or political issues. Smith and Watson go on to clarify that “in contemporary parlance *autobiography* and *memoir* are used

interchangeably” (198). As we saw in chapter two, both Lucía’s memoirs and diary reflect how she copes with various types of loss.

As in the other novels studied here, Montero employs a metafictional style in *La función Delta*. Metafiction in *La función Delta* serves to offer many possibilities of interpretation for the events within the novel. According to Joan L. Brown, “The metafictional aspects of the novel focus overtly on the nature of narrative and the continuum of truth on which ‘reality’ and ‘invention’ are opposite poles” (246). Montero incorporates metafictional elements throughout the novel, especially when describing the life of Lucía Ramos as one of a protagonist in a novel or in a movie. Lucía commonly refers to herself as a character in a movie/novel of her life,²⁵ as if she had an audience observing her many deeds: “Solía y suelo verme como protagonista de una película mental” (*Función* 52). She hypocritically criticizes Hipólito for making a novel out of his life, but his response indicates his inability to find things to write about: “El problema de esa novela, querida, no es salirse de la página, sino pasar del prólogo. Y yo no puedo pasar porque se me han acabado las cosas que decir” (21).

Another metafictional aspect of *La función Delta* is Lucía’s writing in her diary and the intention of publishing it as a novel. Aside from becoming famous by authoring a novel, Isolina Ballesteros comments on other purposes for writing for women: “La escritura autobiográfica, en primera persona, traduce la necesidad de expresar la interioridad, la vivencia subjetiva, de autodescubrirse, reafirmarse en su posición ante el mundo y ordenar la propia vida a través de la escritura” (Ballesteros 99). In her diary written in first person, Lucía discusses loss and death, among other topics. Ballesteros

²⁵ Montero describes Ana Antón’s ex boyfriend, José María, in the same way: “se construía a sí mismo como personaje literario cada día, quizá por eso era incapaz de escribir” (Crónica 8).

affirms the following about Lucía: “Con la literatura, en la vejez, inicia una introspección intimista, que le lleva al autoanálisis” (106).

We also witness the protagonist’s search for identity through writing in *La función Delta*. As Lucía writes: “Creo que el escribir mis memorias ha refrescado mis recuerdos y mis emociones” (*Función* 259). Ballesteros indicates the element of self-discovery in autobiographical writing (99) that helps the protagonist interpret her many facets of identity. For Lucía, the diary opens an interior dialogue about her roles as a professional, a lover and a friend in two different stages of her life. Ciplijauskaitė comments on the implications of the autobiography:

La novela autobiográfica femenina intenta reunir las dos funciones: nace como diálogo con la novela masculina tradicional por una parte, y con lo que se solía considerar como «estilo femenino», por otra; además negando éste, trata de descubrir o crear un nuevo modo de expresión que revele lo más hondo del «yo» individual y a la vez representativo de la mujer en general. (18)

Although the novel ends with the death of Lucía, the last months in the hospital serve to show optimism upon her ending the last chapter of life. In the following passage Davies maintains that there is hope in *La función Delta*: “This beautifully written story [...] is moving, poignant and strangely hopeful. In the face of death and decrepitude there is memory, compassion, admiration, and humour; above all, there is love and desire” (110).

Historia del Rey Transparente

In an essay entitled “Conversations,” Hélène Cixous maintains, “the inaugural gesture of writing is always in a necessary relation to narcissism. When one begins to write, one is constantly reminding oneself of the fact: ‘I write’” (232). *Historia del Rey Transparente* begins with the self-conscious writing of the protagonist/narrator Leola, a

plebian who escapes the village where she and her family serves the señor de Abuny, and embarks on a journey that includes learning to read and write, jousting at competitions, and participating in tournaments, among other knightly tasks. Her writing is autobiographical, and the first paragraph of her literary endeavor begins, “Soy mujer y escribo. Soy plebeya y sé leer. Nací sierva y soy libre...Yo escribo. Es mi mayor victoria, mi conquista, el don del que me siento más orgullosa” (11). Proud of her accomplishments, Leola deems her life story worthy of recounting.

Leola’s first experience with writing is the compilation of an encyclopedia of vocabulary words. When Leola initially considers writing a book, she believes the idea to be ridiculous, and even describes it as extravagant: “[D]e repente yo también he tenido la extravagante idea de hacer algún día una enciclopedia, pero escrita en lenguaje popular” (*Historia* 366). Although to begin with Leola doubts herself as a writer, she decides to move forward with the project. At first, she is embarrassed to tell anyone about her writing and many times tries to keep this project a secret: “Oculto con la amplia manga de mi vestido el pergamino en el que estoy escribiendo” (439). Even though Leola attempts to hide her literary activity, she truly enjoys it and writes frequently. Her many ink-stained clothes confirm this: “Observo que he vuelto a manchar la manga con la tinta: una fastidiosa torpeza a la que estoy acostumbrada. Todas mis ropas están entintadas” (439). Leola lives in a time when society views writing, as well as knightly activities, as inappropriate behavior to her sex: “Al igual que antes era una mujer disfrazada de guerrero, ahora soy un escribano disfrazado de dama” (439). Leola is aware of the taboos surrounding her passion and feels safer keeping the encyclopedia private.

Leola wields both her pen and her sword to inscribe herself in the history of knighthood as well as authorship.²⁶ In order to be a believable knight, Leola must hide her femininity: “Sudan mis pobres pechos, aplastados por la venda con que los disimulo” (*Historia* 418). She changes her name to Leo and imitates masculine behavior. Cixous states: “Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallogocentrism” (“The Laugh” 337). Leola spends many years practicing with the sword to become a great warrior, an act not typical or even considered appropriate for a woman, and the same holds true for her writing.

According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in the essay “Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship,” women writers, canonically underrepresented, feel inadequacies, like outsiders, when undertaking the task of writing. Leola begins with an utter lack of self-confidence, calling her writing ambitions as ridiculous: “Si lo pienso bien, lo descabellado de mi ambición me resulta risible: una pobre sierva, una campesina, intentando escribir el libro de todas las palabras...Algún día, quizá” (366). Leola’s initial apprehension and later desire to hide her writing may be explained by Gilbert and Gubar’s premise that

her [a woman’s] need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention—all these phenomena of ‘inferiorization’ mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creating from those of her male counterpart. (292)

²⁶ Reminiscent of Cervantes’ *Don Quiixote*, Leola trains in both letters and arms. We are reminded of Quixote’s advice to Sancho Panza before he sets out to govern his own island that “Arms are needed as much as letters, and letters as much as arms” (675).

Virginia Woolf also reveals the possible negative outcomes for women who hoped to write during Shakespeare's time, nearly five-hundred years after the era in which Leola writes:

[A]ny woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard, feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty. (1023)

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* explain the definition of an autobiographical or life narrative as a "historically situated practice of self-representation," and "in such texts, narrators selectively engage their lived experience through personal storytelling." In addition, the autobiography "located in specific times and places... are at the same time in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory" (14). Leola's account of her life takes place in twelfth-century France, a time when a poor peasant woman would never dream of authoring a manuscript of any kind. In fact, the usually religious in nature autobiographical writing during medieval times focused on the writer's relationship with God: "Medieval Christian writers deployed a rhetoric of self-reference in their quests for salvation. It is important to note, however, that the challenges and complexities of self-reference and self-study in medieval mystics do not yet present the self-fashioning private individual of much early modern narrative" (87). Besides the occasional reference to the Bible or Providence, "La Providencia ha hecho que la niebla haya desaparecido por completo" (*Historia* 267), Leola's account of her life as a knight mirrors a knight-errantry tale rather than a mystical writing like that of Santa Teresa of Ávila. However, after

taking refuge in a convent, Leola enjoys the time she can dedicate to writing: “Quizá me estoy equivocando en todo lo que soy y lo que hago. Quizá debería hacerme monja” (368).

Ballesteros claims that autobiographical writing for women aids in the construction of a personal identity within the realms of a specific culture or society: “La escritura autobiográfica sigue siendo uno de los medios principales de expresión de los grupos oprimidos para resolver problemas de identidad cultural. En el caso de la mujer, el discurso autobiográfico no revela una identidad femenina preexistente, sino que provee las vías para la construcción del ‘yo’ dentro de una realidad cultural y social determinada” (*Escritura femenina* 30). Leola, a former illiterate farmhand, writes a narrative about herself, an atypical, even unheard of task for someone of her sex and social class. During this endeavor, she discusses many losses, and consequently the reader learns her ever evolving concept of self.

Leola amends and transforms her perception of “yo” through the years, at times embracing her femininity, while still others renouncing it completely. Smith and Watson point out: “The stuff of autobiographical storytelling, then, is drawn from multiple, disparate, and discontinuous experiences and the multiple identities constructed from and constituting those experiences” (35). Leola learns during her stay at Dhuoda’s castle how to conduct herself more like a refined lady: “Me explica cómo tengo que sentarme y agacharme, ... cómo debo mover la falda y alzar graciosamente el ruedo para dejar asomar el pequeño pie... También he aprendido a comer con delicados mordiscos y con la boca cerrada” (*Historia* 140-1). Leola also learns how to apply make-up, maintain a smooth

complexion and whiten her teeth with pumice and urine. She believes that training to be a lady is more challenging than learning to be a knight.

Although Leola eagerly wishes to appear more feminine and refined, she rejects certain aspects of her womanhood. After participating in a fight, Leola notices her clothes stained with blood, but soon realizes that it “era mi flor de sangre, un menstruo inesperado” (229). She curses the physical nuisances of being a woman: “Y proseguimos nuestro camino, mientras yo maldecía mi cuerpo de mujer. Este pobre cuerpo prisionero, que pugna por salir y derramarse” (229). Toward the end of the narration proves to during her involvement with León, however, Leola finds herself wanting to only dress as a woman: “En el sitiado castro no dispongo de una armadura completa, y tampoco sé si deseo vestirme nuevamente de hombre” (456). Leola lives her life at times only as a woman, at times as a man, and sometimes, a combination of the two.

Since Leola leads a great portion of her life as a man, does she also write her life history like a man? Is there even a difference between what men and women write? According to Estelle Jelinek, autobiographical writing by men differs greatly from that of women. Jelinek claims that men tend to highlight intellectual and professional successes, concentrating on achievements that reveal their place in society. Men tend to make themselves out as heroes, mostly preoccupied with their standing in the public eye. We see this tendency in Leola’s writings.²⁷ On many occasions, Leola highlights her personal triumphs in battles and expresses how she enjoys the attention of the crowds: “Qué extraño: antes me inquietaba que me mirara y ahora lo que me incomoda es que me ignore” (*Historia* 105). On the other hand, according to Jelinek, women in general give

²⁷ We also see this type of typically “male” writing in Mórbidus, the scribe of the señor de Ardres, who compiles the biography of his master. In it he “llena pliegos y pliegos de pergamino con un hinchado relato de aventuras caballerescas y clamorosas victorias de su amo” (*Historia* 277).

attention to their domestic roles by focusing on topics of their intimate lives, including feelings and personal growth: “What their life stories reveal is a self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding” (Jelinek 15). Leola also describes her feelings and personal growth through her encyclopedia where she defines words that have special meaning in her life. Just as Leola lives her life as a man and as a woman, her writing exhibits both typically male attributes as well as female.

Cixous asserts, “If I were to write a historical novel, what would it matter if I were a man or a woman? But if I write about love, then it does matter. I write differently. If I write letting something of my body come through, then this will be different, depending of whether I have experience of a feminine or masculine body” (“Conversations” 230). Leola writes her encyclopedia and her autobiography after having lived for years both as a man and as a woman. She has a unique perspective of the world around her. In addition, she has worked the fields, but has also dined with royalty. Virginia Woolf states in “A Room of One’s Own” that there are two sexes in the mind that must work in partnership to obtain happiness, and this collaboration must also be present in the instance of writing:

The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually cooperating. If one is a man, still the woman part of the brain must have effect; and a woman also must have intercourse with the man in her. Coleridge perhaps meant this when he said that a great mind is androgynous. It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilised and uses all its faculties. (1025)

Woolf also suggests, “Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the act of creation can be accomplished” (1029). Leola’s changing clothes reinforces a change in identity. While learning to battle with her Maestro, she also becomes skilled at behaving like a man: “[I]ntenté adquirir gestos y

maneras de varón: para sentarme, para caminar, para mover las manos. Además hablo siempre en voz baja y susurrante, en el registro más grave que puedo extraer de mi garganta. Y nunca río en público. La risa, lo he descubierto, es femenina” (*Historia* 111). Sometimes as a man, Leola feels free: “Hay un placer en volver a correr por los caminos revestida de hombre. Libre e intocable” (322). Other times, she feels trapped in her suit of armor as if in a cage: “Estoy vestida una vez más de caballero y siento mi armadura como una jaula” (305). Perhaps her identification with male attributes may give her the ammunition and courage to write, a typically male activity in her era.

