

Battered Bodies and Inadequate Meanings: Violence and Disenchantment in Juan José Millás's *Visión del ahogado*

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For Mario Santana, my timely friend

Desde una perfecta adecuación con la realidad, uno hará otras cosas, pero no escribirá.

—Juan José Millás

An Inadequate Introduction

It is treacherous, no doubt, to take a literary text as the measure of a society: as treacherous, if not more so, as taking a family as the measure of a nation. Treachery, moreover, is scarcely gainsaid by invoking a social text to match a literary text or national sites to go with domestic sites. Such rhetorical plays, involving parallelisms and analogies, matches, correspondences, marriages, concordances, and other relations, are fairly standard fare for a wide range of realist-inspired, empirically oriented, mimetically fashioned endeavors; but they persist even in many of the most linguistically attuned endeavors as well. These rhetorical plays, however, are perhaps at their most intense when one endeavor meets another, when realism, understood broadly, recognizes its own language, or rhetoric. Contemporary cultural critique, including cultural studies, is a case in point; for with its studied skepticism, its semiotic sophistication, and its contextual sensitivity, it grapples with nothing less than the meeting of rhetoric and reality and, within that, with the problem of adequation. It seeks, that is, to provide an *adequate reading* of social, historical, and political reality even as it disputes the very viability of an adequate reading (in part

because it reads reality as susceptible only to readings, in the plural). Put a bit differently, it problematizes the *relations* between rhetoric and reality, words and things, texts and societies, families and nations, even as it sustains, extends, and alters them. Racked with paradox, cultural critique is treacherous because, even though it often debunks literary critique, it indicates, however ambivalently, that it too can never be *completely* adequate.

Flirting with treachery, I want to take a literary text, Juan José Millás's *Visión del ahogado* (*Vision of the Drowned Man*), as a particularly *inadequate* measure of contemporary Spanish society. Paying special attention to the avatars of violence, I want to consider how Millás's text, published in 1977, reflects, represents, or corresponds to a moment in Spanish cultural history marked by the transition from dictatorship to democracy and characterized by change as well as continuity, expectation as well as frustration. I want to do so, furthermore, in recognition of the general *inadequacy* of such concepts as reflection, representation, and correspondence, many of which are crucial, in turn, to the concept of democracy. Interestingly, Millás's text makes only weak reference to the Spanish political situation—democratic, dictatorial, or otherwise—and is more explicitly concerned with the breakdown of reference as such, the loss of stable foundations, and the collapse of absolute truth: in short, with the crisis of adequation. And yet, as I will be arguing, the crisis of adequation bears not only on democracy, but also on what has come to be known, in Spain and elsewhere, as (the) disenchantment, *el desencanto*. José-Carlos Mainer has noted the lability, indeed the *subjectivity*, of such epistemic markers as “transition,” “disenchantment,” and “demo-

cratic affirmation,” connoting respectively, for him, mere descriptive asepsis, militant irritation, or dogged optimism (11). All of these markers, to varying degrees and to varying ends, figure in my reading of (in)adequation for the not so simple reason that, as I have already indicated, no one marker is adequate to the diversity, let alone the totality, of my object of critique.

A somewhat awkward, erudite term, “adequation” ‘*adecuación*’ appears a number of times in Millás's text, almost always in introspective or reflective passages. For example, towards the beginning of the text, the narrator states that “la adecuación de Julia (the main female character) con el mundo resultaba natural y perfecta” (18). But this “natural and perfect” adequation is here a function of oblivion, of the absence of memory. A bit later, the narrator speaks of Jorge's (one of the two main male characters) “adecuación con las cosas” (25). In this case, adequation is presented as a function of sadness and internalized prohibition or repression. Later still, the narrator, adopting a sort of free indirect discourse, speaks of yet another instance of “adequation,” or rather “inadequation,” with respect to the third main character, Luis, “El Vitaminas” (49-50).¹ Here, the accent falls more explicitly on inadequation, with time itself presented as an inadequate measure of sickness as well as of some forms of work and language. All three main characters are implicated, then, in the problem of (in)adequation. And a problem it is indeed. For all three instances of adequation, different as one is from the other, involve oblivion or repression or illness, that is to say, either a forgetting of the *misery* of history or a sad, sick accommodation or resignation to it. Whether taken together or separately, these instances of adequation are far

from easy; but that may be just the point. Adequation, particularly an adequation that is “natural and perfect,” may be possible, sad to say, only through an act of oblivion, prohibition, or repression, through a kind of (self)-violence. I will return to all of this in greater detail, but for the moment suffice it to say that in Millás’s text adequation—its successes and failures, its crises and problems, its bearings on democracy and disenchantment—is bound up in violence, both symbolic and real. What is more, although the narrator presents adequation as something personal (implicating Julia, Jorge, and Luis), it is also deeply political, implicating the “things” of the world. The absence of direct political meaning does not preclude its indirect presence, quite the contrary.

In a certain sense, adequation functions as a democratic concept, bespeaking equality, equivalence, and equalization (Lat. *adaequatus*, past participle of *adaequare*, to equalize; *aequus*, equal). In a certain sense: for in another sense, adequation functions as a decidedly less than democratic concept, bespeaking an equality less free than forced. I am referring, of course, to the principle of adequation effectively deployed by the Francoist state, where equality, and for that matter freedom, continued to be important signifiers, whatever the reality thereby signified. Of course, if adequation can bespeak a *totalitarian* equalization, inadequation, once put into play sociopolitically, does not necessarily bespeak inequality or the non-viability of democratic representation. Adequation and inadequation are thus not *related* in a stable, mutually opposing manner, one always “better” or “worse” than the other; instead, they are related ambivalently. In English, in fact, adequation and adequacy are the stuff of deconstructionist dreams:

“adequate” means both “satisfactory and suitable” and “barely satisfactory or sufficient.” And although “adequate” does not correspond neatly to “adecuado,” although one word is not a truly adequate translation—or is only an adequate translation—of the other, ambivalence attends “(in)adecuación” as well. As Millás’s text indicates, it is an ambivalence of ethical and political dimensions, an ambivalence that may be treacherous, but that is not necessarily devastating, and that may even be quite promising. To put it more clearly (or less ambivalently), the ambivalence is such that adequation *may* signify political inequality, non-representationality, and even violence, while inadequation *may* signify, if not exactly the opposite, something like an opportunity for democracy itself.

The democratic opportunity that I find in and around inadequation is not easy and is certainly not the social effect of some positive, straightforward literary message. If anything, *Visión del abogado* indicates the devastating dangers of adequation *and* its collapse instead of the promising possibilities of inadequation (or of the suspension of the adequate/inadequate pair altogether). And yet, the novel also indicates the perils of fighting the crisis of adequation as well as, indeed, the perilous opportunities of accepting it. These opportunities and possibilities, admittedly beyond the novel, are not of my imagination alone. Gianni Vattimo sees in the dissolution of strong metaphysical concepts—and adequation is surely among them—an occasion for a resignified reality whose values are *not* domination, homogeneity, and centrality. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe see the dissolution of tight universal concepts and “the de-centring and autonomy of [...] different discourses and struggles, the multipli-

cation of antagonisms and the construction of a plurality of spaces” (193) as an occasion for an open, “unsutured” society whose values are discontinuity, contingency, and difference. In a rhetorical flourish indebted to Lacan, Laclau and Mouffe speak of the “impossibility of society,” in the sense of some utterly unified and self-same order, and argue, out of impossibility, for a radically democratic society of diversity and plurality. For them, as for Vattimo, failure to accept the dissolution of strong notions of society, failure to accept a certain inadequation or non-correspondence, can have devastating effects: from unbridled strife to totalitarian control. Lest this all seem too theoretical and inopportune, we might recall that civil strife and totalitarian control—operant terms in any modern society—are especially resonant in Spain during the so-called Transition. Associated at the most extreme with an expansive terrorism and a resutured Francoism, civil strife and totalitarian control are specters of a past ever ready to return, or to *continue*, in the present.

One of the reasons it is treacherous to take one thing as the measure of another is that it can entail a violent denial of difference. Truth, after all, has long been reasoned as an effect of adequation—*adequatio intellectui ad rem*—and true adequation, to loop the loop, has long been “reasoned” as gentle, spontaneous, and self-evident, as “natural.” And yet, there is something else in “truth,” “reason,” and “adequation,” something less than gentle. Spun a bit sharply, if the fit is not easy, it can be forced. Adequation can thus be an act and effect of violence, a coercive equalization that is often as not the residue of hierarchization. This holds most clearly for the violence of

the totalitarian state, but it also holds for the violence of ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna) and GRAPO (Grupo de Resistencia Antifascista Primero de Octubre). Both ETA and GRAPO claim to have the truth, to represent the people, to act in a way that corresponds to reality: violence matching, and purportedly bettering, violence. Insofar as relations of equivalence or interchangeability are here at issue, it bears noting that one violence is *not* necessarily the *same* as another and that the violence of GAL (Grupo Antiterrorista de Liberación) is particularly troubling because it issues from within the democratic state apparatus itself. The existence of GAL points to the continuity of totalitarian tactics in democratic times and thus casts doubt on the *difference* between one system and the other. And yet, as significant as the violence of and against the state is, there are obviously other modes of violence as well. One is the violence of the self and against one’s self, a violence that does not issue, at least not directly, from some external site, but that instead issues, or appears to issue, from within. Another is the violence of the home, the family, a violence of privacy and domesticity that is often, but certainly not always, sexual in scope. These last two modes of violence—self-violence and domestic violence—figure prominently in Millás’s text as relatively internal and intimate problems of (in)adequation: relative to what passes for more public, socially visible, and historically momentous problems. Turning now to the literary text, we may turn, if only (in)adequately, to something socially significant as well.

