

Writing Without a Grain: Identity Formation in Three Works by Muñoz Molina

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The search for identity by fictional characters is a commonplace in twentieth-century narrative. Indeed, the acquisition of identity (national, religious, linguistic, etc.), as well as its loss, evoke critical concerns of modernity related to personal angst and cultural dislocations. Individual or group identities may be viewed in any number of ways, from the imposed filiations of nationhood to a complex of unpredictable alignments of self, family, race, gender, and other elements pertinent to identity formation.¹ Identity is perhaps most usefully perceived, however, as the commingling of desire and place regulated by the preeminence of time (history), the confluence of which is able to generate communal and individual securities among heteronomous subjectivities. Much of identity is therefore imagined or constructed and claimed through language (narration), which is able to traverse time and location in an attempt to free from dissonance those whose identity is at stake.² Such freedom is rarely achieved, since historical forces, personal tensions, and cultural alienations often mark not the solidity of identity but its uncertainty. Characters in twentieth-century fiction frequently explore ontologically slippery questions about where their identity might reside, but more importantly, they place in doubt the set of assumptions through which their identity may be imagined: who determines the historical meaning that frames them; how are they embraced by a community or exiled from it; is the concept of a stable identity even possible to begin with?³

While the questions posed in modern fiction tear at the firmness of identity and the process through which it is acquired, there nonetheless remains a longing for the continuity inherent in identity-making—a need, as Saul Bellow writes in *Mr. Sammler's Planet* “[to] keep the wolf of insignificance from the door” (190). Identity at its core thus becomes a condition of human existence rather than merely an enunciation of difference within the asymmetries and hierarchies of power. Yet it is generally within the latter where identity must be formulated and sustained, hence it inevitably becomes subject to the paradoxes of resistance and redefinition. On the one hand, individuals seeking identity encounter discomfort born

of instability: how to position themselves and with whom to connect are not easily prescribed. On the other hand, the possibility of organizing the components of identity to form continuities from discontinuities fulfills the broad desire for what Edward Said calls "affiliation." It is ultimately this quest for affiliation which lies at the root of identity-making and which shapes the process whereby identity is at once desired and resisted.

In Spain during the past half century the question of identity (both for the individual and for the nation) is convoluted by historical circumstance, political authority, and cultural tension. While other countries in Western Europe struggled with diversity, plurality, and even polarization within the frame of liberal democracy following World War II, Spain sought to diminish conflict and difference within the national community by establishing a clear dividing line between the "I" and the "not-I," the authentic self and the inauthentic other. Such a view of course relied on the concept of an essential core of values and ideas presented as natural and necessary, with the concurrent elimination of all that was considered alien. The creation of a comfortable and usable Spanish identity, in which truth and meaning were collapsed into a single concept, pushed difference to the margins and sought to banish it from national consciousness.

The Franco regime attempted to impose homogeneity on the identity of the nation in a number of ways. Above all, the regime exploited the retroactive nature of affiliation and psychic identification through the rigorous appropriation of history. It established the history of the nation as a center from which it could perceive both the beginning and the end, then positioned itself as the inevitable outcome of all that had come before it. Of course, "all that had come before it" amounted not to everything, but rather emerged as a tradition constructed by desire and need. What is more, this tradition moved backward in time, from present to past, so that requirements of the present prescribed the truth and meaning of the past. The history of Spain thus became purified and redeemed, with individual and national identity sutured to the myths (e.g., Christianity, heroism, honor) empowered by the regime. Such a view is forcefully imprinted on the nation by Federico García Sanchiz in 1945:

España es el único país de la Historia donde no puede haber ni ha habido ni hay diferencia alguna entre la constitución moral y religiosa y la constitución histórica nacional; porque en España la hispanidad y la cristiandad están tan unidas, que llegan a formar un todo consustancial.... No se puede ser español y no ser católico, porque si no se es católico, no se puede ser español.

El que diga que es español y no es católico, no sabe lo que dice....
 Caballeros y cristianos son todos en España.
 (Rodríguez Puértolas 993-94)

It is not only the unity of culture and religion that allows Spain to assert its oneness during the Franco years. The nation was also chosen by God to be located imperiously in the geographic center of the world. As Andrés Sopeña Monsalve notes in *El florido pensil*, the entertaining memoir of his school days under Francoism, the maps of his textbooks assured students that “España ha sido colocada providencialmente por Dios en el centro del mundo” (162). In other words, all roads emanate from Spain. Not content to stop with geographical primacy, God blessed Spain with ideal climatic conditions as well: “El Señor quiere mucho a España. Por eso la puso en el mejor sitio del mundo, donde no hace ni mucho frío ni mucho calor. (Pues en otros sitios o está siempre todo helado o hace tanto calor que no se puede vivir.)” (164). In brief, Sopeña Monsalve shows how the educational system during the Francoist years was aimed largely at closing rather than opening the Spanish mind to the potential diversity of its cultural identity.⁴