In addition to differing subject matter in male autobiographies versus female already stated above, the lineal structure of a male’s narration of his life, generally characterized by “harmony and orderliness,” contrasts with the a female’s usually non-chronological, “disconnected, fragmentary, or organized into self-sustained units” self-portrait (Jelinek 17). The structure of *Historia del Rey Transparente* as a whole is circular; the end repeats several sentences that we read at the beginning, but Leola’s self-referential writing is linear and chronological. Once she begins her narrative describing her life at the age of fifteen, she includes no flashbacks, nor does she create distance by writing about writing the autobiography. Only when she catches the reader up on her life history to the present moment does she begin inserting metafictional speech.²⁸

Lucía Ramos of *La función Delta* is more self-conscious of her writing, sharing with the reader the entire process of putting her ideas on paper and editing them. Lucía and Leola are mature women at the end of their lives who have in common that they are both writing against the clock, cognizant of their upcoming death. In addition, these

²⁸ Leola refers to the act of writing when discussing the encyclopedia, but does not do so with regards to the autobiography, apart from the opening of the novel and at the very end.

protagonists write about their youth over two decades later with more mature eyes and perhaps a different perception of the events that originally took place.

We note some metafictional elements in Leola's writing of the autobiography when she mentions the actual act of writing while describing the way the plume feels in her hand at the beginning of the novel and again at the end. Likewise, while Leola writes an encyclopedia that she refers to as her "libro de todas las palabras," the reader is allowed access to her writing process. For example, Leola reflects on the theme of hope and how it can turn bittersweet in an instant: "La hermosa virtud de la esperanza puede también ser, paradójicamente, la madre de las más punzante pesadumbre...Debería añadir esta reflexión a la definición de la palabra en mi enciclopedia" (*Historia* 445). We witness her thoughts as a writer, what she considers viable and worth sharing with her readers. As Leola learns through life experiences, she annotates definitions, but she also finds help from other sources. Nyneve, for example, suggests a word to Leola to include in her book, an act demonstrating her support in Leola's project: "[Q]uería regalarte una palabra. La mejor de todas...Compasión. Que, como sabes, es la capacidad de meterse en el pellejo de prójimo y de sentir con el otro lo que él siente" (496). When her companion Nyneve dies, Leola writes the words "la vida" and proceeds with the definition: "un relámpago de luz en la eternidad de las tinieblas" (508). The encyclopedia shows Leola's sentimental side in contrast with her rough exterior.

After learning to read and write, and participating in several noteworthy experiences, Leola finally unearths the confidence to write. However, her contact with other educated women plays a crucial role in her initiative to begin her own compositions. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar state that a female author must "define

herself as an author” and in doing so she must “redefine the terms of her socialization” (“Infection in the Sentence” 292). Thus, Leola finds assurance through her encounters with strong women who also write: “[S]he can begin such a struggle only by actively seeking a *female* precursor who, far from representing a threatening force to be denied or killed, proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible” (292). Leola admires María de Francia whom she meets while visiting the city Poitiers:

Esta María es la autora de unos relatos muy bellos, los *Lais*, que he empezado a leer al llegar aquí. Apenas puedo creer que, siendo mujer, se atreva a escribir, y que lo haga tan hermosamente. Su ejemplo me deslumbra y me envenena: siento el picor de las palabras que se agolpan en la punta de mis dedos. Tal vez algún día yo también ose escribir. Tal vez algún día sepa hacerlo. (*Historia* 179-80)

María de Francia writes beautiful poetry, which inspires Leola to learn to write.

Likewise, Herrade de Landsberg, another female precursor, rouses her interest in writing as a means to impart knowledge or information. She is the role model who inspires Leola to write an encyclopedia: “[L]leva años entregada a la inmensa tarea de confeccionar un libro de todas las palabras y todas las cosas, una enciclopedia escrita en latín y titulada *Hortus Delicarum* [...] Su pasión por el conocimiento es contagiosa” (*Historia* 366).

In addition to María de Francia and Landsberg, Leola encounters still other female writers with whom to aspire, helping her to overcome any “Anxiety of Authorship.” Also in Poitiers, at Queen Leonor’s court, Leola discovers a group of women who participate in “Las Cortes de Amor,” a book club of sorts where the members compose poetry, share their works with each other and discuss literature. Leola describes the environment at Leonor’s palace as “un entorno que te obliga a pensar” (*Historia* 182). This atmosphere encourages the sharing of ideas and creating literature: “Podríaís escribir un hermoso *lai* sobre el tema, María—dice la hija de Leonor con un

guiño a la otra María, la de Francia” (185). Nevertheless, Fray Angélico whose character represents the oppressive voice of censorship, asserts his disapproval of “Las Cortes de Amor” and all other creative activities and games. He argues, “Pues bien, mi Reina, pienso que es un tiempo, una inteligencia y un esfuerzo totalmente desperdiciados en un debate absurdo e insignificante. *Judicium rationis per nimium amorem*” (186). Cixous recommends women to eliminate such sentiments from their environments: “[F]irst we have to get rid of the systems of censorship that bear down on every attempt to speak in the feminine” (“Castration” 51).

Finally, Leola meets Eloísa, a nun who also writes, but dedicates most of her writing activity to letters: “Lo mejor que soy son esas cartas, Leola. Empleaba días enteros en escribirlas” (*Historia* 369). Via poetry, volumes of encyclopedias and letters, Leola witnesses several instances of women who write. Gilbert and Gubar maintain that this search for a female example expresses the woman writer’s need to give herself permission to write: “The woman writer...searches for a female model not because she wants dutifully to comply with male definitions of her ‘femininity’ but because she must legitimize her own rebellious endeavors” (“Infection in the Sentence” 292). While still living on the farm, Leola would have never encountered the access or freedom to educate herself nor the role models to inspire her to engage in the act of writing.

As we see with Leola’s encyclopedia, or the tattooed story of Achilles on Filippo’s body, Montero includes many layers of text within *Historia del Rey Transparente*. Obviously, Leola’s autobiography makes up the majority of the narrative, but the novel’s namesake “Historia del Rey Transparente” indicates an elusive tale that the reader anxiously awaits to learn, but someone or something always interrupts the

narration of it. We learn early that only nefarious consequences occur once the storyteller shares this particular forbidden tale.

Early in the novel, the reader cannot ignore the odd reactions of people when anyone begins to recount the “Historia del Rey Transparente.” In the first instance when a man begins to share the tale, a bystander reacts erratically: “El viejo guerrero se atraganta, tose, se demuda, pierde su tranquila gravedad. --¡No! ¡Detente, desgraciado, esa historia no!” (*Historia* 38). Leola seems confused, and the reader also questions the old warrior’s strange reaction. The storyteller disregards the agitated warning and continues the story: “Había una vez un reino pacífico y feliz que tenía un rey ni muy bueno ni muy malo” (38). In mid sentence a lightning bolt strikes a tree causing mass confusion and panic. Hence, the first time, Leola only hears the first few sentences of the beginning of the story followed by strange happenings.

The next time Leola comes in contact with someone willing to share “Historia del Rey Transparente” she is dining with friends at Dhuoda’s palace. After finishing his show, one of the acrobats takes a moment to approach the table and offers, “Mi hermosa Señora, mis Señores, ruego vuestro permiso para contaros la historia más extraordinaria que jamás he escuchado. Se trata de la historia del Rey Transparente” (*Historia* 123). Again, a fearful reaction ensues, this time from Nyneve: “Nyneve, a mi lado, da un respingo...[L]a miro extrañada, porque no sé si quiere decir algo, o interrumpir el relato, o arrojarse sobre el hombre” (123-4). Just as the acrobat begins the story, a heavy ceiling light of iron chains and torches plummets on top of him, crushing him beneath the metal.

On still another occasion a young man tells the “Historia del Rey Transparente” to a group of his friends and Leola listens *in medias res*. This time we learn more

information than just the first few lines of the story. The young man expresses that the king remarries several times since he is unable to produce a descendant. However, this “robusto mozo de mirada bizca” (*Historia* 200) too does not finish the tale because he begins to choke uncontrollably on his pipe. These examples of failed attempts at telling the story create suspense in the novel, but at the same time, they cause us to doubt our narrator. In addition, since Leola is a self-professed liar, “Claro que yo siempre miento, puesto que me hago pasar por varón” (185), the reader may question Leola’s sincerity regarding the inclusion of such implausible events.²⁹ Smith and Watson argue that one goal of the autobiographer is to create trust between the narrator and the reader:

Because issues of authority can be crucial to autobiographical acts, life narrators have much at stake in gaining the reader’s belief in the experiences they narrate and thus having the ‘truth’ of the narrative validated. Persuasion to belief is fundamental to the pact between narrator and reader. Appeals to the authority of experience bring to the fore issues of trust in autobiographical narrating, since the autobiographical relationship depends on the narrator’s winning and keeping the reader’s trust in the plausibility of the narrated experience and the credibility of the narrator. (28)

Next, a bleaker fate transpires when Ardres tells the same story of the Rey Transparente to Leola. Ardres compares himself to this king because they both have in common that they were not able to conceive a child.³⁰ In his canopy bed, he dies a dreadful death in the midst of telling the prohibited story: “Las maderas labradas han aplastado el cuerpecillo del enfermo con la misma facilidad con que una bota de hierro aplasta un caracol [...] [H]a tenido la misma muerte que un insecto, y con él desaparece su linaje feroz” (*Historia* 284). Time after time, Leola witnesses several instances of

²⁹ Leola includes other examples of fantasy in her narration such as Nyneve’s condition of being a witch, although we never encounter true examples of witchcraft. Nyneve introduces herself explaining, “Soy una bruja, o un hada, o una hechicera, como prefieras llamarme” (*Historia* 48).

³⁰ Ardres’ need for a biography of his life stems from the fact that he has no descendants to continue his bloodline or his life’s story.

people willing to tell this ominous tale, even though most understand the dire consequences that result after telling it.

Alina's character offers to tell the story of the Rey Transparente stating that her stepmother told it to her. We learn earlier that Alina's stepmother suddenly became ill, but Alina thinks it is because she inadvertently gave her the evil eye. Nyneve saves Alina from a horrible fate by covering her mouth before a single word of the story can escape. With the exception of Alina, only male characters attempt to tell the story, and consequently suffer in some way or die. Only Alina eludes the negative consequences because she never has the chance to speak.

After several attempts of trying to hear the story to its completion, Leola believes that she has finally met the person who will narrate it to the end. A peddler's young nephew begins to tell the story, "La historia del Rey Transparente sucedió hace muchos, muchos años, en un reino ni grande ni pequeño, ni rico ni pobre, ni del todo feliz ni completamente desgraciado" (*Historia* 449), but Leola does not impede the suicidal act: "Y yo no le hice callar. No sé qué me pasó; tal vez fuera el deseo de terminar de una vez, de saber qué ocurría en esa historia" (449). However, the young man never finishes the story because out of nowhere, a large stone flies through the air and knocks him unconscious. Leola shows her frustration when she writes: "El buhonero lo montó en una mula y se lo llevó, junto con las demás palabras no dichas de la historia maldita" (449). The reference to fiction within the novel is a metafictional quality Montero utilizes to point out the fictive nature of the text we are reading. According to Hargis, women authors' use of metafiction during the post-Franco era demonstrates subversion as it "exposes the patriarchal myths perpetuated by the conventions of mass culture. These myths have

traditionally entrapped women in stereotyped gender roles. Using the metafictional mode for subversive purposes, these writers provide an alternate discourse from a female perspective” (8). Case in point, Leola’s knighthood and her writing fly in the face of any typical delineated gender roles for women.