Little Stories

Hacia tiempo que había concluido que en el fondo de las decisiones importantes no había grandeza o virtud, sino una puerta falsa que conducía al desencanto. (*Visión del abogado* 58)

Visión del abogado is not, by most measures, a story of great significance. It contains few specific historical and political references, few “important” names and dates, and little, if anything, “transcendent.” Published in the wake of Franco, it makes no mention of the dictator except through topographical allusion: his presence is sustained, but displaced, in the repeated place name, Caudillo de España. Published, moreover, in the year of peaceful general elections and the Law of Political Reform, it does not narrate the struggle for political power, the plight of the working class, or the machinations of the rich and powerful. Nor does it narrate—depending on the narrative’s chronology—the depletion of Francoism or the intricacies of the transition to democracy. Instead, it centers on petty crime, rather sordid affairs, adolescent obsessions, and small-minded pranks. Indeed, the smallness of the narrative is reinforced by the vagueness of the temporal markers. The action, at its most recent, may take place during the transition, but it seems much more probable, according to calculations by Gonzalo Sobejano and Robert Spires (100), that it takes place in the last years of Francoism, sometime between 1973 and 1975. Through a careful reconstruction and reordering of the temporal markers—a reference to a political assassination, the average age of students, vividly vague memories—it is possible to affirm that the text *cannot* be about the disenchantment because the action takes place *before* the disenchantment, at least as historically codified. For that matter, according to the same history,

even the text’s date of publication is prior to the disenchantment. And yet, it is just such historical precision around what is ultimately a sentiment, impression, mood, or sensation that begs to be questioned. Disenchantment precedes and exceeds any discrete chronology; *the* disenchantment, in contrast, purports to crystallize and signal something “in the air,” to name a *Zeitgeist*. As such, it is symptomatic of an anxiety regarding historical definition.

The disenchantment or *el desencanto*—with the definite article in Spanish as prominent as it is unobtrusive—effectively validates a “before” and an “after” that is in some respects strangely comforting. Enchantment, that is, is saved even as it is negated, consigned to a time when change for the better was still thought to be possible. Of course, one of the more uncomfortable effects of disenchantment is that it casts the enchanted time as benighted. In that sense, the enchanted time, as a sort of lost anteriority, is also profoundly false: an illusion or a pathetic innocence, a deception or a lie. So while the disenchantment appeals to a chronology of change it also signals a *diffuse continuity*—or as Spires calls it, a “discursive continuity” (96)—from a “then” to a “now” by which things do *not* change, at least not for the better. As Spires so discerningly observes:

the strategy to blur temporal boundaries suggests that the imprint of a watchtower system is as much in evidence in the infancy of the Spanish democracy as it was during the maturity of the Franco dictatorship. (101)

Interestingly, such organic or generational markers as “infancy” and “maturity” are problematized by the text’s insistence on

adolescence, itself a *transitional* time as momentous as it is petty. Published in a time that many consider momentous, and narrating a time that is necessarily *before* the time of publication, *Visión del ahogado* relates moments whose pettiness, profuse and discontinuous, disrupts any sense of a story, or history, that depends on neatly definable disruptions:

El tiempo transcurría con gran profusión de acontecimientos íntimos y con algún que otro suceso exterior (la aparición de un nuevo modelo de la casa Seat, la ascensión inesperada de un equipo de segunda a la primera división, y también el asesinato del presidente Kennedy, católico y anticomunista, que tenía los hombros muy anchos y la sonrisa muy brillante), que, como más tarde se comprobaría, *tampoco sirvieron para crear una conciencia cronológicamente ordenada en la que los aconteceres externos estuvieran registrados con un carácter sucesivo*. Los hechos, como las personas, se debatían entre la identidad y el apelmazamiento. (193, emphasis mine)

The intimate events of Millás's text are not those of some Unamunian *intrahistoria*, nor are the external events those of some grand history: political assassination, sporting upsets, and marketing innovations seem to be strung haphazardly together. If there is a *grand récit* here it is, ironically, in the disruption, if not collapse, of the *grand récit*, whether intimate and interior or public and exterior.

And yet, among the plays of irony, the smallness of Millás's story is the sign of its weakened grandeur. This might suggest that small signifies grand, or grandly, but *Visión del ahogado* is not about the hidden great-

ness of lowly individuals, the honor of petty thieves, or the magic of debased lovers. And it is certainly not about the latent heroism of the common citizen. It appears to hold no humanist moral, no utopian message, and no redemptive lesson. Indeed what it is about, if anything, is the debilitation of humanism, utopianism, and redemption in general. What it is also about, as I have indicated, is the debilitation of the very principle of adequation that allows us to say that a text is "about" anything at all. Anything, including nothing: for in the crisis of adequation we cannot even say that the text is "about" nothing. Death itself, that once grand signifier of nothingness, is here weakened to such an extent that it signifies nothing so grand as release or resolution or transformation. The text ends with a small-time robber—Luis, "El Vitaminas"—brought back from the edge of death only to be thrown into jail:

estaba en que se iba a morir, en que se ahogaba. Pero un médico ha dicho que se va a joder, que un lavado de estómago y listo. (238)

The clinical, cynical tenor of this closing comment, made by the meddlesome doorman of the building where "El Vitaminas" is finally discovered, indicates to what extent the vision of the drowned man announced in the title of the text is not a true illumination, even a truly profane one. Hallucinatory and sick, "El Vitaminas" does not die; he is just fucked over.

Still, it is possible to recast the most derisive and flippant of comments into something serious and profound. In that sense, if *Visión del ahogado* is "about" the death of grandeur, it is about quite a bit. As

if to drive this home, the text contains lengthy, dense, and far from straightforward reflections on life, liberty, and love; sadness, suffering, and fear; language and consciousness; aging and death. As Constantino Bértolo and Esther Cuadrat have noted, there is more than a trace of Juan Benet and, through him, of William Faulkner in Millás's dense reflectiveness. The effect is, however, quite different; for in Millás's text, identifiable political events and precise historical moments are not merely washed away by smaller stories, they are also belittled, as it were, by a certain philosophically reflective grandeur that is, however, neither as consistent nor as dense as Benet's. Sobejano qualifies Millás's text, with all its conversations, as monologic or, more precisely, as "plurimonologic" (207), a quality that brings to mind Benet's much-touted grand style. But Benet's grand style seems to saturate his texts; it is the same for one character as well as another, one event as well as another (*Inspiración* 78). Millás's style, in contrast, is far from grand or is only *intermittently* grand, punctuated as it is by easily recognizable commonplaces and all too common situations. Even though Millás has spoken of Madrid as "territorio mítico" (Rosenberg 154), the Spanish capital is not of the same order as Yoknapatawpha or Región, and its reality, its presence on maps not of the author's making, drags down the more grandly reflective moments.² Just as the passages of reflective grandeur may belittle rather than elevate the few precise historical and political events present in the text, the passages that narrate small and rather sordid events belittle the moments of grand reflection. Millás himself, in an interview published in the late 1980s, says that *Visión del ahogado* oscillates between

narration and reflection ("En fin" 22), a point that virtually all of his critics corroborate. He goes on to say that he has attempted to diminish reflection in subsequent texts, accentuating instead "narrative technique." The contrast between reflection and narrative technique is instructive, but no less instructive are the author's assertions that "la reflexión sirve muchas veces para disimular carencias de oficio" ("En fin" 22) and that "el oficio puede utilizarse a veces para tapar carencias" (Rosenberg 143). These extratextual assertions dovetail the narrative's self-reflective concern with falsity, simulation, masquerade, and lack, each one feeding into and off the other.

In *Visión*, lack is prolific: lack of talent, intelligence, expertise, faith, commitment, endurance, health, love, and communication, lack of adequate relations. If lack spurs desire, it also spurs simulation, the desire for simulation, the simulation of desire. If lack constitutes a form of truth, it also constitutes forms of falsity, the lack of truth. All of the characters of *Visión*, without exception, give testimony to the vagaries of lack; all are creatures of simulation and simulacra, acting as if in accord with pre-scripted roles and incapable of any "experience" that is not surrounded by quotation marks. True things of fiction, all reflect not just problems of social history but also problems of narrative technique, of storytelling. And the problems of telling a story, whatever the author states, are not limited to the presence or absence of reflection alone. Ponderous as the moments of reflection are in Millás's text, they are part and parcel of the story here told. As I have suggested, it is a little story, little in its weak, reflective grandeur. It centers, in classically triangular style, on three people, two men

and a woman. After having robbed a pharmacy and wounded a policeman, Luis, “El Vitaminas,” hides out in the boiler room of the building where his estranged wife, Julia, lives with their young daughter. Soaked with rain, cold, lonely, and increasingly delirious, Luis reflects, almost in spite of himself, on his past. In the meantime, as Luis shivers with fever, in the apartment above him Julia and Jorge go hot and cold, talking, avoiding talking, and having violent sex. Outside, the search for Luis involves a number of less prominent personages. They include policemen; inspectors; the doorman of the apartment building who is a retired member of the Guardia Civil (“El Ratón”); a barman (“El Cojo”); and Jesús Villar, the husband of Rosario, a woman with whom Luis had regular sexual encounters in the school bathroom when he was a teenager. Interrogated by the police, Villar makes a series of calls to throw off the investigation and toy with and defer Luis’s capture. Villar is eventually found and beaten by the police. Luis, babbling incoherently in a corner of the womb-like room in which he has hidden, is also found by the police. Julia, engaged by the police to assist them, is present when Luis is caught. Jorge, however, is absent, having left Julia, Luis, and the entire situation in a final act of frustration and failure. This, in broad strokes, and minus the reflection, is the story that Millás tells. It does not, in itself, seem especially significant. Of course, as I have suggested, the semblance of insignificance may be precisely the point.