Within narrative fiction in Spain during the Franco years, voices of dissent sought to undermine the narrowly drawn images of national and personal identity offered by the regime. Social realism, the novel of memory, and certain postmodern fictions, each in their own way, punctured the solidity of identity imposed by Francoism and shook the myth of essentialism to its very core. The range of dissent was widespread during the 1950s and 1960s as opposition writers as diverse as Juan Goytisolo, Jesús Fernández Santos, Carmen Martín Gaité, and Juan Benet created a discursive field in which the implied intertext of their writing was the Francoist representation of the nation’s culture. The proliferation of dissent, however, did not emerge without inevitable tensions and paradoxes, especially for writers who remained in Spain rather than choose (or be forced into) exile. Perhaps most significantly, opposition writers not only set their works against the identity forged by Francoism but did so within the structures of power constructed and controlled by the regime. In other words, while Francoism aspired to prevent the establishment of alternative identities to begin with—the definition of “Spanishness” was essentially copyrighted by the State—it also served as the requisite condition for the articulation of alternative identities.

In practical terms, this means that while the “oppressed” (voices of dissent) were defined by their difference from the oppressor, oppression itself was critical to their very being. This created the insoluble paradox

in which the gradual negation of power and authority (the erosion of Francoism) destabilized and finally diminished the purpose and functioning of the voices of dissent. What is more, the close dependency between authority and dissent (not unique to Francoism, of course) inevitably led to self-destruction when both the source and boundary of that dependency (the regime) ceased to exist. Furthermore, although the regime was supplanted by a new form of democratic government by the late 1970s, with the attendant shifts in control and authority, it could not be forgotten, ignored, or erased from memory. For many writers and opposition voices (among the most notable were Juan Goytisolo and Fernando Arrabal), the very sustenance of identity in their work had been intimately bound up with Francoism. Thus to write for these writers most often meant to write against the grain, with the grain invariably perceived as a construct of the regime. Such a construct appeared to many writers outside the center as a form of intellectual sclerosis, with the margins most often defined in relation to a stagnant center.

But what happens to identity and its creation when the unequivocal markers of difference between the “I” and “not-I” are dismantled? If for many writers, as the saying goes, “things were better *against* Franco,”⁵ what tensions shape a younger generation of authors whose intellectual formation is tied to the Franco/anti-Francoist dichotomy but whose writing grows towards maturity when that dichotomy no longer serves as a template for the making of identities? Does identity formation now become a contestatory practice to the contestatory practices of the previous era? Does it become an even more deeply embedded desire to write against the historical grain of Francoism to rid it from consciousness once and for all? Does this writing counter the universal “truth” of essentialism with the unanchored particularism of small and fragmented differences, thus proscribing the very concept of larger unities? Is truth itself berated, viewed as a disingenuous desire for solidity where none can be found?

There are of course no paradigmatic answers to these questions, primarily because the questions themselves suggest instability both practically and philosophically. Once the Francoist/anti-Francoist dichotomy is historically de-activated, and once within the flow of time and in reality the dialectic no longer frames the narration of identity, some other set of concepts moves to the fore. Franco no longer rules the nation, a new constitution is approved, a liberal democracy gains lawful standing—these and other factors begin to constitute a new order of relations within which identity may be imagined. This does not mean, however, that the past fades from consciousness, for indeed the Francoist/anti-Francoist

opposition as the shadow of history remains both pertinent and useful. New relations not only are propped against the “old” in the course of daily life (in politics, economics, journalism, etc.) but also against the mass of previous narrations. In other words, the narrations that sustained the old dichotomy stand in some (re)alignment with emergent narrations conceived in different circumstances. What the nature of this alignment may look like and the way in which the construction of identity may be conceived in post-Franco Spain, is illustrated in three narrative works by Antonio Muñoz Molina: *Beatus Ille* (1986), *El jinete polaco* (1991), and *Ardor guerrero* (1995).

For Muñoz Molina the impossibility of identifying a transcendental center of the national identity compels him to concentrate on multiplicity rather than singularity. But two questions immediately come to mind in this context: first, do the conditions in which multiplicity is made possible arise from a post-Francoism or an anti-Francoism; and second, does the collapse of the essential center around which the regime had constructed a wall of imposed truths unleash now a surge of particularisms grounded not in a dichotomy (as under the regime) but in the mutual exclusions and subjectivities of multiple differences? Each of these questions provokes Muñoz Molina to imagine identity both within the circumstances of contemporary Spain and within the discourse of storytelling, which in turn produces a strong reliance in his work on the concrete historical instance as well as on the authority of narration.