Matilde de Anjou tells Leola: “La *Historia del Rey Transparente* es un texto poderoso que produce efectos porque ha sido creído por demasiadas personas durante demasiado tiempo. Al leer el libro puedes tener la debilidad de pensar que lo que lees ocurriría de modo irremediable, y con ello, sin darte cuenta, lo estás convirtiendo en realidad” (374). Throughout the novel, the reader never learns the entire story of the “Historia del Rey Transparente.” Someone always becomes injured before the end. After Leola ingests the deadly potion, and her autobiography ends, Montero tempts the reader with what looks like a copy of the authentic manuscript with a footnote expressing gratitude to the emeritus university professor Nuria Labari for her help in finding this medieval text. Here again, Montero’s metafiction blurs the lines of reality and fiction and attempts to involve the reader in the deception. The tale comes to an end with the phrase: “Y luego aclaró la temblorosa voz, miró al Dragón y dijo: «La respuesta es” (525), but only blank pages follow. Just when the reader believes he or she will finally learn the king’s answer to the dragon’s riddle, there is nothing. Montero entices us, making us become a part of the fiction. Since none of the other characters can finish telling the story within the text, this version must also end inconclusively. Just as Matilde de Anjou warns that upon reading the tale of the Rey Transparente, one begins to believe that the fiction turns into reality, we the readers of the novel become swept up in this narrative game.

Within *Historia del Rey Transparente*, Montero revisits medieval France with an underlying goal of “awakening consciousness” as Adrienne Rich would put it. In her essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as a Re-Vision,” Rich asserts that we should re-examine the past: “Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (18). Montero gives a voice to women who are important historical figures of the past, such as Marie de France or Leonor de Aquitania, depicting them as strong, able women. She also revives from the dead lesser known women such as María Pérez “La Varona” who, legend has it, combats against Alfonso I el Batallador and wins. In addition, Montero incites the reader to question the validity of the legend of King Arthur’s court by recounting details through the eyes of Merlin’s lover. Nyneve demythifies the story of Merlín stating that his real name was Myrddin and “no era mago. Era un bardo con una bella voz y con una notable habilidad para usar las palabras [...] Su gran acierto fue el de narrar por vez primera la historia de Arturo... Y la contó a su placer y su manera, tal y como él quiso. Se inventó la mitad” (*Historia* 98). In a sense, the reader along with Leola, loses his or her innocence. Finally, creating a female “knight in shining armor” whose man of the woods is also a woman, Montero further reinterprets medieval chivalric romance literature. Judith Kegan Gardiner finds a connection between the process of female identity and resisting patriarchal norms in writing: “The hypothesis of the processual nature of female identity illuminates diverse traits of writing by women, particularly its defiance of conventional generic boundaries and of conventional characterization” (349).

La loca de la casa

In *La hija del caníbal*, Rosa Montero appears as a character, an author Lucía's fans and the public in general mistake her for constantly. Amago explains that "the appearance of a fictionalized 'real' author within her [Lucía's] own text serves to subvert the conventions of literary realism, and, along with the narrator's repeated prevarications, further problematizes clear-cut distinctions between fiction and reality (40). The same holds true for Rosa Montero, who appears as a character, the narrator/protagonist, in her own novel *La loca de la casa*. Montero blurs the divide between real life and fiction, just as Miguel de Unamuno does when he writes himself into *Niebla*. Not only does Unamuno make an appearance, he interacts with the protagonist Augusto Pérez. Rosa Montero, the author, writes a pseudo-autobiography of herself mixed with reflections on writing and other authors in *La loca de la casa* with the intent of redefining our meaning of reality.

The reader must question, is this autobiography a true account of the real Rosa Montero? Our first indication that the novel we are reading represents another product of Montero's imagination is the title. *La loca de la casa* or "The Madwoman of the House" is a metaphor for the imagination. Montero adopts this quote from Santa Teresa de Jesús: "La imaginación es la loca de la casa." Although we can verify many of Rosa's disclosures about herself with the real Rosa Montero, such as the references to novels we know for a fact that Montero wrote, she also reveals absolutely false details about her life that one could easily disprove. For example, Montero spent much of her childhood without the company of friends due to years of suffering with tuberculosis and anemia. To pass the time, Montero avidly read and enjoyed writing since no child close to her age

was around to play. Nevertheless, according to Rosa, she has a twin sister Martina, revealing “somos mellizas y vertinosamente distintas” (*Loca* 28), but Rosa also states, “La novela es la autorización de la esquizofrenia” (29). Perhaps Martina simply represents another side of Rosa’s personality, or her other.

Montero leads us down the path of believing that we are reading an autobiography only to put on the literary breaks to create distance. First, Rosa, the narrator/protagonists admits problems with her memory. Then, she recounts a story she remembers from nineteen seventy-five, when she was just twenty-three. The reader can only doubt the clarity of details that she recalls. Rosa even invites us to question her memories through her own admissions: “[C]uando transcurre cierto tiempo, pongamos veinte años, de algo que recuerdo, a veces me resulta difícil distinguir si lo he vivido, o lo he soñado, o lo he imaginado, o tal vez lo he escrito (lo cual indica, por otra parte, la fuerza de la fantasía: la vida imaginaria también es vida” (*Loca* 224). Benstock warns about the reliability of memory in autobiographical writing: “The workings of memory, crucial to the recollection implicit in life writing, are found to be suspect. They slip beyond the borders of the conscious world; they are traversed and transgressed by the unconscious” (1053). We the reader must constantly qualify Rosa’s statements about herself as true or false to determine whether she is revealing true secrets about the real Rosa Montero or purposefully misleading us.

Smith and Watson pose important questions regarding the reading of an autobiography: “When we try to differentiate autobiographical narrative from biography, the novel and history writing, we encounter a fundamental question: What is the truth status of autobiographical disclosure? How do we know whether and when a narrator is

telling the truth or lying?” (12). Rosa expresses that she is tired of everyone believing everything she writes, assuming that each admission is an autobiographical confession: “[M]uchos lectores caen en el equívoco de creer que lo que están leyendo les ha pasado de verdad a los novelistas...A mí se me llevan los demonios cuando lectores o periodistas extraen absurdas deducciones autobiográficas de mis libros” (*Loca* 267). However, this statement seems sincere, as though the real Rosa Montero wishes to declare certain truths about her profession as an author, but then again, this could be another trap.

Montero provides several examples of metafictional elements throughout the novel. For one, the narrator mostly writes about writing. She frequently discusses what makes for an effective writer or how power, success and failure can undeniably destroy those who create literature. On many occasions, Rosa reverts back to discussing the novel we hold in our hands: “El caso es que ayer pensaba dedicar el día a *La loca de la casa* y me relamía de sólo imaginar el montón de horas que iba a poder emplear en ello” (*Loca* 47) or “Cuando empecé a idear este libro, pensaba que iba a ser una especie de ensayo sobre la literatura, sobre la narrativa, sobre el oficio del novelista” (235). By drawing attention to the writing process, Montero wishes to create distance between the reader and the protagonist, further blurring the lines of reality and fiction.

On the topic of the way men and women write, Cixous claims that because men’s and women’s bodies contrast physically from one another, so too will their writing reveal essential differences: “I don’t believe a man and a woman are identical [...] Our differences have to do with the way we experience pleasure, with our bodily experiences, which are not the same. Our different experiences necessarily leave different marks, different memories” (“Conversations” 230). Throughout *La loca de la casa*, Rosa mostly

identifies with other authors, not because they are female or male, from Europe or the Americas, from this century or centuries past. She makes connections with those who create narrative, and she compares herself with this extraordinary group because writing defines her life: “El escritor siempre está escribiendo. En eso consiste en realidad la gracia de ser novelista: en el torrente de palabras que bulle constantemente en el cerebro. He redactado muchos párrafos, innumerables páginas, incontables artículos” (*Loca* 17). Rosa also indicates that writing is a human act, not necessarily feminine or masculine, but Cixous takes issue with this:

Women who write have for the most part until now considered themselves to be writing not as women but as writers. Such women may declare that sexual difference means nothing, that there’s no attributable difference between masculine and feminine writing...What does it mean to “take no position”? When someone says “I’m not political” we all know what that means! It’s just another way of saying: “My politics are someone else’s!” And it’s exactly the case with writing! Most women are like this: they do someone else’s—man’s—writing, and in their innocence sustain it and give it a voice, and end up producing writing that’s in effect masculine. Great care must be taken in working on feminine writing not to get trapped by names: to be signed with a woman’s name doesn’t necessarily make a piece of writing feminine. It could quite well be masculine writing, and conversely, the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man’s name does not in itself exclude femininity. (“Castration or Decapitation” 51-2).

Hence, according to Cixous, since men’s and women’s bodies are different, their writing will also convey dissimilarities: “The way we make love – because it isn’t the same – produces different sensations and recollections. And these are transmitted through the text” (“Castration” 230). Rosa, of course, denies this claim wholeheartedly. In line with Cixous’ reasoning, Jelinek contrasts men’s autobiographical writing with women’s and concludes that the intention of the sexes can prove to be very different. For women: “The autobiographical intention is often powered by the motive to convince readers of their self-worth, to clarify, to affirm, and to authenticate their self-image”

(Jelinek 15). Rosa attempts to validate her position as an author and clarify her stance on various issues such as feminism: “Me considero feminista o, por mejor decir, antisexista, porque la palabra feminista tiene un contenido semántico equívoco” (*Loca* 171). In this sense, at least according to Jelinek, Rosa’s autobiography shows signs of a self-narrative typical of a female writer.

The organization of women’s autobiographies tends to avoid chronological structures (Jelinek 17). We find in Rosa’s narration many examples of digressions and flashbacks from childhood mixed with short biographical notes plus the recounting of a personal experience three different ways. While she discusses her personal life and many aspects of her life as an author, she also analyzes factual anecdotes of other writers. She states in the post scriptum: “Todo lo que cuento en este libro sobre otros libros u otras personas es cierto, es decir, responde a una verdad oficial documentalmente verificable” (*Loca* 273). In keeping with Jelinek’s idea, because Rosa’s writing tends to reflect a non-linear construction, the narrative exhibits a characteristically feminine quality.

To sum up, all five protagonists show a consciousness about the words they put on paper while they share their unique experiences. They utilize various forms of writing, from the chronicle to a diary, but all contain the first-person, confessional “I”. It is important to note that male writers may also utilize the first person while expressing their thoughts and personal anecdotes. Thus, Showalter sees women’s writing not as “*inside* and *outside* of the male tradition,” but rather “inside two traditions simultaneously” (348).

CHAPTER 4

DEATH, PROCREATION AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

In chapter two I explored how the protagonists write about various losses throughout their lives. This chapter will center on the most grave of all losses, the loss of life. It will also provide an analysis of the worries that the protagonists include in their writings about death. In *Crónica del desamor*, *La hija del caníbal*, *La función Delta*, *Historia del Rey Transparente* and *La loca de la casa*, death represents not only the end of the life cycle, but the end of everything. The protagonists confront their fears about death and use writing as a means to understand these fears, while at the same time to transcend their own end. Writing satisfies a certain need to achieve fame, and in this way, survive. Javier Escudero refers to this recourse as the “tema unamuniano de la salvación, del triunfo sobre la mortalidad, mediante la fama literaria [...] Con una terminología distinta, pero con propósitos similares, Montero se enlaza así con la tradición filosófica española moderna” (“La presencia” 26).

We have found in the protagonists the fear of losing their youth, which signals the entering into old age. For these women, as well as for some other characters in the novels, growing old is the last step before death and this reality causes feelings of terrible uncertainty. Escudero comments on the terror that many of Montero’s characters experience: “El terror de estos personajes ante la mortalidad se agudiza por el hecho de que todos ellos carecen de los consuelos religiosos o espirituales, de la dimensión

filosófica o trascendental” (“La presencia” 24). As Félix comments in *La hija del caníbal*: “Yo no creo en el Más Allá, pero creo en las palabras” (217). Because of the terror they feel regarding inexistence, for the two Lucías writing implicates a more profound meaning, which is symbolic procreation.