Ignacio-Javier López, in one of the few sustained readings of the text, sees the story in familiar terms of adultery and quest, a “conjugación de quijotismo y bovarismo” (38). Sobejano, in contrast, underscores the story’s strangeness (*extrañeza*), its senses of

estrangement. Indeed, Sobejano detects a strangeness of expression in all of Millás’s texts that, for him, “corresponds perfectly” to the strangeness of themes and the estrangement of human consciousness (196). Though López raises interesting questions, Sobejano is, in my opinion, closer to the truth, if for no other reason than that truth is here the uncanny effect of the persistence and return of something familiar, yet (partially) lost. “Something familiar” might be Franco and Francoism, continuing, for many, even after their apparent disappearance, continuing, moreover, in the act of writing and publishing *after* Franco’s death a tale that may very well take place *before* it. More generally, and hence more disturbingly, “something familiar” might be anything that forms part of a familiar story, a tradition, a family. Millás’s text, profuse in quasi-philosophical reflection and sparse in social, historical, and political reference, does relate some strangely familiar things. Among them is the persistence of violence, discipline, and punishment that may imply the return, or persistence, in a time of transition, of the norms of social control. Millás’s text does not partake of the newer, sexier projections of Spain that accompany the move to democracy; it does not bring to mind the *Movida* or the *Destape*; it does not present something wild, ecstatic, glamorous, campy, or kitsch. Instead, it stays with what has not quite changed: the routines of daily work, the presence of the police, the eyes and ears of others. This is not to say that the text acknowledges no social change whatsoever. In what may be an allusion to the 1973 assassination of Luis Carrero Blanco, a principal Francoist *continuista*, “El Vitaminas” apostrophizes the occupants of an armored police jeep: “aún recuerdo cuando gozabais de tal impunidad que no

necesitabais viajar enrejados” (49). Nor is it to say that the text acknowledges no sort of political struggle. Jorge, seeing the crowd at the entrance to the metro where “El Vitaminas” has injured a man, reflects:

el conjunto recordaba sin esfuerzo a un grupo de manifestantes que portara una pancarta incomprensible y desproporcionada. (13)

But the references to the vulnerability of the police and the power of demonstrations—to what may be taken as the signs of political change—do not change the fact that while the meaning of the crowd is incomprehensible, the meaning of the police is reinforced.

The persistence and return of a policed reality should not be underestimated. *Visión del ahogado* is, as Sobejano notes, a work of close interiors and ever-vigilant exteriors. Even more, it shows how vigilance is interiorized, domesticated, and, as Spires remarks, “popularized,” uncoupled from a centralizing state apparatus and brought into play with popular culture (100). The most insistent indication of the “domestication” of vigilance is Julia’s bathroom mirror, its tain flecked in such a way that it recalls a keyhole. The surface of reflection—so important to, but also against, narration—is chipped in a way that calls forth an illusory depth and opacity, at once titillating and threatening. Standing naked before the mirror, Julia sees both herself and a blind spot from which she can imagine that she is seen. Jorge sees something similar, and yet is more annoyed than excited. The difference between Jorge’s and Julia’s reaction is touched by the difference of gender, a ritualized difference to which I will return.³ For the moment, what is important is the extended play of vision and blindness, of voyeurism, paranoia, and civil espionage. Jorge

watches Julia and “El Vitaminas,” who watch him in turn, and each is watched, or believes himself or herself to be watched, by others, most intensely the police and their minions. More devastatingly, each character watches, *almost blindly*, him or herself. Millás’s “scopic regime” does not have the dystopic intensity of Orwell’s or the panoptic rigor of Foucault’s reading of Bentham, but it is arguably more chilling for being more strangely familiar. Millás’s presentation of the scopic owes much to the less than grand formulations of reality found in detective and police narrative. Yet, it is the evocation of the everyday and, more exactly, of the persistence of the past in the present that marks *Visión*. The text’s epigraph, attributed to John Le Carré, reinforces this idea: “Fue de nosotros de quienes aprendieron el secreto de la vida: hacerse viejo sin hacerse mejor.” Things do not get better; they just get older.

The epigraph is well chosen, adequate, that is, to the story of inadequation and inadequacy that follows. In both, progression appears more powerful than progress, and aging, not ethics, is the gauge of narrative development. Historical movement is similarly implicated, textualized in terms of decay, decline, and degeneration. The latter is an especially intriguing term, one that reverberates in a variety of ways. Degeneration may be a general phenomenon, but according to a number of Millás’s critics it is the feature of a particular *generation*. For Sobejano, the characters featured in *Visión del ahogado* are “los desplazados del 60,” adults who came of age in the 1960s and who, torn between apathy and anarchy, bore witness to an advanced, decrepit Francoism (208). By coming of age, Sobejano means “going through” adolescence, the “age” in life that Millás’s characters remember most

vividly. Both Jorge and Luis, “El Vitaminas,” are all but obsessed with adolescence, a *sexually tumultuous* period marked by possibility and opportunity, frustration and failure. Generational coordinates abound. Constantino Bértolo, to whom the novel is dedicated, declares that

Visión del abogado es una novela generacional, la novela de una generación fracasada y aplastada por sus propias falsedades internas como por la degeneración y fraude moral de la sociedad en la que ha crecido. (*Papel* 203)

Sobejano, for his part, sees the text as a “*cuadro de una generación frustrada que mira hacia atrás para comprobar su inerte prolongación en un presente sin esperanza*” (209, emphasis original). The generation to which Bértolo and Sobejano refer comes of age, in short, in the shadow of Franco: *a man who grows older without getting better* and, what is more, a man who grows weaker without losing power.

Leaving aside the Spanish penchant for generational terms (few histories of literature rely as heavily as the Spanish on “generation”), Sobejano hits on something crucial when he describes the present as hopeless. Inasmuch as the date of the narration (1973-75) approximates the date of its composition and publication (1977), the present to which Sobejano refers is far from stable. It is also, one might think, far from hopeless, a transitional, *politically tumultuous* period of possibility and opportunity, of potential *regeneration*. And yet, if the experience of adolescence is any indication, the upshot of so much possibility and opportunity is failure and frustration, disenchantment. On this score, Sobejano is em-

phatic:

El significado de *Visión* no sería otro que el fracaso de las relaciones amorosas y amistosas: *la angustia de un convivir inauténtico*. (208, emphasis original)

The failure of human relations and the anguish of an inauthentic community: what Sobejano points to is a crisis of adequation or adequate relationality that, far from constituting an opportunity for something positive, generates only negativity. Violence, sadness, melancholy, despair, anger, and aggression are the principal forms of negativity that Millás’s text showcases. Violence, anger and aggression are perhaps more socially visible, more spectacular, but, as Millás indicates, they are often mixed up in sadness, despair, and melancholy. Sadness, violence, and so on are the signs not just of some nebulous human condition but also of a certain—though perhaps ultimately equally nebulous—generation. Take, for example, the previously noted sadness and suffering of Jorge:

su adecuación con las cosas y sus escasas tentativas de entendimiento con el mundo se habían producido siempre por vía de la tristeza. (25)

Sadness may have been a sin in the Middle Ages, but in the Modern age it has become a tremulous virtue, a sign that the subject is in tune with the sad truth of reality. Through Jorge, Millás’s text shares a notion of reality whose exponents include Benjamin, Adorno, and, however differently, Benet, and that suggests that to know reality is to know sadness, suffering, and pain. And yet, the text also indicates that the truth-value of sadness and pain goes the way of the

truth-value of death—emptied, as indicated, of grandeur. Jorge’s “adequation with things” may have “always” occurred through sadness, but what the narrator signals is that this adequation is no longer functional, that what was “always” adequate is so no longer. Coopted as an emotional response, sadness is no longer an adequate measure of truth and reality.

Jorge’s situation is not unique. “El Vitaminas’s” suffering, pain, and sadness are likewise undermined. After all, it is with regards to “El Vitaminas” that we read that the mythical, let alone redemptive, dimension of sadness and pain is defunct. The narrator ponders:

de qué manera habían perdido estos sucesos cualquier posible relación con lo mitificable—lo que se nombra triste y doloroso—hasta convertirse en visión espantosa [...] era una cuestión adyacente tal como preguntarse en dónde pudo conseguir el muerto cuerda tan eficaz. (71)

Indeed, the narrative voice is so incisive that no sooner does it assert the inoperability of the relation between the quotidian and the mythic (as in allegory) than it asserts that this assertion is itself ancillary, like wondering, after the fact, about the efficacy of suicide. The last remark is not a throwaway. A principle of adequation, founded on sadness, suffering, and pain, is not replaced with a principle of efficiency, but endures—in its inefficiency, its inadequacy—as something frightful. Fright and fear pervade *Visión del abogado*, though they too are styled as the emotional effects of Millás’s version of the culture industry.⁴ They are not, at any rate, incidental. In a short book on the Transition published in 1980, Juan

Luis Cebrián underscores the importance of fear. Cebrián describes:

un miedo tanto mayor y tanto más acusado cuanto más desaparece el temor de los representantes del antiguo régimen, cuanto más reverdecen las antiguas formas, los antiguos modos y los antiguos objetivos del gobernar. El miedo se enseñoorea hoy de la actualidad española. (9)

For Cebrián, fear is the emotional mark of the Transition. For Millás, in an interview with José María Marco published in 1988, however, fear is the emotional mark of Francoism, of a time apparently before. *Apparently* before, because fear is a dominant factor of many of the novels that Millás writes after Franco’s death, indeed well after the Transition itself, deep in the midst of democracy. *Visión del abogado*, published in the midst of the Transition, remains, however, special. In it, as in Cebrián’s work, fear is a function of a past that *remains and returns* in the present and that shapes the future. At the same time, fear is a function of the past as it passes into something else, a function, that is, of oblivion and loss. *Fear is a function both of continuity and change*, permanence and impermanence. This spins a number of ways: one may fear that people, things, and relations *do not change*; that the truth of reality is sadly the same as it ever was; that the transition from dictatorship to democracy is more rhetorical than real. Alternatively, one may fear that people and things *have changed* so much that no relation is viable, let alone adequate; that truth cannot be measured even in terms of sadness and suffering; that the transition from dictatorship to democracy has rendered the dream of a better society a frustrating failure. There are, needless to say, other fears,

other modes of sadness and violence: fears not only of past and present Francoists, Communists, Social Democrats, and so on, but also of less politicized subjects not so readily related to anything grand. Millás's "little" story, shot through with reflections, is about nothing if not the (in)adequacy of relations and the treacherous interplay of sadness, fear, and violence generated therein. Having touched on sadness and fear, it is to violence that I will now turn.