In his novels Muñoz Molina theorizes life in contemporary Spain not as it opposes the Francoist past but as it follows from this past. In contrast to many Spanish novelists (e.g., Juan Goytisolo, Luis Goytisolo, Carmen Martín Gaité, Jesús Fernández Santos), who publish their first works in the 1950s as small antidotes to Francoist essentialism, Muñoz Molina refuses to set forth the universal and the particular as antithetical or unbridgeable. He conceives identity as more than sheer temporal posteriority but as less than an alternative to an “other” born from resistance. Without the perceived need for radical difference or the compulsion to embrace a specific narrative grain whose goal was dissonance, Muñoz Molina imagines identity as less exclusionary than writers of the postwar period. His “de-oppositioned” narrative (following Jameson’s concept of the postmodern versus the modern), which is both consciously historical and consciously textual, eschews an organic center while finding scant comfort in proliferating particularisms. In other words, neither the metanarrative of unity nor the postmodern dispersion into fragmentation and amorphousness resolves Muñoz Molina’s dilemma of post-

Francoist identity. As audience, Muñoz Molina absorbed in his youth the narrative of resistance through which writers forged alternative identities to those of the regime. As producer, his work reshapes the status quo less through an inversion of antecedent dialectics than through the resignification of time, history, and narration.

In the two novels *Beatus Ille* and *El jinete polaco*, and the autobiographical narrative *Ardor guerrero*, Muñoz Molina's characters seek marks of identity with the same urgent passion and desire as a figure such as Alvaro Mendiola in Juan Goytisolo's *Señas de identidad* or Raúl Ferrer Gaminde in Luis Goytisolo's tetralogy *Antagonía*. The divergence occurs, however, in the way that Muñoz Molina envisions his characters neither as part of a natural community easily identified (as in Francoism) nor as a strategically constructed "other" whose role is to dilute and contaminate the historical center. Furthermore, as Muñoz Molina writes identity into palpable form (most often through the narrative of memory), he reveals a sophisticated understanding of the cognitive demand for storytelling without eschewing the representational validity of language as a connector to life. In other words, his works appear as a common sense synthesis of referential accuracy and discursive constructionism—a purposeful balance between the word/world tensions of narrativity. When eventually pressed to opt for one solution or the other, however, he chooses neither. In a critical twist to the roots of narrativity, Muñoz Molina ultimately envisions identity not as an effect of language or of history but as the accretion of individual experience encumbered by both.

Each of the principal characters of Muñoz Molina's three works (Minaya of *Beatus Ille*, Manuel of *El jinete polaco*, and the autobiographical "I" of *Ardor guerrero*) finds himself unmoored from identity and adrift in the dimness of life. Perched upon a precipice of confusion, unable to align himself with either the particular or universal forces of the present, each draws upon the deep atavistic forces of his psyche in hope of anchoring himself in time and in space. Indeed, the chronotopic foundation of identity becomes critical in these works as the characters seek kinship with something outside of themselves. In *Beatus Ille*, Minaya returns to the fictional Mágina to acquaint himself with the time and space of the past. He expends much of his energy reading Solana's papers (which in the end are revealed as a lie) in order to configure the image of the past, which he views as the raw material of his identity in the present.

At first glance, Minaya's efforts center on the idea of text. Indeed, Georges Poulet's precept that a text "is [the author's] means of saving his identity from death" (46) shapes Minaya's quest as he reads Solana's nar-

rative in preparation to write his own. Minaya's consciousness reverberates within the textual imaginings of Solana as he cultivates an identity through his recurrent interactions with Solana's manuscript. Two key elements shape this interaction: 1) Minaya's sense of the historical as a contextualizing force for the creation of meaning; 2) the renunciation of textual coercions in favor of personal experience. Yet one clearly depends on the other in *Beatus Ille*. Minaya's knowledge of the historical forces that define him is gleaned from a series of texts which are created by Solana with the purpose of writing false history. In this sense the entire narrative base of the novel (which of course is the perceived foundation of Minaya's identity) turns out to be mere artifice. But it is artifice with a purpose. As Solana explains, "Yo inventé el juego, yo señalé sus normas y dispuse el final ... y al hacerlo modelaba para Minaya un rostro y un probable destino" (258). Much of the novel in fact seems to support common postmodern strategies through which text and history (life) become both inseparable and indistinguishable. Minaya is absorbed into Solana's text, which is written to constitute reality rather than to imitate it and is intended to bestow identity rather than to describe it. History thus becomes a form of story, with identity tied to myth and narration as an implied sublation of the real. With Solana manipulating the readerly desire of Minaya, who in turn requires of his reading the fulfillment of desire, *Beatus Ille* appears to embrace the full supplanting of the material world by the textual one. Solana himself makes the critical point: "[yo] pensaba que la literatura no servía para iluminar la parte oscura de las cosas, sino para suplantarlas" (270).