In all five novels, there is an utter lack of physical reproduction. As Escudero explains: “Las relaciones sexuales, mecánicas y vacías, que provocan hastío más que placer, no conducen nunca a la procreación” (“La presencia” 24). Of the five protagonists analyzed here, only Ana has a child of her own, and for this reason she does not demonstrate the same need or calling to write as do the other women. Conversely, Lucía Romero, Lucía Ramos, Leola, and Rosa Montero all of whom do not have children, feel anxiety and a deep angst to leave behind their mark through writing. Ciplijauskaitė explains that “El aspecto creativo es muy importante en la literatura femenina actual; escribir se vuelve igual a crearse” (20). The creative process of writing can be related to maternity beginning with the conception of an idea, followed by the gestation of the text that culminates in the birth of the work. This relationship expresses the idea that women write the body:

Partiendo de su cuerpo y de todas sus características intrínsecamente femeninas—la vagina, el vientre, los pechos, las zonas erógenas—deben evaluar y meditar sobre su sexualidad y sobre la relación que existe entre lo cultural y lo sexual, para llegar a un discurso nuevo y único, exclusivamente femenino. (Gascón Vera “Hacia un abordaje” 64)

This metaphor is further developed in the case of the Lucías who need the assistance of a male to create their writings. For example, Lucía Romero intercalates several of Félix’s oral stories into her novel; his collaboration is necessary for the final product. Amago, however, views this process as more of a “literary cannibalism”: “Her text, which reflects

her attempts to formulate and articulate a new personal identity, is in fact predicated upon her own consumption of other discourses and identities. Her fiction—the novel we hold in our hands—is realized through the consumption of other fictions (54). I, on the other hand, perceive Lucía’s novel as an offspring: the fusion of two parents, not the absorption of one by the other. In the same way, Lucía Ramos makes use of Ricardo’s advice, her interlocutor, in order to modify parts of her diary. Davies questions this very point: “Are the memoirs coauthored?” (112-3). In both cases, the progenitor is essential to create the novels because, as in physical procreation, the union of the two sexes is indispensable. Susan Stanford Freidman describes the ideas in Anäis Nin’s diary, which express this parallelism that men are “the necessary fecundators of women’s writing” (388). Susan Gubar sees this as a negative effect on women writers: “[L]ike their nineteenth-century foremothers, twentieth-century women often describe the emergence of their talent as an infusion from a male master rather than inspiration from or sexual commerce with a female muse” (“The Blank Page” 256).

We can also relate the maternity metaphor to Cixous’ theory, just as Gascón Vera interprets it in the following quote:

Este concepto de la maternidad y del embarazo es central en las teorías de Cixous sobre la escritura femenina, porque de él, en su dimensión biológica y cultural, radica la idea de mantener la diferencia sexual y genérica entre el hombre y la mujer (que para Cixous es esencial) en la creación de un discurso femenino. (“La escritura femenina” 61)

Cixous maintains that women should write their bodies, which is for Elizabeth J.

Ordóñez, “the primary locus of women’s subversion and escape from external phallogenic definitions and discourse” (53). Therefore, writing the novel represents the life cycle because it requires a beginning (the conception of the idea), the development

(the process of writing the novel) and death (the end of writing). Even though writing reflects death, in some ways it rejects it since the novel survives the physical death of its creator. Ana, the Lucías, Leola, and Rosa use their bodies to give birth to their literary creation and in this way they achieve continued existence.

Crónica del desamor

For Ana, death is a distant preoccupation because she still maintains a sense of optimism toward an ample future ahead of her. She is in her early thirties, and for this reason she does not obsess about thoughts of her own end as do the other protagonists in the study. However, this does not mean that some contemplations of her own demise do not enter her mind. She does think about what will be the disease that will rob her of her life³¹: “Era la muerte, simplemente, pensó Ana, e intentó bucear en su futuro, desentrañar qué tipo de agonía le estaba reservada a ella misma” (*Crónica* 75). The vision of death in *Crónica del desamor* is not a serene passing from the physical to the spiritual world, but rather a time of anguish and pain. An example is Ana’s description of her grandmother’s experience with death while battling liver cancer: “La abuela Concha bramaba sus torturantes dolores en un atardecer continuo [...] Era una mujer fuerte y le costó mucho morir” (74-5). Constant reminders of death appear throughout the pages of the novel, for example in the description of the elderly in downtown Madrid. Amell notes: “Older people, apart from being a hindrance on their path to success, remind the younger too much of what is in store for them. Therefore, they prefer to ignore their presence as

³¹ Escudero affirms that the reader learns the future of Ana by discovering Lucía’s destiny: “*La función Delta* nace, en gran medida, como respuesta al deseo [of knowing how she is going to die] manifestado por Ana en *Crónica del desamor*.” (Escudero *La mujer hispana* 221). In addition, he also concludes that Lucía is the alter ego of Ana in the 2010.

much as possible” (*Odyssey* 65). Writing has a double function for the protagonist: to vent her apprehensions about life and society as well as to leave behind a part of herself as a sign of her existence.

Still another example of the presence of death is the sad portrait that Ana paints of her neighbor, Doña Engracia, who represents the elderly, but not in a positive light. In her old age, Doña Engracia finds herself alone. Her children live far away in Germany, and she does not benefit from any companionship from friends or even acquaintances. The characters in *Crónica del desamor* worry about death, but also the prospect of dying alone. There is nothing more tragic than to die and be forgotten, according to most characters in the novel, and that occurs in the case of Ana’s neighbor who always dresses in mournful black attire. Doña Engracia’s dress further exemplifies the depressed state of her life, which ultimately leads to her suicide. Another resident in the apartment complex equates Doña Engracia’s death to “morirse como un perro,” while a policeman announces that “se pasaba las horas encerrada en la casa” (*Crónica* 251). The desolation of the scene is most blatant with the description of Doña Engracia’s appearance during her last hour: “Estaba tirada en el suelo como un guiñapo de trapos enlutados, y su mano izquierda aún agarraba la pata de un pesado sillón de viuda, ese sillón en donde se había roto las uñas rascando el barniz y el tapizado en un postrero esfuerzo por alcanzar la puerta” (252). She dies a lonely woman who lacks the emotional shelter of family or friends. Wishing to preclude suffering a fate like Doña Engracia’s, Ana proposes a pact to her friend Cecilio: “Lo que tenemos que hacer es buscar una alternativa a la familia tradicional, lograr crear un clan de apoyo y cobijo entre amigos” (75). Since old age and

dying cannot be averted, Ana looks to her close friends to find comfort in the face of loneliness.

Death continues to manifest itself even in the news reports within the novel. In one scene, someone calls the newspaper office to report that “Comprendemos que deben estar hartos de oírnos, pero es que nos han vuelto a sacar un muerto al jardín” (*Crónica* 248-9). The vision of death is pessimistic and grotesque, as observed in the following passage: “Es que hay un asilo de ancianos, justo enfrente de una colonia suburbial, y cada vez que les muere un viejo sacan el cadáver al jardín hasta que vienen a llevárselo, dicen que es para no deprimir a los otros asilados” (250). Several characters seem to be awaiting their own death, such as the senior citizens in the park or the veterans in the Toño club. Ana portrays the elderly in a negative light: “siempre son distintos y parecen los mismos, las mismas arrugas, los mismos ojos opacos y medrosos” (76). Old age denotes a somber existence in *Crónica del desamor* because it is reduced to a day-to-day wait for one’s own mortality. Ana classifies the most ill-fated group of old people as those who live on the streets or the “solitarios, beodos y miserables.” They are the ones that “la ciudad ignora, habituales de una esquina hasta que una madrugada particularmente helada y húmeda les hace desaparecer para siempre” (77). Perhaps the most shocking and pessimistic description of old age is the colors and odors of the elderly who are at death’s doorstep:

Y hay, en fin, los viejos y viejas que llevan la muerte entre los párpados, la piel amarillenta deja traslucir la enfermedad que les está comiendo, tienen los ojos vacíos y la boca siempre les tiembla ligeramente, como temerosa de traicionar su próxima partida: se mueven en el mundo de los vivos como si aún pertenecieran a él, pero llevan la sentencia impresa en el rostro a veces con precisión notable—a éste le quedan un par de meses, éste no verá la primavera, aquél morirá en dos semanas—y desprenden un tufillo cálido y picante, un olor de orines y sepulcro. (78-9)

The veterans at the Toño bar represent another group of elderly people that reflect a death that is both threatening and imminent. Ana describes them as “un trofeo más del tiempo, un penoso trofeo maltratado” with wrinkled hands and missing teeth, characteristics of “sus vidas ruinosas, cuerpos sexagenarios machacados de alcohol” (*Crónica* 180). Amell notes the regulars in the Toño bar who miserably await death, just as the elderly in downtown Madrid do: “Estos recuerdan con añoranza la época en que ellos eran los subterráneos y marginados, ahora que se ven apartados incluso de la misma marginación, esperando su muerte y echándole incluso una mano a fuerza de fumar, beber y trasnochar” (“Una crónica” 76-7). Escudero explains that the pessimism of the characters is due to an illogical view of the world: “En un mundo concebido como caótico y absurdo, los seres están abocados, irremediablemente, a envejecer y morir, a enfrentarse con el vacío vital, con esa nada angustiosa que les aguarda tras la muerte” (“Fantasmas” 346).

Cecilio, even more so than Ana, expresses his fears about death. Ana narrates: “Cecilio suele decir, moriremos un día tontamente, saliendo de la ducha, resbalando y golpeándonos contra el suelo, agonizaremos durante horas sin que nadie esté acostumbrado a visitarnos” (*Crónica* 79). According to Bellido Navarro, pessimism is not “provocado por el desencanto vital de una generación [...] sino por la evidencia trágica e inexorable de que somos títeres en manos del tiempo y de la muerte” (259). The

utter lack of control at the hands of destiny terrorizes them. Writing for Ana, and the other protagonists in this analysis, represents a way to control her environment. Cecilio admits that: “Nuestra muerte vendrá en los periódicos, encontrado el cadáver de un anciano, llevaba varios días muerto, el portero advirtió su ausencia” (*Crónica* 76). Cecilio is at least ten years older than Ana and not surprisingly, the reader can perceive a higher level of anxiety about death in his descriptions. In addition, he lives in Spain during a time when fewer options for procreation existed for homosexual males and their partners.³² Ana uses writing as a means to console herself before such a negative perspective of the future. Of the five protagonists analyzed in this study, Ana is the only one who produces an offspring. Curro to some degree is her guarantee to perpetuate after death, and after the publication of her novel *Crónica del desamor*, if it is a success, it will offer her assured literary recognition. A progenitor and fame are two elements that Cecilio lacks. In order to calm his worries about death, Cecilio looks for one-night-stands in bars in Madrid, but he only finds a deep emptiness in his heart that only worsens with each casual affair: “El espejo criminal que te devuelve la derrota, las grandes bolsas bajo los ojos, los ya cuarenta años que empiezan a resquebrajarse cara abajo, envueltos en una palidez trasnochadora y nicotínica, una palidez insana y loca. Es el vacío, Cecilio, es el vacío” (137).

The theme of death is secondary in *Crónica del desamor*. The apprehension and concern are most noticeable in characters like Cecilio who do not have descendents, whether a son, a daughter or a literary work. Ana shares many heartbreaking

³² In another one of Montero’s novels, *Amado amo*, the protagonist César Miranda is very conscious of his inability to have children without the cooperation of a woman. He believes that it is the power of women to be able to procreate. He also thinks that women make the final decision on reproduction because they have control of their own bodies.

observations about the old people in downtown Madrid, the veterans at the bar or her neighbor Doña Engracia because she worries about becoming one of them. Regardless of the presence of her son, it bothers Ana to live without the company of a man and to have to come home to a cold and lonely apartment day in and day out. Ana does not want to die and be forgotten, and for this reason, the chronicle acts as a defense against becoming a nonbeing.

La hija del caníbal

In an interview with Vanessa Knights, Rosa Montero expresses the opinion that “Al crear lo que creas es tuyo, tu creación es hija tuya. Es para mí una explicación del mundo, de la realidad que vivimos. Por otro lado, te darás cuenta de que la escritura de una novela es un símbolo de esto” (260-1). This quote corresponds to the metaphor that writing is giving birth; it is procreating through one’s imagination. Lucía Romero of *La hija del caníbal* communicates a genuine fear about death, and a great deal of her worry stems from her inability to have children. Death is a central theme represented by the symbolic death of Lucía upon losing what was her life before Ramón’s kidnapping, including her marriage and her identity as a wife, and real examples of death that appear throughout the novel. Montero introduces part of the life cycle with three generations: the beginning of adult life with Adrián, middle-age with Lucía and old age, which completes the circle, with Félix. We also discover the metaphoric circle of life through writing, a process that begins with an idea. As Montero explains in an interview with Escudero: “Lo primero que se te ocurre es el huevecito de la novela que puede ser una idea, una imagen, una cara de persona” (“La creación literaria” 218). While combining

the kidnapping story about Ramón with Félix's interpolated oral anecdotes, the novel "for adults" is born. Lucía needs a masculine interlocutor in order to procreate; thus, the novel results from a relationship between man and woman.