Names, Bodies, and Other Damaged Goods

Men have always fought their misery with dreams. Although dreams were once powerful, they have been made puerile by the movies, radio and newspapers. Among many betrayals, this one is the worst.

—Nathaniel West, *Miss Lonelyhearts*

It is tempting to say that the only adequate relation is one that recognizes its inadequacy. Tempting, it is also too easy; for within the very text that is an inadequate measure of Spanish society, there is at least one character who struggles to accept, indeed to accentuate, his inadequacy in a desperate effort to salvage something he can call his own. Inadequacy and inadequation are, for this character, the stuff of a *negative authenticity*, shot through with gestures of ritualized mortification and fraught with yearnings for an authenticity more traditionally positive (one need only think of the authenticity of the ascetic). Perhaps not surprisingly, the character in question is the most self-violent in the text, physically sick and close to madness: Luis, a.k.a. "El Vitaminas." To be sure, "El Vitaminas" is also violent towards others (he wounds a policeman), but what *characterizes* him is a

centripetal decline, a desperate, increasingly inner-directed movement of destruction. It is as if "El Vitaminas" believed that by destroying himself he could save himself; as if by beating himself he could overcome the distance between people, words, and things. As Bértolo observes, "El Vitaminas's" only desire is for self-destruction, but that too is a trap (*Papel* 204). Self-destruction is a trap, *Visión* indicates, because so many others have performed it to such an extent that it has become part of an appallingly predictable script, a pose, and a cliché. It is not enough to seek a devastation to match the devastating truth of reality; nor is it enough to accept inadequacy as adequate to (a negative) authenticity: in *Visión del ahogado*, self-destruction, willful though it may be, has gone the way of sadness, suffering, and death.

Part of the problem with self-destruction, at least as it is presented here, is that it refuses to relinquish a sense of redemption and, more intricately, a sense of the self. "El Vitaminas's" self-destruction is thus vitiated, ironically, by the presence of codes of conduct and reason, Christian, capitalist, and so on:

la suya es una memoria competitiva y cristiana que fía a la voluntad lo que no puede alcanzar con la inteligencia. De ahí que continúe, a su pesar, buscando las pruebas de una superación que haga más llevadero su desastre. (205)

Furthermore, "El Vitaminas's" desire for self-destruction is a desire for the destruction of an *inauthentic* self, a destruction that would recapture or redeem an authentic self. In contrast to the text's epigraph, "El Vitaminas" appears to hold on to an idea of

progress even as he lets himself go; it is as if he believed that he could make himself better by making himself worse. But if “El Vitaminas” seeks adequation (a sad and suffering self to match a sad and suffering reality); if he attempts to accept his inadequacy as adequate to authenticity; if he strives to redeem himself by destroying himself, that does not mean that he has got at reality, its truth. In fact, even as the text suggests that “El Vitaminas” is close to the truth of reality, it stresses that he is still very far away. The following is illustrative:

Con las manos apoyadas en la reja metálica que rodea el amplio complejo deportivo, husmea el aire, registra la interrupción momentánea de la lluvia, gira la cabeza a izquierda y derecha comprobando con la barbilla la humedad de sus hombros: intenta protegerse a cualquier precio de la realidad. Y esta incapacidad que ahora le impide aceptar como propia la actual experiencia le conduce una y otra vez desordenadamente a ese sucedáneo de la experiencia que es la memoria. Descubre el barrio por cuyos laberintos hubo de destilar una adolescencia inútil. La escasa gente que se cruza con él son los representantes de todo aquello que el Vitaminas no quiso para sí. (49)

Grasping a fence, “El Vitaminas” struggles not to move to the other side but to remain away, symbolically speaking, to guard himself from reality. He is incapable of doing so, however, and also incapable of accepting (his) present experience as his own. Cebrían’s present fear and Sobejano’s present hopelessness come together in “El Vitaminas’s” dilemma. Unwilling to be like other people, he cannot “really” be himself;

unable to accept reality, he is unable to deny it.

So presented, “El Vitaminas” is a creature of the culture industry, where commodification serializes and annuls personal experience. Throughout *Visión*, characters reproduce gestures, words, and even emotions seen in movies as if they were their own; they replay, again as if they were their own, the sentiments and rhythms of popular songs. For example, translated lines from a song by Simon and Garfunkel are incorporated into the body of the narrative:

las palabras de los profetas, dice [“El Vitaminas”] como quien escuchara una guitarra, están escritas en las paredes de los subterráneos y en los vestíbulos de las casas baratas. (202)

Memory, far from providing access to experience, is instead a substitute or “sucedáneo” for it. What is worse, experience itself is unreliable, its immediacy spurious, its intimacy fraudulent. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the intensification of “El Vitaminas’s” sickness and his attempt to make sense of it:

El resultado es desastroso: apenas ha conseguido musitar dos oraciones que se despegan muy ligeramente del lenguaje oficial y establecido. Además no significan nada. Pero ¿es que significa algo su modo de actuar? Tal vez resida ahí la clave del asunto, dice, e inmediatamente: qué clave, qué asunto, qué residencia. Las frases hechas le rodean y desprestigian su actitud. (204)

Everything, it seems, has been said, everything thought, everything felt. It is not just that, as Martha Miranda maintains, the

characters pretend to be what they are not (527), but that, outside of pretense, they are not anything at all. This holds for Jorge and Julia as well, but for Luis, “El Vitaminas,” it has a special force, manifested not only in his bodily discomfort but also in the very name by which he is known. Names, like everything else, are popularized, commercialized, and officialized to the point of banality. So stifling is this lack of originality that nicknames become desperately feeble attempts to give the name an elusive body and to rescue the authenticity of the sign. If “Luis” is the official, duly registered name of the man sought by the police, the nickname might just be a way to elude “officiality” while preserving a sign of the self.

In *Visión del abogado*, nicknames abound: “El Ratón,” “El Lefa,” “El Cojo” and, most importantly, “El Vitaminas.” They also seem adequate to the person so named: “El Ratón” (the “Rat”) is the ever vigilant doorman; “El Lefa” (slang for ejaculated semen) is Jorge’s and Luis’s sexually furtive schoolmate who dies at a young age; and “El Cojo” is a barman with a limp. In the case of Luis, the nickname, “El Vitaminas” (“Vitamins” or “Mr. Vitamin”), is ironically motivated, insofar as the sickly Luis is “reinforced” in name only. Or rather, the nickname impossibly supplies the body with the physical force that it is missing. Whichever way it may be, there is something telling about the adequation of *nickname* and body. For in all cases, the physicality signified by these nicknames is itself defective or damaged and signals, in turn, the impossibility of a *perfect* adequation between word and thing, name and body. What is most adequately named is the *imperfect* body:

Luis amaba como pocas cosas su cara de tuberculoso que era, al tiempo que una advertencia—tal vez una amenaza—, la señal evidente de una distinción que hasta el momento había funcionado. (80)

Imperfect as this is, it *is* something. Jorge, on the other hand, does not have anything visibly “wrong” with him and yet does not have anything that is “rightfully” his.

Seguramente Jorge ignoraba que quien no se deja motejar hace de su propio nombre el peor de los mores, por cuanto al confiar en él toda posible referencia a su persona admite al mismo tiempo que nada de destacar hay en ella, ni siquiera un ligero estrabismo, una imperceptible cojera o una disposición original de los dientes; nada excepto la paz mediocre que se adivina tras los nombres todos. (80)

So ill and imperfect is the signifying relation that authenticity and originality, that refreshing other side of banality, are here the accidental attribute of a set of teeth.

There may well be something more expansive in the “mediocre peace” that the narrator finds behind all names, be it the peace of the Francoist establishment, celebrated with pomp in 1964 as “25 Years of Peace,” or the peace of the Transition. For all their undeniable differences, both modes of peace may not be just mediocre, but deceptive as well. And part of their deceptiveness, a critical part, is violence. Again, even at its most reflective, the text does not expound on peace and violence in some grandly historical sense, but remains focused instead on the small story of a small group of characters. Theirs is the peace and violence that is at issue, and as with the grander senses there are undeniable differences in

these smaller senses as well. Although “El Vitaminas” is the object of public concern, sought by the police and certain civilian collaborators, and although he is considered to be armed and dangerous, he is not necessarily the most violent. The most outwardly violent character, the one whose aggressiveness is most morosely detailed, is Jorge, the former friend of “El Vitaminas” and current lover of “El Vitaminas’s” estranged wife, Julia. This may seem paradoxical, for this outwardly violent character is depicted, in large measure, inside the home. The outward violence is here domestic violence, the violence that lies behind the mediocre peace that lies, in turn, behind so many seemingly fine proper names. Domestic violence has only recently been recognized in Spain as a legitimate social and political problem. As Anny Brooksbank Jones notes, it is not until 1984, years after *Visión* appears, that statistics on domestic violence in Spain were collected. Jones cites a number of reports and affirms, in a way that intersects compellingly with Millás’s novel, that “domestic violence aids the smoother functioning of [the social] order” (97). Of course, the social order that so smoothly functions is one founded, as Jones implies, on force. And when the social order does not function smoothly, when violence “inhabits” the streets and even the police—as fearful forces of social order—are subject to fear, often as not the domestic order is adduced as being either too violent or, indeed, not violent enough.