Solana's belief in the potential of literature to create identity is crucial for two reasons: first, it suggests that textual images are the equivalent of life itself and thus the arbiter of identity; second, his belief is in fact only a belief ("Yo pensaba ...), which Muñoz Molina in the end refuses to sanction. The first of these concepts lends to Muñoz Molina's post-Franco search for identity an illusory cynicism. If "all there is" is text, if meaning derived from discourse titillates but does not fulfill, and if authenticity is therefore a deceit, Minaya's stalking of Solana's text can only lead to a perplexing and pathetic deliquescence of identity. But Muñoz Molina refuses to let the matter come to rest in *Beatus Ille* in the uncertain terrain of discourse and storytelling. For his part, Solana opts to escape the muddling reach of his textual machinations and slides again into the reality of his nothingness. He therefore urges Minaya to destroy the manuscript and notebook which have narrated Solana into being so that the recreated writer and his contrived identity as a leftist poet cease to exist: "[Solana

quiere] que [Minaya] piense que también ahora, al huir, me obedece, que todavía no levante los ojos hacia la entrada del andén y me maldiga en voz baja y jure que en cuanto llegue a Madrid y rompa la trama de mi maleficio quemará los manuscritos y el cuaderno azul” (280-81).

Minaya similarly renounces the previous filiation of text and self, but does so for opposing reasons. His identity has become so vexed within the narrative morass of his own making that he must redefine himself or fall victim to his previous desire for textual security. While Minaya had earlier wrapped himself in the past (the space and time of *Mágina* as revealed in Solana’s text), he now repudiates this past as he perceives fully the narrative deception. Solana makes the critical point (which is also the point of the novel): “quiero que [Minaya] sepa que lo estoy imaginando y escuche mi voz como el latido de su propia sangre y de su conciencia, que cuando vea a Inés parada bajo el gran reloj amarillo tarde un instante en comprender que no es otro espejismo erigido por su deseo y su desesperación, *beatus ille*” (281). The “espejismo” associated with Minaya’s desire has been a textual one; the grasp for ontological solidity will be an experiential one. For in the end, Muñoz Molina shows how human experience necessarily supersedes narration. And what is more, experience turns on the particularized experience of the individual rather than the hegemonic impositions of texts aimed at securing a universal meaning or, contrarily, no particular meaning at all.

Muñoz Molina emphasizes the experiential in the way that he structures Minaya’s sense of identity. When the young writer first arrives in *Mágina* his self fades from view and is absorbed into Solana’s text: “Desde que llegó a *Mágina*, la conciencia de Minaya ha ido adelgazándose hasta quedar resumida en una mirada que averigua y desea, como un espía en un país extranjero que hubiese olvidado su identidad verdadera y lejana para no ser más que una pupila y una secreta cámara fotográfica” (93-94). In other words, what identity Minaya had forged before his arrival in *Mágina*—the social, historical, and personal forces that shaped him—grows blurred amid the textual labyrinth that he and Solana construct.

By the end of the novel, however, Minaya renounces the text of the poet as well as the time and space of *Mágina* to which it is tied. His escape from *Mágina* is of course also an escape from Solana’s manuscript and a return to experience, which compels an identity beyond the historical forces of the past (the Civil War, postwar persecutions) and within the historical forces of the present. This movement from text to life, from past to present, enables Minaya to tease out the elusive space between being and meaning. He will be able to engage what Muñoz Molina posits

as a more authentic positioning of his identity still within time and space, but unencumbered by narration fixed as the cynosure of his pursuit. Furthermore, in contrast to anti-Franco writers of the postwar period, whose characters generally struggle against the identity imposed by a discourse constructed to compel conformity, Muñoz Molina allows Minaya to opt out of discursive inscription and into the multiple possibilities of affiliation identified neither with or against a narrowly defined cultural and historical grain.