Lucía feels a certain panic about the prospect of dying. She confesses that at night "me dejaba caer en el pozo el miedo" (*Hija* 67). She refers to the "miedo personal que cada uno arrastra, del pozo que te vas cavando alrededor a medida que creces, ese miedo exudado gota a gota, tan tuyo como tu piel, el pánico de saberte viva y condenada a muerte" (67). Lucía writes in order to explore the feelings that scare her each night. In addition, according to Peña: "En este ejercicio, Lucía ha cumplido el ritual de encarar sus viejos dolores: el desencuentro paterno, la traición, el desamor, el aborto, la pérdida de su condición procreadora y el rotundo fracaso de su colección de cuentos infantiles" (158). Through writing, Lucía confronts various problems she has suffered throughout the forty years of her life. She writes in order to discover and embrace her new identity, the one she assumes after the symbolic death of her life rooting from her husband's kidnapping.

Writing works as a mechanism to confront death and at the same time to survive it. Because of the testimony that Félix recounts to Lucía and Adrián, he will never die. His perspective of the world differs from that of Lucía, and actually proves to be more contented and optimistic. He understands that "Félix" does not end with his burial because his memory will continue through his interlocutors. In this respect, he does not agonize over death in the same way that Lucía does, even though he is much older than she. He explains to Lucía that "Para no morir del todo, en fin, me he puesto en tus oídos. Que es como decir que me he puesto en tus manos" (*Hija* 324). Félix continues living in the hearts and minds of his listeners with his fascinating stories about anarchism and bull

fighting. Félix will never die as long as the words that he narrates continue living through others. Lucía learns from Félix that she too can survive through writing; with the use of the first person, she relates her experiences just as Félix does during those long nights around the kitchen table, but her credibility proves questionable at best: “Aquí estoy, inventando verdades y recordando mentiras para no disolverme en la nada absoluta” (316). According to Peña, in Félix’s presence, Lucía finds: “la fortaleza y el consuelo para asumir la traición de Ramón, la irremediable partida de Adrián y la historia que ella modula al escribir su novela” (156). Félix’s adopts the philosophy, which he wishes to teach Lucía, that “el sosiego sordo y ciego de la materia, en una serenidad sobrehumana que es la raíz de toda la belleza” (*Hija* 324). He finds beauty even in all that is grotesque about the world.

At the beginning of the novel, Adrián complains that Lucía does not pay him much attention because she listens so intently to Félix’s stories. Adrián explains: “Es lógico que Félix tenga muchas más cosas que contar. Es una de las pocas ventajas que te aporta la vejez, precisamente. Félix está lleno de recuerdos y de palabras interesantes” (109). In short, sharing the many memories that one amasses through out life indicates one of the advantages of old age that Montero celebrates. Through the metafictional qualities of Félix’s narration, the novel returns to the oral tradition of story-telling, a historically feminine one. It represents discourse which rejects a lineal or logical form, characteristics that tend to represent patriarchal writing as Dotras explains in the following quote:

La metafiction, además de ser una celebración del poder de la imaginación creadora, reivindica la libertad de imaginación. En esta reivindicación subyace el deseo de recuperar la fabulación, el gusto por la narración, cuya esencia reside en

contar historias; en definitiva, la recuperación del arte tradicional de contar, del placer de escribir y leer novelas. (196)

During the narration, we find the theme of mortality mostly in Félix's stories for the simple fact that he has had more life experience than Lucía, by over forty years, and he lived during a very violent period in Spain's history; furthermore, Félix assumed the life of a gunman, a profession where one is likely to encounter several brushes with death. Félix first learned of death with his own parents at an early age; his father was murdered and his mother "murió de tuberculosis, de miseria y de hambre" (*Hija* 55). As an orphan also witnessed various murders because of his life as an anarchist while a member of the *Solidarios* gang, one of which he caused himself. Félix created and detonated a bomb that claimed the life of his victim and disfigured his hand.

Finally, Félix's wife died who was the true love of his life. Margarita became ill with Alzheimer's disease, and illness Félix describes as "una dolencia cruel: te va devorando la memoria, de manera que no sólo acaba con tu futuro, sino que también te roba lo que has sido" (318).³³ Margarita makes the decisión to commit suicide with her own "pócima de muerte" because "sabía hacia qué tipo de oscuro sufrimiento se dirigía, y prefirió marcharse" (318). Although he admits several brushes with death over his lifetime, Félix's optimism in the novel prevails over all of the narrator's pessimism. He gains invaluable wisdom that one can only achieve through living a full life. He expresses that "Vivir no es sólo perder. Vivir es viajar. Dejas unas cosas y encuentras otras. La vida es maravillosa si no se le tiene miedo" (108). Montero repeats this idea in the article "Vivir en una nube" when she says that "La vida tiene esas cosas deliciosas,

³³ We can see an obvious parallelism with Margarita's bout with Alzheimer's and the suffering that Lucía Romero experiences. In both cases their identity is compromised due to an illness of the brain, which cheats them of the life that they once knew.

conmovedoras, generosas. La vida ciega no es sólo brutal, la vida ciega también es generosa y hermosa” (341). With time, one gains in knowledge and understanding. As Félix says: “Es en el único registro de la vida en el que vas mejorando con el tiempo, pero es importante. Hay tanta ignorancia en la inocencia que a menudo me parece un estado indeseable” (*Hija* 329). Obtaining knowledge and life experiences demonstrate favorable aspects of growing older. As Félix repeats: “La ancianidad no es un lugar tan desolado” (315).³⁴ Félix, like Lucía, feels the need to share his experiences and his acquired knowledge, although he offers an oral version instead of a written one. By sharing the past with an audience, one can alleviate some of the pain brought on by life’s misfortunes. Peña concludes that at the end of her writing project, Lucía: “Es una mujer que asume, con plena conciencia, la historia de su país, el desencanto de su generación y el devenir de su propia existencia” (159). After finishing the novel, Lucía also feels more optimistic about the future. She learns about the continuity of existence thanks to Félix’s wise words: “Todas esas palabras que flotan en el éter desde que alguien pronunció la primera sílaba. Por eso, porque sólo somos palabras, es por lo que te he estado contando mi historia a lo largo de estos últimos meses” (*Hija* 324). In short, this quote brilliantly maintains the metaphor that literary creation represents physical procreation. Félix inseminates his word in Lucía so that she may conceive the novel, a product of the two of them.

³⁴ The hope that Félix displays shows his dignity in his old age as Peña maintains: “Pero, es Félix quien aporta el conocimiento de la vejez como un proceso todavía valioso que, por sobre la carencia física, puede dar cabida al amor y la esperanza” (156). This vision of old age greatly contrasts with that of the elderly in Montero’s first novel *Crónica del desamor*.

La función Delta

Hélène Cixous initiates the search for a different and original writing that expresses femininity. According to Davies, these elements appear in Lucía diary: “This self-reflexive narrative, drawing attention to the way it is written, distances the so-called objective reality of history and privileges feminine subjectivity, woman-centred experience and memory” (113). Lucía feels the need to put onto paper her life story because she does not want to lose her memories: “¿Dónde irán a parar todos mis recuerdos, todo lo que sé, toda la vida que tengo metida en la cabeza” (*Función* 266). Lucía thinks that she will be able to save her memories through writing: “Yo no tengo nada, nada más que rutina y un sosiego artificioso. Nada más que la memoria de aquellos años plenos, nada más que estos folios que voy rescatando del recuerdo y en los que juego a vivir” (72). Writing serves as a way to confront death and as we will see later, a way to procreate and survive her physical death.

The conclusions of *Crónica del desamor*, *La hija del caníbal* and *Historia del Rey Transparente* correspond to the beginning of the protagonists’ literary projects. This structure contrasts with the ending of *La función Delta*: “The only possible conclusion for her autobiographical narrative is death itself, the moment at which individual discourse ceases to be produced” (Knights 97). Lucía demonstrates a sense of desperation to write her memoirs and rescue her memories from oblivion. She is rapidly approaching the moment of her death, and since she does not have any children through whom she can leave a part of herself, she needs to leave the diary behind as evidence of her existence: “Me cuesta mucho escribir y concentrarme. La realidad mezcla y se confunde. Pero he de seguir, he de terminar estas memorias, he de finalizar el recuento de mi vida”

(*Función* 287). Lucía also uses writing to confront death, to transcend it, and finally to metaphorically procreate through her diary/ novel. Escudero explains: “El acto de escribir se constituye así para Lucía en un acto de salvación, en la única manera posible de perpetuarse” (“La narrativa” 224). In addition, Escudero parallels Lucía’s existential worries to the ideas of the Generation of 98: “Por la persistencia de ciertos temas, como la supervivencia mediante la reproducción, o mediante la fama, Montero se enlaza con el pensamiento existencial del 98, especialmente con Unamuno, incansable luchador contra la muerte” (“La presencia” 36). Lucía fights against death through her words.

The anxiety and fear that Lucía experiences about death originated in her youth. Her neighbor Doña Maruja is a constant reminder of a dismal future that, with all her many suicide attempts, demonstrates the desolation of old age. Lucía includes negative descriptions of Doña Maruja in the diary in order to better understand her own uncertainties about death. In a weak moment she admits: “Prefiero mil veces escoger un fin rápido y digno, lo mismo que quiso hacer doña Maruja” (*Función* 250-1). Lucía views it a problem that nothing survives after Doña Maruja’s death; nothing is left of her. Hence, she becomes another forgotten elderly woman who leaves behind no indication her existence, just like the cleaned sidewalk after she leapt to her death: “No quedaba ningún vestigio, ninguna marca, ni la menor señal del grotesco y breve vuelo de muerte de la anciana” (235). Lucía wishes to avoid falling into oblivion like Doña Maruja and for this reason, she promises herself to finish writing her memoirs even as the task becomes increasingly difficult due to her brain tumor. In this way she survives death: “La mujer y la escritora logran derrotar a la muerte, transustanciándose en la escritura, puro ejercicio, pura voluntad de vivir más allá de todo silencio” (Peña 69). In the

following quote, Lucía explicitly states how her writing is her rescue from oblivion or nothingness:

Qué estúpida sinrazón la de la vida. Tengo que terminar de escribir mis memorias, tengo que conseguirlo. Para que quede algo de mí, para salvar parte de mí misma de la nada. Para fijar en el tiempo aquellos días en los que existí intensamente, los instantes agudos de mi función Delta. He de terminar mis memorias, he de sobrevivirme. (*Función* 266)

Peña adds to the idea of transcendence through writing:

Entonces el discurso se desboca, se convierte en un exceso que busca conjurar la traición final de la existencia. Por ello, la escritura se desborda y cambia de sentido, porque la *Memoria* se asume como signo de la trascendencia y el texto se fija para vengarse de lo efímero. (67)

Lucía's writing also serves as a means to explore and understand the meaning of death: "Hablo de morirme y no sé lo que es. Sólo se me oscurece la mente en un temor sombrío y sin relieves" (*Función* 249). She converses with Ricardo about the process of entering into nonexistence, and he affirms that she should try to "vivir sin miedo cada día, porque la muerte es una función natural y te irás preparando naturalmente para ella" (265). Nevertheless, Lucía obsesses about death and her own end. In one point in the novel, she is unable to read novels written by dead authors or even watch videos for fear of being reminded of actors who have passed:

Sentí como si tuviera el cerebro de un cadáver en mis manos [...] Desde entonces soy incapaz de leer ninguna obra de autor ya fallecido, y ni tan siquiera puedo entretenerme viendo vídeos, porque las películas se han convertido ahora para mí en un obsesionado recuento de difuntos: ese ya ha muerto, me digo, y ésa, y éste. (250)

Lucía's vision of death is both grotesque and graphic. She imagines scenes of dead people "en sus tumbas, todos huesos polvorientos roídos de gusanos" (*Función* 250). Lucía's writings show the panic that she exhibits surrounding her own mortality, but Ricardo's presence does help her to calm her fears. Lucía also uses writing to distract

her consuming thoughts about death: “Hay que sobreponerse al pánico, hay que conseguir reducirlo a simple miedo, que siempre es cosa controlable. Escribe. Piensa en otra cosa” (251). Peña supports this idea that writing satisfies the challenge to silence one’s internal fears: “Desde el borde, la conciencia de Lucía se abre y convoca la escritura para disipar el miedo, para negar el olvido. El discurso cobra fuerza y logra restringir la muerte a la rigidez del concepto” (68). Because of Lucía’s overwhelming fear about inexistence, she must find a way to soothe her thoughts and find inner tranquility.