Again and again, away from the streets and in the close space of the home, in what Millás has called an “oquedad moral” (Rosenberg 153), Jorge beats Julia. He beats her as he has sex with her, in order to have sex with her. Along with the violent yearn-

ings for authenticity, Millás’s text is steeped in violent masculine yearnings for femininity. Jorge is not alone. Jesús Villar—whose wife had sexual relations with “El Vitaminas” when they were in high school—fantasizes about hitting his wife in the face with an ashtray. The violent yearnings run through “El Vitaminas” too, though they run more explicitly through Jorge. What “El Vitaminas” and Jorge yearn for is a woman they both “have” yet cannot have, a woman adequate to their needs, demands, and desires. Haunted by the past and rocked with yearning, both men end up leaving the same woman; but only Jorge is depicted as doing so after engaging (her) repeatedly in violently abusive sex. The difference is significant, though in both cases the sexual relation seems, as Lacan might put it, impossible.⁵ Its impossibility, or inadequacy, does not issue in anything very promising, but rather in forms of violence—one directed largely inwards, the other largely outwards—that would overcome (*superar* 205) impossibility and inadequacy alike. Something similarly unpromising goes for the social relation, in part because sexual relations *are* social relations. But the difference between one man and another man, let alone the difference between them and the woman, is, I repeat, significant. “El Vitaminas’s” attempt to accept impossibility and inadequacy entails doing violence against himself. This is so largely because it is actually an attempt *not* to accept impossibility and inadequacy, but rather, through a play of established negations, to make them good; it is not for anything that the narrator describes “El Vitaminas’s” memory as “competitiva y cristiana” (205). “El Vitaminas’s” attempt is arguably more involute than Jorge’s, but it is not for that rea-

son more troubling. For what Jorge attempts is to overcome inadequacy and impossibility, not simply by accepting or denying them, but by mastering them, willing and guaranteeing them. It is he, more than anyone else in the story, who tries *to make things fit by force*.

Force, for Jorge, assumes the form of sexual violence. In *Visión del abogado*, sexual violence is at once coupled to, and displaced from, self-violence. It functions as yet another attempt to overcome impossibility and inadequacy (even by *willing* impossibility and inadequacy to be) and as yet another attempt to save the distance between people, words, and things (even by *willing* the distance to be). What Millás's text indicates is how the attempt to save such distance can become mired in destruction, how the refusal or inability to give up the ghost of adequation can become ghastly. This fearful vision, beyond sadness and suffering, assumes a variety of forms and is at once masked and exacerbated in consumer capitalism, where new and original products nourish the ever-expanding banality of experience. "Es como si no fuéramos capaces de alimentarnos con nuestra propia experiencia" (210-11), declares Jorge, caught between the hyper-mediated tyranny of mass culture and the nostalgia for direct, non-mediated experience. With food for experience as well as for thought alienated and mass-produced, the subject grows grave with its own insubstantiality:

Donde debía haber carne, no hay más que un vacío atravesado por el viento. Alcanza [Jorge] como mucho, a ver pequeños jirones, algunos trozos putrefactos pegados a la osamenta de su vida. Un esquema sin cuerpo.

(220)

The specter of such material consumption, the vision of the rotten remnants of a once full flesh, stands in stark contrast to the promise of longevity, youth, beauty, and bodily gratification that characterizes the modern market. It also stands in contrast, and yet strangely subtends, the promise of fulfillment through sex.

It is important to keep in mind that the promises shadowed forth in *Visión del abogado* are not gender neutral. When Jorge hits and penetrates Julia, he is striking out at an image of his own inadequacy. This is not to deny Julia's materiality (textually figured as it is), but it is to underscore that her body is, *for Jorge*, a masculine fantasy or phantasm (again, textually figured). The text indicates as much, but it also indicates that Jorge is not exactly aware of the phantasmatic nature of what is, for him, Julia's body: a body he projects onto and over hers, a body of his making, a body, in short, that is "his." This is the body that Jorge attempts both to affirm and to deny by striking out against it. He attempts to affirm it, violently, as the site of something substantive, true, and real; and he attempts to deny it, violently, as something phantasmatically of his making. In a state of generalized inadequacy and inadequation, then, Jorge strikes out, attempting to make Julia lie in for a truth that has lost both grounds and objects. Again, the text suggests that Jorge may not understand this, but that it is not for want of trying. Jorge, though not physically ill like "El Vitaminas," is nonetheless consumed by a feverish intellectual activity. Julia, on the other hand, remains for the most part impassive,

tranquilamente instalada en una especie de debilidad que la exime de intentar cualquier iniciativa. Aunque por otra parte no hay ninguna iniciativa que tomar. (220)

The contrast between activity and passivity, insight and ignorance, masculinity and femininity is only partially undercut by the assertion that there is no action, no initiative, to be had. As Jorge and, perhaps, the narrative voice understand it, there is no action to be had *by Julia*.

Jorge appears to believe that he, unlike Julia, can grasp the “reality” of the situation, empty and factitious though it may be:

Jorge, por el contrario, se encuentra sometido a una gran actividad interior. Comprende que en cierto modo se ha hecho cargo de la situación porque el guión exige de él una palabra, un gesto, algo que establezca por su parte lo que ya ha quedado establecido por parte de Julia. (220)

What Jorge understands, if anything, is that his innermost acts, his words and gestures, are pre-scripted and externally imposed; he understands, that is, a diffuse but powerful *imperative to understand*. And part of this imperative, a dangerously essential part, is that Jorge don a mask of meaning and be a man. Julia’s part, already obscurely established, is to play the willing victim whose alluring body will fill in (for) the fulsome emptiness that Jorge dreads (the “vision” of the drowned man, of “El Vitaminas”). And yet, early in the narrative, the feminine fullness for which Jorge yearns is presented as a fantastic sham. Julia’s memories and desires of peace and happiness, her own innermost activities, recall, for instance,

algunas secuelas habituales ya en algunos anuncios encargados de pro-

mocionar un suavizante para el cabello o un abrillantador de dientes. (36)

They recall Adorno’s assertion that

the most intimate reactions of human beings have been so thoroughly reified that the idea of anything specific to themselves now persists only as an utterly abstract notion: personality scarcely signifies anything more than shining white teeth and freedom from body odor and emotions. (167)

Reified intimacy, like banal originality, marks Julia as a thoroughly modern woman, one about whom there is little to be understood, as Jorge might put it, except, once more, the mediocre peace behind her name.

Mediocre as such peace may be, it is not what characterizes Julia. Moved by anger rather than complacency, she too seeks to understand not heady metaphysical problems such as the ends of life, but something tantalizingly closer to home:

Entretanto medita y se pregunta no por el objeto de su vida, sino por la intención inmediata de sucesos [...] a través de los cuales se reconoce, y que actúan a manera de acotaciones en un texto cuyo único asunto parece ser la dentellada atroz del tiempo. (35-36)

Like Jorge, Julia understands that she is prompted to act in a text not of her own making. There is, of course, an authorial incision here: Jorge and Julia, as if they were the heirs of Unamuno’s Augusto Pérez, confront their confinement in a script signed by Juan José Millás. But there is something

even more incisive: time, aggressively personalized, leaves the atrocious, figurative mark of its teeth—"la dentellada atroz"—on the text. We might wonder, after Adorno, if these teeth are not rotten with the beguiling gleam of progress. Regardless, the estrangement of experience, the specter of emptiness, and the inadequacy of signification all contribute to make the female body so (in)significant a thing for Jorge. That the body is thought to be a thing, if not the Thing, to be seized in the name of truth points to what is at stake in the breakdown of linguistic confidence. For if truth has long been an effect of the adequation of thought to thing in language, it does not simply turn into falsity when adequation is reckoned inadequate. Instead, truth persists, but as a shadow of its former self, as a memory of a time when truth was (thought to be) adequately produced and maintained.

With Julia, the problem of truth is linked, fearfully, to the persistence of memory. Here, an adequate solution seems to be the erasure of thought itself. It is in this light that we can return to the question of Julia's adequation:

La adecuación de Julia con el mundo resultaba natural y perfecta, ya que el olvido de la existencia de un horario no nacía de la erosión de una memoria perezosa, sino de la ausencia de cualquier tipo de memoria. (18)

The absence of memory—and thus of history, human time, and the more banal schedule, or "*horario*," of day to day life—is alone capable of a natural, perfect, and true adequation. But while truth may paradoxically be "recalled" as oblivion in Millás's text, it nonetheless persists as a memory that

is archaic in its own right. Or at least truth persists as a *fantasy* of archaic memory, a fantasy that is, moreover, sexual in scope. Troubled by the memory of an adolescence that, "como el cadáver de Dios" (96), inhabits the heart of maturity, Jorge seeks to "lose" or "forget" himself in the eroticized body of Julia. Such ecstatic oblivion, though hardly novel, is inflected with a significant difference:

Ignora [Jorge] que el olvido de Julia procede de una memoria centenaria. No sabe del tumulto, ni del rumor de voces que se escuchan tras los ojos cerrados de su amiga. El aprieta y olvida. (43-44)

The narrative voice, quite masculine itself, "knows" and "remembers" what Jorge does not.⁶ The result is a disjunction between Jorge's ignorance and oblivion and Julia's, a disjunction effected through the agency of something supposedly engendered long ago.