In *El jinete polaco* the small town of Mágina once again moves to the fore as the spatial and temporal focal point. The question of identity in this instance turns upon the main character's (Manuel's) abandonment of Mágina rather than his return, yet Mágina is constantly present through its reinvention in Manuel's memory. Mágina in fact becomes a semaphore for the dislocations of personal and national identity as Manuel initially sets out to imagine himself detached from all that surrounds him. In contrast to many characters in Spanish novels of the 1950s and 1960s, Manuel here turns not *against* the prevailing discourses of the nation but *away* from them. As he explains to his lover Nadia, "quería no estar atado a nada ni a nadie y no tener raíces, y vivir en la realidad de mi vida de adulto como vivía en las imaginaciones solitarias de la huerta" (259). Citing the anonymous Polish horseman represented in Rembrandt's painting (thus the title of the novel),⁶ Manuel confesses that, "quería cambiar a mi antojo de nombre, de ciudad, de país y de idioma, y mientras caminaba solo por las calles de Mágina o trabajaba en silencio en la huerta, al lado de mi padre, estaba inventándome de manera incesante pasados y porvenires..." (256).

Manuel's life as an interpreter allows him to flee the debilitating numbness of his youth in Mágina and to pursue his identity far removed from both the space and time of his hometown. Clearly, there is little that is extraordinary about the plot here: a young man leaves home to explore the world and to construct a life for himself. Nor is there compelling novelty to the story when Manuel discovers the desolation of existence in his work and in his travels. Indeed, he finds himself disconnected not only from Mágina but from life itself. His job as an interpreter consigns him to use the words of others, further alienating him from his own sense of identity and location in the world ("escucho palabras que no me importan y busco equivalencias con un automatismo instantáneo..." [80]). Yet Muñoz Molina takes this rather familiar story and turns it back on itself: not only in the end does Manuel decide that he can go home, but he realizes that he must.

The story itself, however, is less compelling than the focus on *storytelling*. As in *Beatus Ille*, Muñoz Molina exposes the way in which identity is linked to narration as if one were enmeshed with the other like the threads of a tapestry. Indeed, as in *Beatus ille*, much of *El jinete polaco* stems from the impetus first away from Mágina and then back toward it through the stories of Manuel and the images (photos, papers, etc.) associated with his past. In this way the novel presents its dual project: toward and away from Mágina as the location of identity fluctuates, and toward and away from discourse as Muñoz Molina explores how language constructs and deconstructs Manuel's link to the world. Importantly, however, language is never fully fledged as either source or patron of his identity. As occurs in *Beatus ille*, experience finally moves to the fore impelled by Manuel's refusal finally to embrace narration as the conveyor of truth.

Early in the novel Manuel travels from one place to another translating the words and phrases of others. He remains detached from the influence and meaning of a discourse that does not originate within him, but he cannot escape the pull of language and the desire to tell his story. Thus at the same time that he acknowledges the rift between who he is and what he says, he refuses to deride words and stories unconditionally. Indeed, they become critical to mitigating his marginality: "oigo detrás de esas voces y de la mía propia otras voces que vuelven y que parecen hablarme al oído como si fueran ellas las que suenan en el interior de los auriculares acolchados ... tan fieles como los latidos de mi sangre, diciéndome que vuelva, anunciándome que no han dejado de existir" (80). These voices compel Manuel to return to Mágina, or at least to return to the images and stories of his youth there.

Manuel's identity is of course tied to Mágina not only in space but also in time—thus the past meaning of Mágina must be reconceived and folded into the present. The need to understand the past—to understand history—serves much the same function here as in *Beatus Ille*. Mágina becomes a microcosm of the nation as a whole: its isolation, conflicts, and small transitions are perceived in the novel as at once granting and withholding identity. Manuel's identity necessarily becomes reconnected to his town through the telling of his own story as he sorts through the images of his past: "me doy cuenta de que por primera vez en mi vida soy yo quien cuenta y no quien escucha, quien cuenta no para inventar o para esconderse a sí mismo...sino para explicarme todo lo que hasta ahora tal vez nunca entendí, lo que oculté tras las voces de otros" (180). Furthermore, Muñoz Molina underscores here the same intimacy (and at times

confusion) between reader and writer that shapes the narrative of *Beatus Ille*. As Manuel reflects on his storytelling he offers the following:

Ahora es mi voz la que escucho, hablando durante horas, hablándole a Nadia, y tengo la sensación de que la oigo yo mismo en una cinta grabada hace mucho tiempo o está sonando sin que yo sepa de dónde viene en los auriculares de una cabina de traducción. Yo soy, a través de Nadia, el testigo de mi propia narración, es ella quien reclama mi voz y quien la revive con la misma asidua ternura con que sus dedos rondan mi piel y quien modela a mi alrededor un espacio y un tiempo donde no hay nadie más que nosotros y en el que fluyen sin embargo todas las voces y todas las imágenes de nuestras dos vidas. (181)

Even at the close of the novel, the telling of stories cannot be disentangled from the foundation of Manuel's self: "[Manuel] le habla a Nadia de su vida y le cuenta lo que le han contado sus abuelos y sus padres y en el asombro y en la atención de ella reconoce sus propias ganas de saber, el ansia antigua de escuchar a otros y descubrir en ellos su más oculta identidad" (496-97).