The role of Ricardo presents two important functions in the novel. He is a friend and later a lover that satisfies Lucía’s need to not feel so alone during the last days of her life. He also serves as the interlocutor that influences Lucía’s writing, as Davies explains: “The interlocutory role Ricardo plays is extremely important as a structuring device in the novel. He counters Lucía’s subjective, feminine interpretation of her past relationships from a, possibly, more objective, masculine point of view” (112). As we see in the procreative relationship between Lucía and Félix in *La hija del caníbal*, the communication between Lucía and Ricardo also constructs the novel. Ricardo serves as the interlocutor of Lucía’s diary, and in this way he collaborates in its procreation; he plays the role of the progenitor of the novel. According to Peña, Lucía uses Ricardo to complete her project because she “reconoce la precariedad de su circuito literario, restringido a un solo receptor, el que se convierte en figura central para la consecución del ejercicio que la compromete” (59). Ricardo offers fictional stories in order to entertain Lucía while she convalesces in the hospital, but at the same time, these very stories form part of the final product. For example, Ricardo shares the story about his

first love as well as the story about the student Engracia who commits suicide in a swamp. Knights warns: “His tales gradually take over Lucía’s narrative and this is perhaps a comment of the stifling effect of relationships on women’s creativity” (101).

Ricardo shows his arrogance in the following passage, which also indicates his participation in the writings:

Pero querida, repites casi exactamente las mismas palabras que te dije [...] Y que tú me discutiste acaloradamente, dicho sea de paso. No niegues la evidencia, no hay ningún deshonor en reconocer que se estaba equivocado, ni siquiera en reconocer que otra persona es más inteligente que uno. (*Función* 209)

With his tales, Ricardo adds to Lucía’s diary, but he also acts as an editor. He suggests that Lucía write about the political landscape, expressing: “Eran los años del miedo, ¿no te acuerdas?, fueron de fundamental importancia en nuestras vidas” (129). In the chapter following this critique, Lucía writes about a tale of violence she witnessed at a coffee shop when the Escuadrón del Orden violently invades the establishment, and then one member of this feared leftist group stabs a man in cold blood. This scene illustrates the terror and exposes “el comportamiento que aconsejaban las nuevas Normas de Seguridad, es decir fingimos que no les veíamos ni oíamos” (139). Because of Ricardo’s negative commentaries on the lack of description of the political environment in the diary, Lucía decides to include this narration. As Zatlín indicates, Ricardo clearly influences Lucía’s creation: “Lucía’s memoirs are radically influenced by the comments of the male reader-within-the-text” (“Experimental Fiction” 120).

The metaphor for giving birth as related to a woman’s creativity is evident in some of Lucía’s comments throughout the novel. For example, before the premiere of her first movie she exclaims: “En esos momentos hubiera querido detener las horas, repudiar la maternidad de la película, impedir que se estrenara al día siguiente, quemar

las copias una a una” (*Función* 243). She refers to the creative process of the movie as “la maternidad,” so in this sense her work becomes her child if we continue the metaphor. On a similar note, she describes the letters of words as one would use to depict a woman’s body: “Lo que más me gusta es escribir la barriga de las letras [...] Es un placer dibujar la curva de la jota” (251). Lucía does not separate the body of a woman from her creation. This relationship between the author and her literary production supposes a metafictional element as Dotras explains in the following quote: “Toda novela de metaficción plantea o analiza, explícita o implícitamente, las relaciones entre el autor y su creación” (181). The reader can easily observe the procreative relationship between Lucía, Ricardo and the diary. The product represents what Gascón Vera would consider feminine writing: “La escritura femenina debe ser la reproducción metafórica del cuerpo femenino y de su libido, con todas sus diferencias y particularidades expresadas a través de la palabra escrita, por donde se libera el hasta ahora reprimido inconsciente femenino” (“Hacia un abordaje” 66).

Historia del Rey Transparente

As the crusaders arrive to the castle and begin banging relentlessly on the door where Leola takes refuge, she writes, “Aunque las palabras están siendo devoradas por el gran silencio, hoy constituyen mi única arma” (*Historia* 11). Leola’s words supply her with the figurative weaponry to protect her from oblivion. Through her writing, Leola will share her extraordinary journey of a woman living as a knight. Susan Gubar describes this lack of distance between the female artist and her work:

For the artist, this sense that she is herself the text means that there is little distance between her life and her art. The attraction of women writers to personal

forms of expression like letters, autobiographies, confessional poetry, diaries, and journals points up the effect of a life experienced as an art or an art experienced as a kind of life, as does women's traditional interests in cosmetics, fashion, and interior decorating. ("The Blank Page" 251-2)

As her imminent death approaches, Leola is terrified: "Me creía preparada para este momento pero no lo estoy: la sangre se me esconde en las venas más hondas. Palidezco, toda yo entumecida por los fríos del miedo" (*Historia* 11). Fortunately for her, as Leola begins to write, the crusaders retreat at least for one more night: "Tintinean los hombres de hierro bajo las troneras de nuestra fortaleza. Se retiran. Sí, se están retirando [...] Dios nos ha concedido una noche más. Una larga noche" (12). Leola and the sisters who accompany her secure another night before the soldiers can capture them, or even worse, kill them. Leola, then, exploits her borrowed time, even if for just one more night to write her autobiography, a tale that she deems as unusual and worth sharing.

Leola gathers all the candles in storage to illuminate the room because she expects to stay up all night writing. Also aware that this will be the last night in the castle, she understands her own mortality: "Enciendo una, enciendo tres, enciendo cinco [...] ¡Y pensar que nos hemos pasado todo el invierno a oscuras para no gastarlas! [...] Yo mojo la pluma en la tinta quieta. Me tiembla tanto la mano que desencadeno una mareada" (*Historia* 12). Leola lights five candles, after a winter of rationing because she realizes that this is her last night alive. She wants to put all of her experiences on paper and prepares herself to write all night about her travels and adventures, stating, "He visto en mi vida cosas maravillosas. He hecho en mi vida cosas maravillosas" (11). The narration, then, is divided into two temporal spaces: the present time exposed only at the beginning of the novel and again at its end, and the memoirs that Leola writes reflecting

on a past spanning from age fifteen and continuing until the end of the novel when both temporal spaces combine, or in other words, catch up to each other.³⁵

During Leola's adventures, she and Nyneve experience a foggy mist that engulfs the atmosphere and lasts for several days. Leola defines the physical mist with words one could easily interpret as describing a state of the mind: "La niebla es un manto frío pegado a nuestros hombros, una venda humedecida que nos ciega" (*Historia* 245).

During the mist Leola and Nyneve travel in circles, and when they finally return to the inn, Leola expresses that everything appears to be a reflection of reality: "Mientras nos habla, miro a la posadera con inquietud: ese ojo lacerado, esa brillante y tensa cicatriz, ¿no se encontraban ayer en el otro lado de la cara de la mujer?" (248). Fiction mimics reality, and this encounter shows the facility of confusing the two. Here the mist also symbolizes how time has the ability to devour one's memory, in effect, causing life events to become erased: "Tengo miedo de que la bruma no levante jamás. De que las cosas se hayan borrado para siempre [...] Pero ahora ni siquiera puedo recordar en vivo color rojo de aquella caverna salvadora: mi memoria está impregnada por el gris de la bruma" (254-5). On more than one occasion, Leola equates oblivion to death: "Mi Jacques desangrándose. Su generoso pecho atravesado por una flecha [...] [S]iento que es mi olvido lo que le está matando" (384). The mist finally lifts soon after Leola allows Gastón to feel her breasts, a gesture that marks the beginning of a new relationship. Passion makes Leola feel alive, and it offers hope, which explains Montero's decision to clear the hazy scenery at this juncture in the novel.

³⁵ Leola writes her autobiography at age forty; she constructs her memories, recalling experiences and feelings of her adolescence nearly twenty-five years after having lived them.

Leola never physically gives birth to any children, but takes on the role of mother for the childlike giant Guy, son of the Maestro who teaches her to fight during the early stages of her knighthood: “Cuido del gigante inocente de la misma manera que cuidaría de un hijo. En realidad es mi niño, un niño monstruoso, el único bebé que podría parir la monstruosa doncella revestida de hierro que yo he sido” (*Historia* 447). Because Leola lacks the offspring to whom she can pass on her personal story orally, she utilizes writing as a means to record her life. Steven Rose describes how the oral tradition of storytelling has enabled generations to pass on their stories. Over time, these stories have ensured that future offspring could learn and remember their history:

For such early human societies, records, individual life histories, just as much as histories of family and tribe, were oral. What failed to survive in an individual’s memory, or in the spoken transmitted culture, died for ever. People’s memories, internal records of their own experiences, must have been their most treasured—but also fragile—possessions. (60)

Leola lacks the physical offspring to whom she could orally share her life story, and must write it on paper to avoid dying.³⁶ Rose explains: “A video or audiotape, a written record, do more than just reinforce memory; they freeze it, and in imposing a fixed, linear sequence upon it, they simultaneously preserve it and prevent it from evolving and transforming itself with time” (61). Writing allows Leola to preserve her valued memories from nothingness.

Literature helps to venerate historic figures and save details of their lives from being ignored and eventually lost. Nyneve’s shares Achilles’ story and how he is immortalized through the repetition of his actions over time.

³⁶ The idea of survival through the continuance of life stories repeats in Montero’s science fiction novel *Temblor*. Characters die a “muerte verdadera” or real death if they do not transmit their memories to an apprentice. When the protagonist and apprentice Agua Fría possesses all of Corcho Quemado’s memories, her “Anterior” continues living after her physical death: “La vida de su Anterior era ya parte de su vida y el mundo de la anciana perduraría gracias a ella” (*Temblor* 13-4).

Es la historia del gran Aquiles, un guerrero terrible e iracundo. Parece un relato actual, ¿no es verdad? Y, sin embargo, está escrito hace muchísimos años. Tantos años y tan incontables, que no sólo se han muerto todos los hombres que vivieron en aquella época, y los hijos de los hijos de esos hombres, sino también todos sus dioses. Y los dioses, os lo aseguro, son difíciles y muy lentos de matar. (*Historia* 415)

By the end of her autobiography, Leola comprehends the power of the pen. Great empires rise and fall, but what does it all mean if no one remembers?: “El estruendo de los antiguos imperios al derrumbarse no resulta hoy mayor que el crujido de este pergamino sobre el que estoy escribiendo” (511-2). In keeping with this idea, Cixous states:

How to continue when no one can any longer continue? Nelly Sachs once asked herself. Answer: after us, the poem continues [...] [T]he desert can lead to the spring; when we have no land, the air remains, the flood is a promise of birth, and when we are led into the never-again and the nowhere that lie behind the barbed wire, *a native land remains to us: language*, a land that moves with us, a land that is its own salvation. (“We Who Are Free” *Signs* 209).

Avalon represents a place of perfection, a heaven on earth. Leola writes in her encyclopedia the word “esperanza” and follows with the definition: “pequeña luz que se enciende en la oscuridad del miedo y la derrota, haciéndonos creer que hay una salida [...] Deseo de vivir aunque la muerte exista” (*Historia* 375). Later she writes, “[A] través de los fingidos ventanales veo el castillo de Avalon, que ahora parece estar más cerca” (375). Thus, Avalon symbolizes hope, but also a place that defies death. Now that Leola has turned herself into a character in a book so to speak, she will live forever. She commits suicide by ingesting the poison, but she immortalizes herself before doing so by writing her personal history.³⁷

³⁷ Félix’s wife of *La hija del caníbal* who suffers from Alzheimer’s disease also commits suicide by drinking a poison.

Montero leads the reader to believe that Avalon is a real, physical place by including a map that indicates the location of the island between England's southeastern coast and the northeastern coast of France. She draws on the Arthurian Legend of the Isle of Avalon where King Arthur's wounds could heal after battle and where he could gain immortality. Leola would rather believe in Avalon than in heaven: "Ellas creen en su Dios; yo, que el Señor me perdone, prefiero creer en la dulce Avalon. Es una isla de gozo en un mar de tormentas" (*Historia* 511). Some of its inhabitants include King Arthur and even the Rey Transparente whose stories make them live on forever. Nyneve explains, "Arturo, herido, fue llevado a la isla de Avalon. Y allí sigue todavía, porque Avalon es un lugar feliz donde la muerte no penetra" (85). Although the reader may interpret the legendary and mystical island of Avalon in many ways, a literary dreamland appears as the most valid interpretation; once a figure achieves fame or infamy in writing, he or she then enters a place where "no hay muerte, enfermedad ni vejez; los frutos siempre están maduros, los osos son dulces como palomas y no es necesario matar a los animales para comer" (20). Montero allows the reader to believe in the fantasy of Avalon while still making available the possibility of interpreting Avalon as merely a fiction within a fiction.