Carter Smith, in a Bakhtinian reading of the text, argues that two chronotopes, one bio-historical and the other abstract and ahistorical "enter into a conflicting, dialectic relationship" (698). I agree, but would add that the conflicting temporal relationship is dramatized as a conflicting heterosexual relationship, duly given to triangulation and homosociality, with Jorge and Luis playing off each other. Stereotype, convention, and normativity, by which something historical is shaped into something ahistorical, are here critical. In *Visión del abogado* an allegedly age-old memory returns, strangely full of forgetting, to a woman. But not to just any woman, for Julia is a mother. This is perhaps most evident in the description of Julia's recollection of her husband: "la imagen de su marido se ha ido haciendo sitio en un interespacio amniótico

de su memoria" (37). The "amniotic interspace" is itself an image that gives, as it were, maternal body to memory. Mysteriously disjoining Jorge and Julia even as they join in the sexual act, the age-old, archaic memory to which the narrator refers is thus that of the mother in general.⁷ She is, it seems, a mother held "responsible" for the inadequacies of truth and signification. Such responsibility carries a high price. For Julia, cast in the role of the hopelessly responsible mother, is repeatedly beaten while her daughter watches on. The narrator stresses the observant presence of the daughter on several occasions (88, 151, 181), as if the spectacle of sexual violence required not merely a spectator, but one who will "learn" from what she sees. What the little girl presumably sees, and what we read, is an act of sex that slips, not quite seamlessly, in and out of rape. Even if Julia and Jorge's sexual encounters are not read as rape, but as consensual sadomasochism, the violence persists.

Now, the fact that Julia is a mother and that Jorge beats her while her baby girl watches intensifies the force of the act. For in beating Julia's *maternal* body, Jorge is beating, in psychoanalytic terms, the symbolic site of the reproduction of the symbolic itself. He is also beating a woman. True, she is not a "real" woman, he not a "real" man, but rather they are textual effects, things of writing and reading. Their relationship, we can remind ourselves, is not really related to us, their violence not ours. So read, the writing is safely in place, comfortably incommensurate with other places, our places, be they the home, the street, or the chambers of government. The violence of (in)adequation in the text may be put in its place as peacefully inadequate to us, to

our peace as well as to our violence. In a sense it really is; textual violence is never adequate to the violence outside the text, regardless of how we respond to the assertion that there is no outside-text. And yet, the inadequation of one to another does not mean that there is no relation or that mimesis is utterly inoperative. In *Visión del ahogado*, where the characters seem to intimate that they are characters and that, in many respects, we all are too, relations assume some violent forms, so much so that *relationality per se seems suffused with violence*. Textual violence is and is not real violence, but across the divide violence persists. Perhaps such violence persists, like truth, in the place of truth, a diffuse and intense memory in its own right: "Con los dedos [Julia] busca a través del dolor la memoria de los golpes" (87). Perhaps violence is, as the text suggests, the *only* truth to be remembered, and forgotten, the only truth that never fails to make a return. This is not to say that truth, as violence, returns always and in the same way to everyone. In fact, amid the mundane figures of contemporary Madrid, violence and truth haunt Julia in especially acute ways:

determinados fantasmas no son sino la huella de una hábil manipulación efectuada por el miedo sobre su memoria más antigua de las cosas. Pero siente el temor, o la repulsa, de ser depositaria de unos fantasmas que ya tuvo su madre, que se repetirán en su hija, y que a ella le parecen las señales que marcan la distancia entre la corrupción y el deterioro. (62)

What Julia finds so fearful is the idea that she is a repository of phantasms that mark her within a matrilineal chain. Something cyclical, inescapable, and fatalistic is hereby

signaled, but there is more. In the *distance* between her mother and her daughter, a past decay (or corruption) and an anticipated decay, Julia senses that truth would have a body still. And the body that truth here would have is cut in violent contradiction, a body thought, willed, and desired as both living and dead. It is along these lines that Jorge takes, or would take, Julia's body as the last adequate measure of truth, as the repository of the phantasms *she* so fears. In saying that her body is cut in contradiction, I mean that Jorge's attempt to take it as the measure of something vitally true damages if not destroys it. Lest this dynamic seem unique to Jorge and Julia, we might remember that Julia is not the only woman subjected to violence in *Visión del ahogado*. Before her, there was Rosario, the object of "El Vitaminas's" adolescent anguish. What "El Vitaminas" fantasized then, like what Jorge fantasizes now, is nothing less than the destructive certainty of masculine identity:

alentaba el deseo de destrozarse la vida
de Rosario en beneficio del macho
inseguro que en su interior buscaba
afianzarse con la desgracia ajena.
(154)

Weaving between Julia, Rosario, Jorge, and "El Vitaminas," between adolescence and maturity, past and present, Millás's text points to the violent repetitiveness of sexual knowledge. Violence is here fundamental, because it maintains and even generates contradiction at the same time that it aims to overcome it. Gender too appears to be fundamental. What thereby obtains, in a chiasmus too tempting to resist, is something like the violence of gender and the gender of violence. Exploring the ties

between violence and gender, a number of feminists have pointed out the historically established tendency to engender the body in the feminine and truth—in such abstract forms as thought, mind, and spirit—in the masculine. According to this history, men create with their mind and imagination while women create with their body: or more succinctly, men produce, culturally, and women reproduce, naturally. The primacy of maternity is readily apparent in this history, not merely as a feminine matter, but as a masculine idea as well. With regards to Julia, the phantasms that she fears as the archaic fate of femininity are, historically speaking, the phantasms of masculinity. These phantasms mark her body as a violently (in)adequate reserve of masculine truth. Indeed, the idea of the feminine body as a repository of truth—simultaneously holding and withholding meaning—seems here untenable outside of violence. To put it more concisely, in *Visión del ahogado*, Jorge cannot think of (or desire) Julia outside of violence. In one scene after another, one beating after another, Millás's text is on this point implacable: "La violencia delata la falta de sustancia. O la sustituye" (181). Violence discloses the lack of substance. Or it substitutes it, replaces it, takes its place.

To substitute a lack of substance does not necessarily mean that something is made good; instead, it may imply a dizzying replication of lack, a simulation. And yet, despite so much emptiness and falsity, it is important to note that violence discloses not so much the insubstantiality of the desired object (Julia, as objectified by Jorge and the narrator) as the insubstantiality of the desiring subject (Jorge). In *Visión del ahogado*, in short, violence substitutes a historically constructed, peculiarly masculine lack.

Through violence, the inadequacy of meaning and the lightness of being that hound Jorge, far from being resolved, are made all the more unbearable:

Jorge la persigue [a Julia] a través del reducido espacio y golpea con precisión los lugares más deseados de su cuerpo desnudo: toma venganza de una adolescencia determinada por aquellas caderas indiferentes a su dolor profundo; y crece su violencia al tiempo que también, de algún modo, el objeto sobre el que la descarga; y así el cuerpo de Julia pierde o recupera sus límites al ritmo de su identidad, que con la crecida de los golpes atraviesa en sucesión los posibles modelos de todo aquello con lo que Jorge no ha concebido nunca otras relaciones que las basadas en la violencia o la transgresión. (88)

In the close, domestic space of the apartment, Jorge pursues, beats, and penetrates Julia with willful precision. And as he beats her, as he moves to master her, she, or more precisely her body, grows. Rising and falling in her body, her identity is rhythmically coupled to his violence, created and destroyed by it, over and over. Coupled to violence himself, Jorge may indeed be of limited ideas, but these ideas are not, unfortunately, limited to him. The scene of violence is here almost primal in its intensity, and belies a disturbingly irresolute tension within the home itself. For it is as if domesticity, symbolized as the placid and productive heart of culture, were unable to relinquish a wildness that it deems its other: as if Jorge had to brutalize Julia to make her fit for the home.

There is a profound domestic dilemma in *Visión del ahogado*. Jorge takes the place, sexually at least, of Julia's sick and delinquent husband. It is not the typical

adulterous affair because "El Vitaminas" actually encourages Jorge, his healthy and aggressive childhood friend, to take his place. While Sobejano touches on the text's relation to realism (205), it is López who, as previously noted, situates Millás's text within a realist tradition of adultery that includes Clarín, Eça de Queirós, Flaubert, Tolstoy, Galdós, and Fontane (40). López's reading is compelling, but what I read is not so much the maintenance of literary traditions and established narrative frames as their violent simulation. Millás's text, in other words, has more to do with the wrenching of tradition and the collapse of master narratives so dear to postmodernity than it does with the mimetic totalization and "virile maturity" that Georg Lukács finds in the realist novel (71).⁸ In Millás's novel, virility and maturity are adolescent illusions, fierce substitutes for a profound ontological emptiness. Adultery, betrayal, and crime are not situated and signified within a stable frame; instead, they are set impossibly loose in a world made mean with masculine meaning.

But if *Visión del ahogado* comes close to laying bare the violence of established masculinity and of male-ordered domesticity, it is not by refiguring meaning within a feminist frame and even less by appealing to "positive role models." Julia, for example, repeatedly validates the violence against her as the only tangible value she knows:

Para Julia, que con los mismos gestos con los que intenta defenderse procura asimismo provocar nuevos golpes, aquello no deja de ser también en cierto modo una reivindicación: el dolor reivindica sus pechos y los dos abanicos de sus nalgas, y su pelo, que se le cruza por delante del rostro y le ayuda a sentirse bella y

codiciada. (88-89)

Such instances of complicity recur repeatedly in Millás's text, as if there were some masochistic truth about women beneath all the violence. I submit however that this particular truth constitutes yet another instance of masculine anxiety before the inadequacy of truth in general. Moreover, the crisis of masculinity in which the subject melancholically fixates on the body as the refuge of lost meaning is shot through with the (dis)ordering of truth:

el desorden nuevo advertido por alguna parte de su ser en una de las mínimas terrazas se convertía bajo la sospecha en un desorden lógico (como si el orden, el número o la causa tuvieran un fundamento razonable); es decir, en un desorden motivado. (116)

For Millás, as the title of a later text, *El desorden de tu nombre*, indicates, the enigmatically motivated disorder is perhaps first and foremost the disorder of the name: another name, an other's name, your name. And the disorder of the name—the sign of the self—is of course often thought to be adequate to the disorder of the body: the treacherous site, or repository, of truth.