Manuel is able to recognize narratives of the past and present as essential to his identity, but he also understands that his identity can be neither constructed nor transformed by image and story alone:

[U]no, si quiere, se puede volver tan maleable como un trozo de arcilla, contar su vida al mismo tiempo que la inventa, modificar, tachar, atribuirse una memoria y una forma de hablar que no le pertenecen, borrar meses, años enteros, ciudades, historias de mujeres. Era tan fácil que no me daba cuenta de que también era peligroso, porque la mentira, una vez inventada, actúa por sí misma y es un ácido que carcome irreparablemente la verdad, sobre todo cuando uno carece de puntos firmes de referencia y sólo tiene puntos de fuga.... (396)

While photographs and stories about his past are able to help fill voids and gaps, they too frequently lend a liquefying amorphousness to his identity rather than the solidity that he seeks. Identity is therefore exposed here as a wound—in part because its elusiveness is revealed as an enactment of misery and in part because the storytelling that Manuel associates with it too easily distorts experience.

It is in fact this awareness of the unsteady connection between being and telling that Muñoz Molina first resolved in *Beatus Ille* in favor of

being and that he reaffirms in *El jinete polaco*. Muñoz Molina is fully aware that his character stakes out identity within a series of images and discourses from Mágina and abroad, and that the text he produces adheres to the rules of the narrative game. His character, however, understands that his life is more than story and game, though it takes him a while to figure this out. Indeed, much of the novel unfolds as Manuel moves from memory to image to discourse to experience. From the very first pages, when Manuel awakens in a foreign city only to calculate immediately what time it is in Mágina, to his physical relocation in Mágina itself, the reader witnesses the transmutation of image into being. This transmutation resolves not only the discursive ambivalence of Muñoz Molina as he works through the confluence of the word and world, but also gives deep resonance to the identity of Manuel. The final construction of his identity is thus seen as a paroxysm of being, composed not against the grain of history as during the Franco years, but rather as an affirmation of the present amid the uncertain terrain of multifaceted choices. Manuel opted to abandon the site of his youthful being only to return drawn by need and desire. His identity is not a matter of assimilation into what he had previously rejected, but rather a recognition that both the pastness and otherness of Mágina are no longer operative. To the contrary, the dialectical differentiation of Manuel and Mágina now yields to their conflation. The symbolic circuitry of their commingling turns not upon a fanciful line of stories but on the intimacy of Manuel's "being there," both as witness and participant in the emerging structures of his own identity and those of Mágina.

Ardor guerrero would at first glance seem to relate to *El jinete polaco* and *Beatus Ille* only indirectly. It is, after all, "autobiographical" and thus covers "real" events from the author's life (in this instance, his time spent in the military). Even if we grant to the two novels a general affiliation with the author's life (i.e., establish the link found in most authors between themselves and parts of their fiction), *Ardor guerrero* would appear to stand more firmly on the side of the real and, therefore, might gain deeper credibility as an expression of the author's range of beliefs in the context of post-Franco Spain. Yet most recent critical writing on autobiography hardly serves to buttress its referential reliability.⁷ Muñoz Molina not only perceives this precariousness in his narrative but frequently moves it to the center of attention. For example, his narrator confesses that when he attempts to recall an incident situated vulnerably between presence (memory) and absence (forgetting), "Yo creo, aunque no me acuerdo, aunque sin duda invento para suplantarlo un vacío absoluto de la memo-

ria" (61). Even when he is able to recollect the past, thereby perceiving his principal task as the ascription of meaning to an incident, he wonders whose meaning it is and ponders where it came from: "...no sé si lo recuerdo o sólo lo estoy transfiriendo de quien soy ahora a quien era entonces..." (354). In this way Muñoz Molina not only points to the temporal and phenomenological insolvency of autobiography but also reminds us of the fragility of all narrative truths.