Cixous insists that women must write from their bodies with a language that is uniquely theirs. According to Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa," women write with white ink, or breast milk. Consistent with the childbirth metaphor, Leola's description of the poison she ingests reminds us of Cixous' claims: "Brilla como una joya y sabe a leche dulce. Tal vez sepa así la leche maternal" (*Historia* 513). Women are able to produce milk once they have given birth, and Leola partakes of the symbolic milk once she has

completed her literary project. In essence, Leola leaves behind her text to vindicate her life. Hence, Avalon denotes a place where death does not exist. Writing her story takes her to Avalon, the land of salvation; therefore, Leola saves herself by means of her words. In the essay “We Who Are Free, Are We Free?,” Cixous continues: “[W]hen there is nothing, when there is neither time nor space, there is still a spring, which is language. And so the dispossessed live in language. And so they work language, garden language, graft it, implant it” (209). Avalon, then, represents the power of language as an escape and a place of freedom for those who nurture it.

In conclusion, Frye discusses the importance of sharing one’s experience through storytelling: “The shared structuring of experience gives access to human continuity: because we can explain our lives to other people or understand other people’s explanations of lived experience, whether by telling a bedtime story or by writing a novel or by reading a novel, we gain an external confirmation that our lives have significance” (61). Writing serves as a form of continuity for Leola, as a way to figuratively procreate. Nyneve states, “Es la palabra lo que nos hace humanos, lo que nos diferencia de los otros animales. El alma está en la boca” (*Historia* 171). Thus, the gift of language is uniquely human, and Leola utilizes its written form to create when physically she is unable to reproduce before her demise.

La loca de la casa

In an interview with Laura Hernández about her latest title at the time, *La loca de la casa*, Rosa Montero discusses the concept of *el olvido*: “[E]l olvido es el fin de las cosas, la verdadera muerte, más que la muerte física. Mueres de verdad cuando ya nadie

se acuerda de ti. Y eso pasa enseguida” (1). Like the author, Rosa Montero, the narrator/protagonist of *La loca de la casa* admits her undeniable concern regarding departing this life. Writing helps quiet the anguish she experiences when thinking of her own mortality: “En el desamparo de las noches, en fin, cuando me agobia el recuerdo de los Mengele que torturan niños, o el espanto modesto y egoísta de mi propia muerte, que ya es bastante espantosa por sí sola, recorro a la loca de la casa e intento enhebrar palabras bellas e inventarme otras vidas” (*Loca* 262). Writing, then, functions as a mental escape from the realities of this world. Rosa confides that turning forty meant realizing that death could actually happen to her: “[P]robablemente esa frase [el viaje es una metáfora obvia de la existencia] era una manera de expresar los miedos al horror de la vida y sobre todo a la propia muerte, que es un descubrimiento de al cuarentena, porque, de joven, la muerte siempre es la muerte de los demás” (28). Death represents oblivion and the end of everything, yet Rosa’s fears about nonexistence subside to a certain extent when she creates through writing.

Rosa employs writing as a means to transcend death in the same way the other protagonists already analyzed in this study do. She compares falling in love, a feeling that makes one forget about death, with writing a novel³⁸: “[C]uando te encuentras escribiendo una novela, en los momentos de gracia de la creación del libro, te sientes tan impregnado por la vida de esas criaturas imaginarias que para ti no existe el tiempo, ni la decadencia, ni tu propia mortalidad” (*Loca* 13). Rosa, an author who does not have any

³⁸ In *La función Delta* Lucía Ramos conveys a similar theory about the effects of love and how it has the ability to lessen one’s anxieties surrounding death: “Con el amor pasión se busca engañar a la muerte, se intenta alcanzar la agudeza del vivir, esos instantes intensos en los que llegas a creerte eterna. Con el amor cómplice se busca vencer a la muerte pero sin engaños, afrontar su existencia con el apoyo de otra persona” (*Función* 110).

children, describes her works of writing as “criaturas” or “little children,” her legacy after her physical death transpires. She believes that novels, like people “evolucionan constantemente. Son organismos vivos” (69). In her essay “Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse,” Susan Stanford Friedman states, “Facing constant challenges to their creativity, women writers often find their dilemma expressed in terms of opposition between books and babies” (373). We find that Rosa feels that her proudest accomplishments surround the act of creating literature.

Rosa also compares her words to fish, making them independent life forms she must “catch” and tame, but unfortunately, they do not always cooperate: “Las palabras son como peces abisales que sólo te enseñan un destello de escamas entre las aguas negras. Si desenganchan del anzuelo, lo más probable es que no puedas volverlas a pescar. Son mañosas las palabras, rebeldes, y huidizas. No les gusta ser domesticadas” (*Loca* 17). Rosa must nurture her words and mother them while keeping rebellious ones in line. Rosa continues, “[E]res eterno mientras inventas historias. Uno escribe siempre contra la muerte” (13). Rosa demonstrates a fear of death, but writing helps to calm that nagging voice in her mind because the end product mirrors a life form she has brought to life.

Friedman illustrates the possibility of the connection, but also division between creation and procreation: “Words about the production of babies and books abound with puns, common etymologies, and echoing sounds that simultaneously yoke and separate creativity and procreativity” (373). An example of the association between the two in *La loca de la casa* lies in Rosa’s comments regarding the gestation period of writing a novel: “En ocasiones el periodo de gestación es mucho más largo” (*Loca* 23). Rosa also

expresses a fear of writer's block, that her *daimon* will cease to supply her with fanciful images and colorful stories: "Y eso es lo que te da miedo, eso es lo que te aterra: ponerte a escribir y no poder encontrar con tu *daimon*, que esté dormido, que se haya ido de viaje, que esté enfadado contigo, que no tenga ganas de sacarte a bailar" (51). In keeping with the childbirth metaphor, this fear of the imagination's well running dry is analogous to a woman's fear of infertility. In addition to writing, Rosa also discusses the human's ability to physically procreate as an attempt to cheat death:

Además de disparar palabras, la especie procrea contra la muerte, y ahí hemos de reconocer que se ha conseguido un relativo éxito. Al menos todavía no nos hemos extinguido como los dinosaurios y nuestros genes se multiplican sobre el planeta con abundancia de plaga. Tal vez la sensación de inmortalidad que sentimos cuando amamos sea una intuición de nuestro triunfo orgánico; o tal vez tan sólo sea un truco genético de la especie, para inducirnos al sexo y por lo tanto a la paternidad (los genes, pobrecitos, aún no saben nada de condones y píldoras). Luego, los humanos, con esa habilidad nuestra para complicarlo todo, convertimos la pulsión elemental de supervivencia en el delirio de la pasión. Y la pasión generalmente no pare hijos, sino monstruos imaginarios. O, lo que es lo mismo, imaginaciones monstruosas. (32-3)

In the following statement, Cixous insinuates a divide between creativity and procreativity in women who have not given birth or in men: "During childbirth a discovery is made inside the body. We can transpose the discovery, using it to understand moments in life which are analogous. A man will understand different things differently. Their bodies are sources of totally different images, transformations, expressions" ("Conversations" 230). Nevertheless, Rosa personifies her literary works, "[L]as novelas, como los sueños, nacen de un territorio profundo y movedizo que está más allá de las palabras" (*Loca* 28), and describes the writing process with terms associated with a pregnancy.

An important part of Rosa's identity is that of an author. Her obsession with death, for example, distinguishes her from a non-writer: "[M]e parece que los narradores somos personas más obsesionadas por la muerte que la mayoría; creo que percibimos el paso del tiempo con especial sensibilidad o virulencia, como si los segundos nos tictaquearan de manera ensordecedora en las orejas" (*Loca* 13). Rosa also fixates on the possibility of cheating death through words: "Los novelistas, escribanos incontinentes, disparamos y disparamos palabras sin cesar contra la muerte, como arqueros subidos a las almenas de un castillo en ruinas. Pero el tiempo es un dragón de piel impenetrable que todo lo devora" (*Loca* 31). Rosa discusses how authors employ writing in order to transcend death by means of their words. By leaving a testimony so that others can use it as a tool to learn from the past, authors survive these tragedies and in a sense and live on for centuries through their tales. Agniola di Tura and John Clyn write in the face of death about their personal experiences during the Plague. Regarding death, Rosa states that Clyn "consiguió vencerla con sus palabras" (151). However, Rosa admits that the simple act of writing literature that becomes published does not necessarily guarantee fame: "Peor y mucho más común es el caso de esos miles y miles de escritores y escritoras cuyos nombres ignoramos, porque la huella de sus vidas y de sus obras se ha borrado por completo de la faz de la Tierra. Ése es el destino que nos espera prácticamente a todos" (163). Perhaps to ensure a proper elegy after she passes, or maybe to better explore her feelings about her own death, Rosa writes an obituary for herself within her autobiography. Her preoccupation with death lies not only in the physical nothingness, but also in not being remembered by others once she is gone.

Rosa the writer intends to leave a testimony of her life. She includes Spain's political atmosphere during the early nineteen-seventies as an unsettling time for both her and the nation. We witness the fear and terror that the policemen produce during Franco's regime when Rosa describes the events surrounding her brief love affair with M. Much like the other protagonists in this study, Rosa fears losing her memories, an act she equates to death: "Así se van perdiendo los días y la vida, en el despeñadero de la desmemoria. La muerte no sólo te espera al final del camino, sino que también te come por detrás" (225). In addition to her own memory loss, she also wishes to avoid a collective amnesia regarding the horrors of Franco's rule. Rosa also states, "Eso es la escritura: el esfuerzo de trascender la individualidad y la miseria humana, el ansia de unirnos con los demás en un todo, el afán de sobreponernos a la oscuridad, al dolor, al caos y a la muerte" (151). Writing serves as the vehicle to make sense of personal history as well as to understand society's atrocities of the past.

Rosa admits that many writers write against time and death. She finds it interesting, even comical a writer's "ansia de posteridad." She explains that males usually tend to exhibit this condition more so than their female counterparts because of their inability to give birth to children: "Tal vez sea porque las mujeres calman esa hambruna elemental de supervivencia con su capacidad reproductora; quizá el mandato genético de no perecer quede suficientemente saciado con la ordalía milagrosa del embarazo y el parto" (*Loca* 162). However, a childless Rosa certainly shows an existential anxiety of forgetting and being forgotten. She finds some solace through the autobiography, which serves to safeguard her memories.

Montero develops the universal theme of death in *Crónica del desamor*, *La hija del caníbal*, *La función Delta*, *Historia del Rey Transparente* and *La loca de la casa*, and the way in which the protagonists of these novels confront their fears of the unknown is through self-referential writing. As Ciplijauskaitė explains, feminine writing tends to focus on the self: “En la novela actual es más frecuente la tendencia hacia la voz verdaderamente personal de la protagonista, que tiene menos interés en informar que en investigarse” (19). Rosa claims that for all authors, “[E]fectivamente, uno escribe para expresarse, pero también para mirarse en un espejo y poder reconocerse y entenderse” (*Loca* 82). However, in *La loca de la casa*, Rosa attempts to reach outside herself to understand certain truths about power, success and failure and their consequences on writers. We find numerous examples of Montero’s effort to inform her reading audience of authors such as Herman Melville, Truman Capote, Rimbaud and Verlaine and little known facts about them. Rosa Montero’s protagonists studied here examine themselves through writing in order to arrive at a better understanding of themselves and to create in the face of death and loss.

CONCLUSION

The five protagonists analyzed in this study successfully attain the goal they set out to accomplish, to write a narrative inspired by their life stories. However, they confront many obstacles before arriving at their final product, as Lucía comments in *La hija del caníbal*: “Gracias a que he vivido todo lo que acabo de contar he sido capaz de inventarme esta novela” (*Hija* 337). The protagonists in all five novels include in their writings several common themes that are at the same time, universal, such as the loss of youth, love and innocence and finally, death. Cixous expresses the positives of loss: “[W]e reach joy only through pain. We are wrong if we think that the experience of loss is bad and to be avoided. Loss gives us more than mere regret. It also gives us, if we but allow it to, love and respect for life” (“We Who Are Free” 218). Through their writings, these women feel more realized as human beings in the patriarchal societies in which they live. The creative process helps them discover their own voice and in turn their identity. Despite certain impediments or obstacles such as in some cases the presence of a male figure, the daily chores of housework and insecurities before writing, the protagonists triumph in their novelistic and personal objectives.