An Inadequate Conclusion

la literatura es, de un lado, imposible, y de otro, necesaria.

—Millás, "Literatura y necesidad"

la literatura sólo puede llegar a ser posible en la medida en que se vuelve imposible.

—Millás, "Literatura y realidad"

It may seem strange that violence and

disorder become the only truly adequate measure of truth. A disorderly word for a disorderly world, a disordered name for a disordered body: adequation, broken down, does not disappear, but seems to engender breakage. If *Visión del abogado* is any indication, the breakdown of strong metaphysical concepts such as adequation, so crucial to truth, can have fearful repercussions, not so much because truth is untethered and set adrift, but because it is pieced (together) as broken. Broken down, truth persists, and returns, as breakdown and breakage; disordered, it persists and returns as disorder. The "rabiosa voluntad de desorden" (64) that Jorge experiences as he hits Julia across the face—while her infant daughter watches on—is therefore not just an attempt to disrupt the order of an already "broken" home; rather, it is an attempt to make a "private" (dis)order adequate to the more "public" (dis)order that Jorge encounters in the street. In this sense, Jorge's act, far from going against the dominant (dis)order, conforms to it. What is ironic is that Jorge, in one reflective passage after another, criticizes conformity, particularly as it is embodied, in his eyes, in Julia. But while Julia's use of popular American and Mexican love songs may be a symptom of conformity, Jorge's use of violence is itself a symptom of conformity, especially since the all too well-established violence he uses is sexual and domestic in order. I use the word "order" deliberately because Jorge's rabid will for disorder, inasmuch as it is manifested in an eroticized assault on Julia, is inseparable from a will to order. Slapping Julia across the face, he may keep her from fully facing him (and himself from fully facing her) as an autonomous, equal subject, but he does not achieve the disorder that he wills. After all, disorder, at least when understood in

terms of violent subjugation, paradoxically replicates established order, the subjugation and violence that subtend it.

According to Gianni Vattimo, in an age of disenchantment, characterized by the absence of foundations, “the only possible foundation for the predominance of an order of meaning is force” (*Transparent* 95). It is worth tarrying with the word “foundation.” Vattimo does not “mean” that an order of meaning is impossible without force, or that meaning is always violent, but rather that the attempt to *found* an order of meaning, to *ground* it once and for all, is unthinkable outside of force. The danger of disenchantment is the danger of groundlessness, of a lack of foundations, and the danger of groundlessness is that it may issue in the will to deny groundlessness and reassert foundations by force. In many respects the danger of disenchantment resembles the danger of full adequation, of taking one name, concept, thing, or person for another, of making them all fit, of denying inadequation. I have already indicated how the denial of inadequation is far from straightforward and may involve, paradoxically, an *apparent* acceptance of inadequation or a will to disorder as the only adequate response to an inadequate world. Different as they are, neither “El Vitaminas” nor Jorge gives up the ghost of adequation and neither gives up violence, whether directed primarily towards the self or towards another. I do not mean to suggest that one *can* ever fully give up the ghost of adequation or that it is a principle that *can* be cast off like a worn garment, but rather that the violent turns of (in)adequation are crucial to the foundation of an order of meaning.

From the idea that a predominant order of meaning is founded by force it is only a small jump to the idea that the pre-

dominant meaning of order is force, that the meaning of order, its *truth*, is forced, violent, and hence at bottom even disordered. The idea that the meaning of order is at bottom disorder is bound to the idea that there is no bottom, or foundation, outside force. This is most apparent in the order of Francoism, and less apparent in the order that follows Francoism, and arguably even less apparent in the order of the home. At its most wily, the Francoist order, totalitarian in scope, fosters the illusion of peace, of being on firm, “natural” foundations. The order after Francoism, democratic in scope, is considerably more complex, particularly in the so-called Transition. Foundation here assumes the form of a democratic constitution and its ratification, both occurring *after* the publication of *Visión*. The democratic constitution is a far cry from the commanding voice, however legally inscribed, of the lifetime leader. Still, as forceful a document as the new constitution is, it would be naive to read it as if other forces—ranging from the police, the military, and state-sponsored terrorism to capitalism—were not also at work. The troubling side of disenchantment is that little if anything can get better (only older) and that the old order and its disorders merely continue in new guises. The order of the home, spanning political regimes, is, as noted, especially important.

Focusing on the violence of the home without losing sight of the violence of the street, *Visión del abogado* comprises an indictment of the domestic order. True, in Millás’s rendition, the domestic order is broken from the outset, with Jorge not exactly filling in for the absent husband and father. Some readers might take comfort, I suppose, in the fact that the home so violently depicted is not that of a faithfully

married couple and might imagine that there would be no violence if the home were whole “as it should be.” They might imagine that the true domestic order is an order founded not on the historical forces of domestication by which women and children are subjugated. They might imagine an order that held, once upon a time, when marriages did not break, at least not in a publicly, legally sanctioned way (divorce was not permitted until 1981); when women’s rights were an oxymoron; and when adultery *really* mattered, morally and juridically. They might imagine a happy family, a stable home, peaceful without being mediocre. What they might thus imagine, of course, is the Francoist family, its idealized version at any rate, the one propped up and propagated with slogans, set phrases, and laws. However accurate such imaginings may be, for many Spaniards, the very idea of the happy, stable family continued to arouse suspicion during and after the Transition. Indeed, it is possible, I believe, to read the broken domestic scene in Millás’s text in the light of the official version of domesticity. Whatever the case, Millás’s text does not stage violence only in the street, but in the home, suggesting an imbrication of sites.

Calling for the need “to broaden the domain of the exercise of democratic rights beyond the limited traditional field of ‘citizenship,’” Laclau and Mouffe question “the very idea of a natural domain of the ‘private’” (185). In addition, they assert that “neo-conservative discourse today is exerting itself to restrict the domain of the political and to reaffirm the field of the private” (185). Part of the democratic process, they contend, is the opening of sites traditionally held to be beyond or outside democracy such as the home and, indeed, the

body. Lest this democratic opening be taken as absolute, Laclau and Mouffe argue that democracy does not dispense with a certain closure. Accordingly, they set a principle of equivalence, by which all sites are equalized, alongside a principle of autonomy, by which sites remain different, in a mutually limiting way (185) that is particularly resonant for Spain. Drawing from the work of Claude Lefort, Laclau and Mouffe declare that

the radical difference which a democratic society introduces is that the site of power becomes an empty space; the reference to the transcendent guarantor disappears, and with it the substantial unity of society. As a consequence a split occurs between the instance of power, knowledge, and the law, and their foundations are no longer assured. (186)

The result, they continue, is “an unending process of questioning” (186) that was by definition inoperable under Franco and only partially operable after the so-called consolidation of democracy. The problem, Laclau and Mouffe concede, is that the unending process of questioning, the splitting of established bonds, and the dissolution of foundations are not accepted without question and can generate a wide array of reactive responses. One such response is nostalgia, from both the right (“Con Franco vivíamos mejor”) and, more complexly, the left (“Contra Franco vivíamos mejor”). Another response, connected to nostalgia, is violence, be it in the attempt, from a variety of political positions, to reassert unity and foundations or indeed in the attempt to disseminate splitting and dissolution. If the former is a case of ordered disorder, the second is a

case of disorder ordered, in the sense that disorder is willed; both, as indicated, perpetuate a principle of adequation. But whether it be nostalgia, violence, some combination thereof, or something else altogether, the space that Franco leaves behind is neither discretely public nor private.⁹

Emptiness is not easily tolerated in the Western tradition. Running against plenitude and fulfillment, in both the religious and the erotic sense, emptiness can motivate penetration, occupation, inhabitation, expansion, colonization, and so on. If democracy introduces a radical difference, and if that difference takes the form of—or maybe even takes place in—an empty space of power, it is not a difference long-lived—if it ever truly existed. For the Transition in Spain is in many respects closer to a *ruptura pactada* than to a *ruptura democrática*, closer to a planned or bargained break than a radically democratic break. The bargained break, whose aim was to ensure continuity and, as Tom Lewis puts it, “to gain breathing space for the new government by involving the Left parties in stemming the rising tide of strike activities and popular unrest” (173), was thus not really a “break” at all. Then again, the idea of a break that is truly one, of a reversal unmarked by what is being reversed, may itself be a function of enchantment, that is to say an illusion. Be that as it may, as Lewis rightly notes, “[t]alk of a *ruptura democrática* after the end of 1977 became stigmatized as immature political fantasy” (174). So one break becomes immature and fantastic—and these terms, along with the violence implicit in so many ruptures and breaks, swirl throughout Millás’s text—while the other, the break that is not one, becomes mature and realistic,

indeed real. But breaks do not need to be absolute, let alone clean, in order to be breaks: a *ruptura democrática* does not necessarily imply a denial of all historical continuity nor entail any more fantasies than a *ruptura pactada*. At any rate, the *ruptura pactada* was in the eyes of many less a break than a patching over of a potentially unbearable gap: the gap—or as Laclau and Mouffe would have it, the empty space—of democracy. This situation did not go unnoticed and gave way to a more temporally acute sense of disenchantment.