To a large extent *Ardor guerrero* tells a story already told in both *Beatus Ille* and *El jinete polaco*: the struggle for identity in the context of post-totalitarian Spain. In the case of *Ardor guerrero*, however, the time and location of this struggle are highly specific—the author's military deployment in the Basque country for fourteen months during 1979 and 1980. What is most striking about the work in relation to *Beatus Ille* and *El jinete polaco*, however, turns upon the presentness of identity for the narrator. In both earlier works, as I have shown, memory and history coalesce to shape the protagonists' understanding of the world and their own place within it. The individual strains against time and context with the hope of freeing himself from what has been, yet at the same time comprehends fully that the present is overrun with the past. Hence time and its meaning must be appropriated and reconfigured outside the constraints of Francoism but not beyond its latent shadow. Individual and familial links to Francoist Spain are thus called forth in both *El jinete polaco* and *Beatus Ille* as markers of identity. In *Ardor guerrero*, the narrator once again reveals an awareness of how the past insinuates itself into the present. Military service, for example, is rife with indices of Francoist influence. From the "jura de bandera" which formally initiates recruits into a culture still largely shaped by obedience to the nation, to the "licencia" which grants them their freedom after a year of duty, the narrator remains inextricably bound to a tradition and a history that he perceives as alien to his personal identity but central to the nation's: "la jura de bandera había de ser tan definitiva para nuestra españolidad como lo había sido la primera comunión para nuestro catolicismo" (17).

In contrast to *Beatus Ille* and *El jinete polaco*, however, the narrator of *Ardor guerrero* clearly perceives identity both nationally and personally as the admixture of forces outside of his own sense of time and history. It is as if the peculiar and compelling microcosm of the military serves as a compulsion to unity despite the apparent "otherness" that characterizes the various recruits who are connected in time and space solely by military conscription:

Es posible que una vez alcanzado un grado máximo de saturación en la unanimidad interminablemente reiterada de los gestos ningún miembro de una multitud pueda sustraerse a la identificación plena con ella, ni siquiera aunque busque refugio en el secreto y en la misantropía: al secreto no le basta la intimidad de la conciencia para salvaguardarse, necesita, aunque no lo parezca, asideros materiales, signos visibles de que la individualidad a la que pertenecía se mantiene intacta. (102)

The narrator is astonished at the diversity of his fellow soldiers and at his own acquiescence to the imposed unity among them. In his most explicit treatment of diversity and identity, Muñoz Molina draws forth regionalism (political and cultural) as a sign of difference (e.g., pp 215-217) that is alloyed, if only for a while, into sameness. Spanishness is thus seen here as hybridity, composed of local identities that are symbolic rather than real and exposed as such under the constricting authority of the military. In other words, while Muñoz Molina perceives the deeply embedded connections of identity to regional culture during his deployment in the Basque country as a soldier marked as the “other,” these same deeply embedded connections are summarily dispatched by the requisites of military order. Difference is disallowed, but eventually recognized by Muñoz Molina as the tenuous material from which the nation must draw its base of commonality.

Unlike the purified oneness of the national identity under Franco, from which all the dross had been eliminated, and unlike the individual characters of *Beatus Ille* and *El jinete polaco*, who perceive themselves marginalized from history but wish to reappropriate it to construct their sense of self, Muñoz Molina embraces the larger issue of unity within diversity in *Ardor guerrero* as a condition of Spanish culture. Importantly, Muñoz Molina does not seek to make distinctions between what is Spanish and what is not by drawing out an authentic past, but rather links the construction of identity to the impositions of the present. The creation of a national or personal identity is by no means perceived as an alien excrescence here—history and its painful attempts at identity-making are not excoriated by a dogmatic postmodernism in *Ardor guerrero*. Still, the past no longer is sought out to decode the present, and the cues for traditional identity formation (e.g., heroic acts, traditions, institutions) now yield to a less structured and less firm core of suppositions. The desire to build ramparts against confusion continues to exist, however, and Muñoz Molina still yearns for what T.S. Eliot called “a fixed point in the turning of the world” (Gitlin 160). Yet the fixed point now seems to

have become fundamentally protean, and the turning world appears to have changed its shape. This uncertainty in fact suggests the larger message of Muñoz Molina's work as it relates to identity. If as Bernardo Atxaga writes, "No hay, hoy en día, nada que sea estrictamente particular. El mundo está en todas partes" (377), then the essential soul of Spain and individual identity so cherished by Franco and still pursued by the protagonists of *Beatus Ille* and *El jinete polaco*, now dissolves into the amorphousness of plurality. The very recognition that identity is both constructed and imposed offers a way out of essentialism, though for Muñoz Molina this escape remains hard to pin down as he moves from Spanish soldier to Spanish civilian with scant hope of reconciling one frame of identity with the other.