While pursuing their literary efforts, the women are not as inspired academically nor professionally when they live with a man. They lose some of their creative drive, except in the case of Lucía Ramos who discovers her talent to write while she consolidates a relationship with Ricardo. However, it seems to Knights that Ricardo’s stories and his critiques actually cause a “stifling effect” in Lucía’s creativity (101). On

the other hand, Lucía experiences less motivation to write or produce more movies when she remains in the relationship with Miguel. In addition, Lucía from *La hija del caníbal* suffers from writer's block while her husband Ramón is still a part of her life. Lucía resigns herself to write children's stories and does not challenge herself to reach higher professional goals until after the breakup. We find that Leola of *Historia del Rey Transparente* loses her athleticism and competes in fewer competitions while with Gastón. She only writes her book of words in private, and composes her major project when she lives without the company of a man. Rosa of *La loca de la casa* boasts many professional accomplishments as a writer, and she admits living a single life with just a smattering of dead-end romantic prospects. She discloses losing focus in her work while obsessing about M., although this very saga supplies Rosa material for autobiographical novel.

In *Crónica del desamor*, Ana is most productive and utilizes her natural talent and creativity when she is alone. For example, she writes the beginning of her first novel while on vacation without the company of a boyfriend. According to Zatlín: "More typically in the metanovels [...] the physical presence of the male lover negates inspiration" ("Women Novelists" 36). The diminution of creativity in the protagonists occurs most noticeably when they participate in romantic relationships. The comfort of the relationship causes less motivation to better themselves in their careers or obtain any type of novelistic goals. Even so, the masculine element is indispensable for the initial creation of the novels.

Another factor that leads the lack of creativity in some of the protagonists is the responsibilities in the home. In *Crónica del desamor* Ana narrates the double duties of

the woman who must work inside the home with her domestic chores of cooking and cleaning, not to mention laundry and raising the children, and the obligation to make a living outside the home as well: “O esas otras, mujeres ya maduras, que corrían a la salida del banco para preparar la comida del marido, menos mal que los niños comen en el colegio, gracias a Dios” (*Crónica* 209). Such obligations to the family, according to Adrienne Rich, make it difficult for women to create: “But to be a female human being trying to fulfill traditional female functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination” (88). This is all too obvious in Ana’s life when she must organize her responsibilities as a mother with her writing schedule: “Ana decide en un cuarto de segundo que madrugará para escribir el reportaje, calcula cuánto tiempo tardará para escribir el reportaje, calcula cuánto tiempo tardará en vestir al Curro y llevarle a casa de su madre” (*Crónica* 9).

The responsibilities of running a household are not so evident in the lives of Lucía Romero of *La hija del caníbal*, the only married protagonist, and Lucía Ramos of *La función Delta*, who cohabitates with Miguel for approximately twenty years. These two protagonists maintain relationships that are more serious than those of Ana Antón, Leola or Rosa. Leola of *Historia del Rey Transparente*, the only protagonist not born twentieth century Spain, lives a rootless life on the move, and Rosa of *La loca de la casa* avoids long-lasting ties with men. They also do not have any children, so they do not comment on the demands of being a working single mother, as does Ana. Even still, being part of a couple and the responsibilities of the home make them fall in a comfortable mediocrity. Comparing the women of the end of the twentieth century with those of the postwar, Sotomayor concludes: “Si bien muchas mujeres ya no se hallan relegadas a las labores

domésticas, su situación no ha mejorado demasiado. Ahora, por lo general, la mujer se ve forzada a asumir una doble responsabilidad, dentro y fuera de la casa” (105). In the same way, sometimes women do not find the familial support in order to foment their literary endeavors. The seemingly innocent comment that Curro makes to his mother when she begins writing represents this lack of encouragement: “Pero el Curro calla un momento mirando las hojas cubiertas de menuda letra, luego se deshace del abrazo, joven, cruel y poderoso, y ya en el suelo, comenta con tajante y sabio tono: ‘pues es una tontería’” (*Crónica* 163). Rosa of *La loca de la casa* boasts the most successful career of the five protagonists, but she also admits a disastrous love life, claiming that she usually maintains a series of fleeting relationships instead of one or two long and meaningful ones.

The anxiety experienced about their own creation represents another obstacle that women must overcome in order to reach their writing goals. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar refer to this phenomenon as “anxiety of authorship.” According to them, female authors endure various anxieties when attempting the daunting task of writing:

Her urgent sense of her need for a female audience together with her fear of the antagonism of male readers, her culturally conditioned timidity about self-dramatization, her dread of the patriarchal authority of art, her anxiety about the impropriety of female invention—all these phenomena of “inferiorization” mark the woman writer’s struggle for artistic self-definition and differentiate her efforts at self-creating from those of her male counterpart. (“Infection in the Sentence” 292)

Ana Antón demonstrates this anxiety before writing her chronicle because she fears creating something boring. She doubts her own ability and she questions herself to whether she will even be able to finish her project. The same thing happens to Lucía of *La hija del caníbal*: “No deseaba frustrar sus ambiciones profesionales, como su madre:

pero sólo se atrevía a escribir sobre gallinas” (*Hija* 116). Later she begins to write another novel, but she never finishes because “en el trayecto de la vida, de algún modo se le apagó el motor” (116). These protagonists find themselves in difficult stages in their lives in which they are unable to create or simply are afraid to write. Finally, Lucía of *La función Delta* expresses her fear of failure regarding her own creation:

Empecé a sospechar que ese paroxismo sentimental que había vivido días atrás no era más que un viejo recurso contra el miedo al fracaso, un refugiarse en amor y desamores para olvidar que esa semana se decidía probablemente el curso de mi vida, mi futuro como profesional del cine. (*Función* 223)

Because of the tension she feels due to the premiere of her first film, Lucía overly and unwarrantedly critiques her cinematographic work: “Era una obra torpe, inhábil y mal hecha, que ni siquiera mi condición de primeriza podría redimirla del fracaso” (243). Her anxiety stems from the fear that audiences would not accept the subject matter: la problemática de una mujer soltera y madre de un niño a finales de los setenta en Madrid.³⁹ Even amid great apprehension and fear, she still has aspirations to create and express her voice: “El mundo de la publicidad habla el lenguaje masculino. En él la mujer se siente marginada pues es consciente de que no habla con su propia voz sino que imita este discurso” (Ballesteros 100). After the premiere of her movie, Lucía sinks into a monogamous relationship with Miguel and halts the development of her talent as a filmmaker and a lucrative career in this field. According to Lucía, the film was not a flop, but rather a total success: “La película estaba bien, casi se podía decir que muy bien, maravillosamente bien para ser la primera que rodaba” (*Función* 236). However, it seems strange that she does not continue with more cinematographic projects if the movie were so successful. Because of Ricardo’s comments and reactions, we have already

³⁹ The movie that Lucía directs in *La función Delta* entitled “Crónica del desamor” shares the same characters and themes as Rosa Montero’s first novel, as well as the name of the title.

witnessed Lucía's lack of reliable narrating. In fact, in his opinion: "Todo lo que cuentas [to Lucía] es mentira, es una simple y llana distorsión de la realidad" (43). In addition, we discover the truth about the real outcome of Lucía's movie on account of Ricardo: "Como directora de cine hay que reconocer que eres un fracaso, y quizá la literatura te hubiera deparado un destino más risueño" (42). Because of the failure of her first movie, a devastated Lucía completely loses confidence in herself, and as a consequence, she does not attempt to direct again. She now doubts herself and fears future failures or disappointments. She hides herself in her relationship with Miguel and only after many years later does her creative vein manifest again, through her autobiographical writings.

The five protagonists of the five novels analyzed in this study decide to write about different stages in their lives. Ana, of *Crónica del desamor*, writes about the year that leads up to the disastrous date with Soto Amón. In *La hija del caníbal*, Lucía shares her experiences with her husband's kidnapping, an ordeal lasting between three to four months. Lucía of *La función Delta* decides to write about the week before the premiere of her first movie plus the last four months of her life. Leola of *Historia del Rey Transparente* writes about the major change in her life when she leaves the farm and her family to initially protect herself from the wars and to find her beloved Jacques. This character's writing is the most encompassing because it spans from adolescence until middle-age. The reader is able to experience Leola's intellectual and spiritual growth through her many adventures and her search for identity. She states, "Tengo dieciseite años y acabo de ser nombrada caballero. Pero soy mujer y nací sierva. Lo único auténtico y legítimo es mi título: todo lo demás es impostura" (*Historia* 223). Finally, Rosa of *La loca de la casa* writes as an accomplished author in her fifties, just like the

real Rosa Montero, and chooses to write about a one night stand with a famous European actor, M., at the age of twenty-three, and the subsequent interview with the same man twenty years later.⁴⁰ Each protagonist arrives to some type of revelation that makes them share their stories through the written word. When they stop believing lies and begin to open their eyes, the consequent disillusion is the circumstance under which they begin to write. However, the final message of Montero is optimistic. These women suffer from various losses and disappointments, but all five protagonists take advantage of their misfortunes in order to learn from them. They use writing as a vehicle to reflect about their identities that go through various changes from the beginning to the end of these novels.

Montero shows that women can gain strength through writing. Upon writing her novel, Lucía of *La hija del caníbal* realizes that she can be alone and independent. At the beginning of the novel she explains: “Yo estaba sola y eso no me gustaba” (*Hija* 64), however at the end she admits: “Estoy sola, y me gusta” (325). Lucía discovers an understanding of the world: “A veces resulta difícil de creer, pero es verdad que viviendo se aprende. Evolucionas, te haces más sabia, creces. Y la prueba de lo que digo es este libro” (337). When Lucía understands that her life was a lie, the revelation inspires her to write. The first line of the novel begins with the following words: “La mayor revelación que he tenido en mi vida comenzó con la contemplación de la puerta batiente de unos urinarios” (9). When Ramón disappears from the public bathrooms of an airport, Lucía begins the search for her husband and her identity.

⁴⁰ Rosa actually tells this tale of the one night stand and interview three different times in three different ways throughout the novel.

Lucía, of *La función Delta*, writes about the week of her premiere because it is during this week that she decides that “amor-pasión” is a lie. After her break-up with Hipólito, she resigns herself to the day-to-day relationship with Miguel. The rest of her love life and even her professional life are based on that decision, which explains why Lucía only wants to remember what was attractive and desirable about Miguel. Lucía feels the positive effects of writing her diary: “Creo que el escribir mis memorias ha refrescado mis recuerdos y mis emociones” (*Función* 259). In addition, the writing process serves to calm the fears and rage that she suffers due to the awareness and understanding of her imminent death. Lucía accomplishes the goal of finishing the diary, but through the process she discovers love in an old friend. She spends the last hours of her life reminiscing about delightful memories of her youth and deciding that life is worth living. Even though Lucía eventually dies in the end, the message is positive because she is able to reach a deep understanding about life and of herself.

Ana’s outcome in *Crónica del desamor* is also positive because she finally finds the motivation to commence her literary project that she had wanted to realize for a long time, but never had the courage to start. The end result of her writing does not produce a drastic change in her attitude. Ana does not profess to understand the world after finalizing the chronicle. She feels that she has something important to say. Through writing, she finds the vehicle to compose a testimony with her point of view as a single mother from Madrid who wishes to communicate her voice with others who may have experienced the same things during Spain’s transition to democracy.

Ana’s disappointing date with Soto Amón leads her to write. She describes him with words such as “poderoso,” “triunfador,” “refinado ejemplar de la clase dominante,”

“todopoderoso,” and she finally admits that he is “un personaje al que Ana siempre ha odiado” (*Crónica* 37-8). In addition to being her boss, Soto Amón symbolizes Spain’s patriarchy, which she must deal with in order to be able to achieve her literary goal. The night of the disastrous date ends up being a game of power: “Ana advierte que dentro de ella crece un extraño y denso orgullo, la serena certidumbre de que en este ajedrez de perdedores más pierden aquellos como Soto Amón que ni tan siquiera juegan” (273). She realizes that this symbol of authority, this influential embodiment of success whom she very much respected and revered, resulted in the portrait of mediocrity. Upon reversing the power roles, Ana achieves a personal triumph. She is more prepared to enter in an adult relationship, not a Cinderella fantasy, because she no longer daydreams about impossible love relationships. Ana writes a testimony of this revelation in her chronicle.

Writing represents a mode of communication for the protagonists analyzed in this study. The creative process compels them to examine themselves introspectively as well as to communicate numerous fears and worries. They overcome various losses and they accomplish the goal of writing. Through writing, they enter in a new sphere of power, one traditionally associated with a masculine vision of the world. The protagonists in all five novels show the intention of publishing their writings in novels or in the case of Leola, in an encyclopedia. This reveals their capacity of high self-esteem; they believe that they possess something interesting to communicate and that their readers will enjoy what they have to share about their lives.

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