The disenchantment in the wake of Franco and in the midst of a transition to a newly (re)constituted society is, among other things, the effect of an intolerance of the radical difference that democracy might introduce. In the same sweep, it is the effect of a rush to fill in an ostensibly empty space of power with the same old thing or with something similar to it. The rush seems to be conditioned by the fear of an even swifter return of totalitarianism, of *absolutely* the same old thing, and by the fear of *different* totalizing systems. Franco may be as much a ghost of the empty space of power as Stalin, and it is perhaps not surprising that neither can be recuperated, in the person of one of their followers, as a guarantor of any social wholeness that is not totalitarian. This is important, for

with totalitarianism, rather than designating a vacant site, power seeks to make itself material in an organ which assumes itself to be representative of a unitary people. Under the pretext of achieving the unity of the people, the social division made visible by the logic of democracy is thereupon denied. (Laclau 187)

The democracy that is constituted through

these specters does not, however, simply accept social division or respect the vacancy of power. It too strives for a kind of fulfillment.

In the “broken” home which one man has left only to be replaced by another, the situation is uncannily like that of the nation. A site of power is vacated (Luis, “El Vitaminas,” leaves), a difference is introduced (Julia is alone with her daughter), and a new guarantor of power arrives (Jorge). But what Jorge guarantees, in the use of force, is the previously mentioned *impossibility* of sexual relation. This raises some interesting paradoxes. Laclau and Mouffe’s notion of the impossibility of society, by which they mean that society is not possible as a closed, complete, and utterly unified totality is here germane. Rather than accepting and managing impossibility, rather than accepting the vacancy so ambivalently signified by “El Vitaminas,” Jorge strives to deny it, seeking instead a relation that is ordered under him. Or disordered: for the relation that Jorge imagines as possible is one founded on force, ordered in and as disorder, planned to fail:

Jorge [...] no tenía nada que planificar, excepto el fracaso. Ordenar el fracaso, disponer adecuadamente sus partes y digerirlo luego día a día. (227)

Ordering failure, it might seem that Jorge does indeed accept the impossibility of a totally sutured, fixed, and non-antagonistic relation, but what he does is strive, through the willful use of force, to make that impossibility “his.” *Ordering* failure and *willing* disorder is not the same as accepting or managing them. Quite the contrary, it is as if Jorge, intimating the impossibility of utterly unified sexual and social relations,

sought to make his breakage adequate to a more extensive breakage that comes to him only in images of violence.

Millás’s text is an inadequate measure of Spanish society. Shot through with references to fraud, failure, falsity, inauthenticity, simulation, and insubstantiality, it is a fractured testament to the pervasive disenchantment associated with the dissolution, not only of systems of total stability and projects of political redemption, but of truth and meaning as well. It is also a chronicle of violence: a disenchanting violence that arises in the breakdown of an adequate notion of truth and that is itself perhaps the frightful last gasp of adequation whose tone is tellingly manly. The same (masculine) privileges and prerogatives that are presumably without substance or objective grounds are reasserted by Jorge but also by “El Vitaminas,” in and as violence. Theirs is not the violence of terrorism and the state-sponsored terrorist “resistance” to terrorism, but the violence of everyday life: the petty, banal, domestic strife of a society seemingly bereft of struggles more grandiose. It is in these “little stories” that grand historical projects, including the project of democracy, are tested. They are tested inadequately and for their own inadequacy, for their inability to saturate the social field as well as for their inability to discount little stories and their “personal” and “private” concerns. The democratic project, for instance, must grapple with the fact that these small stories, however told, are neither identical to it nor entirely different from it. It is in this tension, perhaps, that there lies something significant and, just possibly, promising for us all.

But what is the promise, for democracy, of disenchantment? I have perhaps belabored the dangers of disenchantment—understood as the dissolution of, among

other things, a principle of adequation—as they pertain not only to Francoism but also to a good deal of anti-Francoism. The dangers include the violence of (re)founding a dominant order of meaning (in which a lack of foundations is forcefully denied) or of guaranteeing disorder as a dominant order of meaning (in which a lack of foundations becomes the adequate “justification” of a free play of forces). *Visión del ahogado* is in many respects an account of disenchantment (if not of the disenchantment), where the absence of foundations issues in the loss of socially constructive bonds. There is, however, another way of reading the text, one that takes disenchantment, for all its negativity, as holding a certain promise. Vindicating such weakened, humanist-laden terms as “compassion” and “solidarity,” Vattimo claims that disenchantment need not find its truth in oppressive force, whether exercised against the other, the self, or both. For him, disenchantment—and this I believe is important for the fate of the term in contemporary Spanish thought in general—includes:

the recognition that there are no objective structures, values or laws and that everything is posited, created by man (at least in the realm of meaning). (*Transparent* 97)

And created by woman, I might add. For one of the things that Millás’s text stages is the violent refusal, on the part of Jorge (and perhaps the narrator), to recognize Julia as creative of any meaning that does not issue from the culture industry and/or phantasmatic conceptions of the maternal body. Disenchantment extends to the so-called private, domestic sphere, but need not, as it does in the text before us, extend

only as force and frustration. As Vattimo says, disenchantment

can be understood neither as the grasp of a true structure of reality, nor [...] as a ‘transposition’ into a world of undisguised relations, that is of pure relations of forces. (*Transparent* 99)

Indeed, “to the extent that it takes responsibility for the creation of meaning, disenchantment assumes the form of a decision for non-violence” (*Transparent* 94-95). And to the extent that the meaning that it creates does not ground itself, its truth, in a principle of strict adequation, disenchantment becomes the site of democratic opportunity, fractured and fluctuant in the home as in the street as in the text.

To be sure, meaning, so configured, may still seem quite grand. As such, it gives the lie to my claim that *Visión* is a small story holding no utopian message or redemptive lesson. This is not necessarily a “good thing.” There is a risk—if that is indeed the way of putting it—of extracting a new enchantment from disenchantment. Taking a clue from *Visión*, there is also a risk of resuscitating the “drowned” and offering not just the opportunity for another, better way of living but also for another, more effective way of getting fucked over, of fucking over. And so the new enchantment that may be adumbrated in Vattimo’s “opportune” reading of disenchantment, *pace* Vattimo, and in my extension of it to Millás’s text, may harbor an opportunity for yet more disenchantment, more “adolescent” fantasies and “adult” failures, more violence. To the extent that it takes responsibility for the

creation of meaning, disenchantment *does not perforce* assume the form of a decision for non-violence. Much as it pains me to suggest it, responsibility may itself be an inadequate principle, even, or especially, when it bears on the creation of meaning, all of which does not mean, in this swirling play of meanings grand and small, that responsibility can be simply thrown aside. Things, I would submit, are considerably more complex, more treacherous even, and require a good deal of vigilance: which can also be quite treacherous. This, at least, is the meaning for which I, however inadequately, take responsibility.

Notes

¹ For Luis,

el tiempo es un privilegio de clase que ni sucede ni dura, porque durar denota, más que una adecuación entre existir y ser, un trasiego confuso de ambas categorías, cuyo enredo conduce finalmente a la renuncia de las dos. Dura, verbigracia, una enfermedad no atendida, un trabajo improvento, o este discurso mío cuyo final espera nadie para ni aplaudirlo ni censurarlo. (49-50)

Time is inadequate because some things it tries to measure are simply too complex.

² The relative lack of specific historical markers does not mean that there is a lack of specificity altogether. For Smith,

a very specific urban space in *Visión* (a blue-collar neighborhood in a northern quadrant of the city) is the locus for the tensions and contradictions in the novel. (697)

It is interesting, however, that this “very specific urban space” is not named.

³ Julia’s moment of oblivious, “perfect and natural” adequation with the world takes place before the mirror, in the “rutinaria comprobación de su belleza” (17). It is as if the contem-

plation of her own beauty blinded Julia to everything else: “ella no se sentía vinculada al recuerdo ni a la evocación, sino más bien a su propia imagen” (20).

⁴ Whether it is “El Vitaminas’s” fear of capture or Julia’s “miedo antiguo que conservaba aún como reliquia de la adolescencia” (19), fear, overlaid with desire, saturates the text. The irruption of “El Vitaminas” into Jorge’s sphere of activity is one of those events that:

si bien no suceden cada día ni cada hora suceden en todo caso con la frecuencia necesaria como para acabar por tomarle miedo al mundo en general y a la calle en particular. (12)

⁵ Lacan’s claim that “il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel” (35) should be read against a horizon of ideal reciprocity, correspondence, unity, and adequation. *That* sexual relation is impossible.

⁶ Jorge’s and Luis’s memories are explicitly related, while Julia’s are only suggested through the memories of the men. Memory is thus given narrative content in masculine terms. López is right to read the omniscient narrating voice as masculine and as being close to Jorge’s and to describe Julia as a desired object or voiceless, unsaid subject (44).

⁷ Kristeva’s highly problematic theorization of the archaic mother—as what cannot be seized by rational thought yet undergirds signification—is appurtenant to Millás’s figurations of femininity. Expanding on the Lacanian notion of the real as bound to death, Kristeva suggests that the mother bears the chore of delivering the real into the symbolic, and hence of bringing life to death and death into life. Of course, such a suggestion can have devastating consequences.

⁸ For Lukács, the novel as the art form of “virile maturity,”

means that the completeness of the novel’s world, if seen objectively, is an imperfection, and if subjectively experienced, it amounts to resignation. (71)

In *Visión del abogado*, “virile maturity” is an adolescent fantasy and the very notions of objective

vision and subjective experience are violently unhinged.

⁹ The death of a dictatorial father does not lend itself to indisputable mourning because the father in question is not indisputably loved and perhaps not even indisputably hated (one may have loved to hate him). Unlike Hitler and Mussolini, Franco escapes retributive justice and, however pathetic his protracted agony, finds instead the symbolic sweetness of slipping “naturally” into death. To mourn Franco thus entails mourning the conditions and circumstances of his demise. Given the circumstances of Franco’s death, melancholia is almost a constitutional risk.

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