Muñoz Molina's depiction of his characters' struggle for identity in post-Franco Spain is therefore fraught with instabilities. With no essential discourse in place that appropriates and determines identity-making (as during the Franco period), the vital impetus for a contestatory discourse is largely diminished. Both sides of the Franco/anti-Franco dialectic sought in one way or another to sustain and purify what they imagined as the critical discourse of identity. Each side sought as well to prop up their dominion by propping it *against* the perceived other. This dependency (both historical and discursive) did not obtain in every instance, of course, but it generally wrested difference from ambiguity and consigned nuance to irrelevance.

The weakening of antithetical impositions in post-Franco Spain makes the search for identity more vexed for Muñoz Molina, but by no means inoperable. While fragmented identities begin to emerge as soon as the essentialist perspective is diluted, and while a clear danger to any sense of commonality in Spain is spawned by the narcissism of small differences (e.g., regional, cultural, linguistic), Muñoz Molina nonetheless traverses the time and space of the nation with the sure sense that each constitutes a part of some form of the whole. In *Beatus ille* and *El jinete polaco* both temporal and spatial identities are established with a discursive authority that is first asserted and then betrayed. Muñoz Molina's characters set out to construct identity by *reconstructing* a past no longer written against the Francoist grain. In each case the author immerses his characters in the torturous and finally insufficient narration of memory, which is bound to the hope of wholeness and the felt need for solidity. In each case as well, however, the characters sense the precariousness of identity-making through memory and narration and therefore opt out of discourse (past tense) and into experience. Muñoz Molina's

rejection of essentialism that is tied to the discourse of the other both undergirds and sustains identity for these characters, though in the end each locates identity deeply within his own pool of lived events and unfulfilled desires.

In *Ardor guerrero* Muñoz Molina reveals how his desire to compound identity and become something other than a Spaniard is countered by his surprising acquiescence to the imposed dictum of Spanishness. As Muñoz Molina (his autobiographical self) adapts to life as a soldier he is struck by the military melting pot and its compulsion to unity. Like his companions, however, he both embraces and resists this compulsion. On the one hand, the notion that commonality supersedes difference appeals to a young Muñoz Molina whose personal and national identity has remained just beyond his grasp. On the other, the imposition of identity by the military lacks authenticity (but not raw power) and therefore resonates dully within him. Still, the military emerges as a sort of objective correlative of Muñoz Molina's divided life in Francoist and post-Francoist Spain. It represents a closed society where both difference and dissidence are checked; it stands now only as a small frame in a larger montage of potential identities that pull and tug Spanish consciousness into various shapes and filiations.

Atxaga's dictum once again comes to mind here: everything is everywhere claims the Basque writer, but the reverse for Muñoz Molina seems also to be true. As one of the characters says to another in *Ardor guerrero*, "tú no eres de ninguna parte, tú estás condenado a ser español" (381). The comment is at once critically concise and emphatically irresolute. It dismisses the essential concept of Spanishness as the empyrean of personal and national identity. It also implies the need for something to take the place of Spanishness. In each of the three works Muñoz Molina's characters embrace the necessity but question the feasibility of defining what that something might be. This is not to say that perception of identity during the course of the three works ends where it began. Indeed, identity making for his characters is a revolt against the universalist masquerading and single-minded unities tied both to history and discourse imposed from above. In the end, however, identity remains for Muñoz Molina a perturbation without a fixed and reliable center, and therefore it remains for him unconnected to stability and comfort.

Notes

¹For a discussion of identity formation both of the individual and the nation see Rajchman, Babha, McClintock, Said, Arnold, and Gitlin.

²It is not my purpose here to enter into the debate between essentialist and constructionist perspectives of identity. The varying positions concerning this problem have been laid out admirably and frequently by others. For a fine synthesis of the debate, see Diane Fuss's *Essentially Speaking*.

³Certainly novelists are not the only group of writers who explore the issue of identity formation. Historians, anthropologists, sociologists, etc. have taken on the issue from a wide range of perspectives. I am concerned primarily in this instance, however, with narrative fiction.

⁴For further discussion of the role of the educational system in conveying Francoist conceptions of the nation, see Carolyn Boyd.

⁵For a synthetic discussion of the concept of writing against Francoism in post-Francoist society, see Jo Labanyi and Helen Graham's fine edition of essays in *Cultural Studies*. See specifically Labanyi's essay, "Postmodernism and the Problem of Cultural Identity," pp. 396-406.

⁶There seems to be general agreement now that the painting of the Polish horseman long attributed to Rembrandt was painted by one of his disciples, Willem Drost. For more information on the painting see *The New Yorker*, 5 March 1990. William Sherzer points this out in his article on *El jinete polaco* cited at the end of this study.

⁷For a discussion of recent thinking on the provisional agency of autobiography and the contingencies of autobiographical narration, see Lejeune, Fernández, and Goodwin.

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